



Coach Approach Ministries Podcast

Episode 10: An Interview with Reggie McNeal

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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 want to share with you an interview I did with author, strategist, and thinker, Reggie McNeal. Reggie McNeal enjoys helping people, leaders, and Christian organizations pursue more intentional lives. He currently serves as the missional leadership specialist for Leadership Network. The book he's most famous for is *The Present Future*, and one of his latest books, *Missional Renaissance: Changing the Scorecard for the Church*, details the three shifts that church leaders must make to engage a missional movement and offers suggestions for a different scorecard to reflect missional ministry. In the last few years, I've had the opportunity to teach alongside Reggie as he has become a strong proponent for coaching as a way to develop leaders. This interview with him isn't brand new, but it does reflect his take on how coaching can be applied in a ministry context. Here's my interview with Reggie McNeal.

Hey Reggie, thank you so much for joining me today. I have loved working with you. I want to thank you for giving me some opportunities to teach coaching at the MLI where you've been investing in our tribe for some time, and it's been a lot of fun to work with you.

Reggie McNeal: You've basically worked around me. I don't think anyone's actually, come to think of it, accused me of working in a long time, so I thank you for that. No, it's been great. I'm enjoying every time, and I think what you're sharing is incredibly helpful to those participants.

Brian: Great, great. Well you know my heart. My heart is in coaching and drawing out of people, and I think, you can help me with this, I think the main connection to your material would be people development.

Reggie: That's right.

Brian: And drawing out of them what God has for them in many ways. How would you even begin to define that?

Reggie: Well I think you're right. For me, my advocacy for coaching is not because I'm in love with coaching. My advocacy for coaching is I'm completely in love with the idea of people becoming who God created them to be, and I try to help congregations, church leaders all over, get out of the program-obsessed culture where we just take our scorecard for how our programs are doing, and we actually get

into the people business. So that means we have to create cultures where people are actually growing, and coaching is a key way to help people do several of the things that I advocate that's critical in that, and because it helps us debrief our lives. I know you can coach forward or you can coach backwards, and coaching connects both of those, but helping people connect the dots of what's already happening in their lives, it's such an important function because there's so little time for reflection in our culture anymore. We just go from one thing to the next thing. Social media interaction here, and a 13 second spurt there, and a two-minute email there, and it's incredibly atomizing. Our lives are just being pulverized in all these dents. So most people don't have either the time or necessarily the how-to on how to connect the dots are there. So a good coach, or coaching culture, let's say it that way, where people are asked to reflect, and see patterns, and all that, it's just critical for their own development.

Brian: Now when I think about a local church, and what you just said, I think they might hear a couple things there that I think are probably headed the wrong direction. One is that if you're trying to figure out what to do with a lot of people, coaching seems like a more one on one, and it's beyond their scope. They're trying to figure out what to do with 50 people, and second, if I have a program to try to reach a school, or something like that, how does coaching an individual make us more effective with God's mission. So that's probably two different questions there, but I'll let you react to that however you want to.

Reggie: Well what I'm arguing for is a coaching culture. So I'm talking about building coaching into every aspect of what we're already doing, not just a layer of coaching something out there, but in other words, training our small group leaders on how to ask really great questions so that people are drawn out, or training workers who are as a part of a school ministry. Giving them just the basics of how do you invite people into a conversation. I mean even though that's not a formalized, one-on-one coaching environment, just the skills, those competencies, capacity for listening, active listening, being present with people. These are all coaching pieces that I think you should look to instill in the DNA of your organization so that anyone that brushes up against your congregation, whether it's in student ministry, or as an outreach program, or whatever, feels that someone is listening, someone has attended to them, they've been asked into an intentional conversation, and of course that applies more ongoing Sunday kind of things. Whether it's Sunday school classes, or small group meetings, that kind of thing. I don't know if that exactly answered your question, but I want to broaden that idea of coaching from just the you and me sitting in an intentional conversation. I'm talking about a culture that actually coaches because I'm participating in it, I'm getting helped.

Brian: Yeah, you're talking about definitely some coaching skills that can be used in many, many situations, say, even as we think about evangelism, engaging someone in a conversation to draw out of them what God has been doing in their life and how they can draw that out as opposed to hitting them over the head with some information, or facts, that we want them to just accept. That would be one example as you go. Another example I can think of is so many times, people like to, even beyond evangelism, just like to tell people, "This is how it is. I want to impart this information, or this truth," and a coach would be allowed to do that in a very short time period, and then bring it back to the person to flush it out in their life.

Reggie: Well, Brian, yes, you're right, and basically, and, I'm just saying, there's a particular style, and I've used the word culture now like twenty times, and I'll use that again. I would strive as a pastor of a local congregation to have it as part of our routine that our Sunday school classes would not just be

curriculum driven. They would not just be information transfer. Our small groups would be built more our interaction of people helping each other with great questions, with the capacity to bring a focus on people's lives, more life-centric than curriculum-centric. I mean good heavens. Just giving people information, like you say, whether it's an evangelistic setting or whether it's in a discipleship mode, or whatever. I mean just giving people information anymore and expecting them to simulate that into their lives and change behaviors, that's crazy, and I think coaching, the value of it, is that it focuses on decision making and behavioral shift, and those are the things that transform people's lives. They don't back into it. It's about creating greater intentionality with our lives, and just having information by itself just doesn't change me. I know I can read, you've heard me talk about it, I can read nutritional labels, the side panels of cereal boxes, and see all that good stuff that I should be consuming for breakfast, or the Kind bar, or whatever it is I'll have. Instead, what do I do? I reach for the Krispy Kremes that are laying there. I know the difference, but it's a behavioral shift that's going to make the difference on a healthier life. That requires accountability. That requires a bit more than just having information.

Brian: Yeah, you're going to reach for a Krispy Kreme, and a bad question would be, "Do you really want to eat that?" That's not really helpful. "What are some other options that would bring some satisfaction to you as well?" There's other ways of having that conversation, and when you're talking about that, I just hear a conversation where two people are spouting their sides and really not having a conversation. The other person wouldn't have to be there, where this just creates great conversation to allow people to really interact with material that could change their life. Truths, I suppose, that could change who they are and what they're doing.

Reggie: We've got our family, our spouses, our marriages. I mean some of the competencies in coaching, like I say, leaning in, listening, actually hearing what someone's saying without just using that as a pause for you to put together your next speech so that when they finally come up for air, you're ready to jump right in. Teaching parents to actually hear their kids, listen to their spouse. I mean this is very important and something that's lost in our culture. So again, I think if people are treated, or have the experience of someone actually listening to them, they have a better shot at pulling that off in their own lives, and again, if a congregation could do that for its own people, my goodness. Then the ripple effect of that is that we're having better conversations at home, and better conversations at work with our employees, or our fellow workers, or whatever. It's a no-brainer and yet because life is so jam-packed, and we just run from one thing to the other, I think it's a lost art and one we need to recover.

Brian: I love that. Yeah. Now, you were talking about coaching is more life-centric which I agree with and like that part. How does that benefit the mission of the church?

Reggie: Well I think that the mission of the church is not to build an institution, but to actually build great people. So this is a hand-to-hand combat. This is not something that's done without an awful lot of engagement, and incarnation, and it's very labor intensive, but I think that it's critical that we go down that road, that we realize that that is the mission of the church. We think the mission of the church is to build great churches, and somehow this notion in the West that churches means something outside of people is crazy, non-biblical, westernized, mechanized, institutional views that has to square up with what we see in scripture what the church is really supposed to be which is a movement of people, the people of God. That's an organic, kind of idea. It doesn't mean that I'm against organizing people. Of course I know that's going to happen. The problem comes when we think people are there to serve the church and that the church is something outside of people. That's a what out there. I'm supposed to

support this thing, and church was never supposed to be that way. So I think if we can get that in our brains again that our real job is that God will build great people. People are built to last, not institutions, not companies. So anyway, that's just my take, and I appreciate you listening.

Brian: When you say that it builds great people, I think something that I know this is what you're saying, it goes beyond just them being happier people or more productive people. I think there's something that outside the kingdom, we don't always see is that they care about other people. They're much more community oriented and those things. I think that comes out of coaching as well to help them be not just influential, but impactful in their community, and I think that's just a key in the kingdom because I don't see that outside the kingdom as much.

Reggie: Well there's no question that although we don't have a corner on the market as Jesus followers of wanting to do good because the kingdom is so powerful that the idea of good is resonant of all seers of life, even among people who have no idea where that idea comes from. That's the power of the kingdom, and yet, those of us who are aware, are just able to cooperate with God at a magnificently, fulfilling level because we know exactly what's going on, and so you're right. That idea, again, the typical church just wants people happy with the church, fulfilled, being a wonderful consumer, and I mean we borrow everything. We outright steal everything. We're all for marketing to having satisfied customers. We talk about our people like that. It's just amazing. We produce this thing to a consumer culture at church instead of a developmental culture, and so yeah, letting people actually be aware of their own spiritual development, not just I'm part of a great church, so therefore, somehow, my life's supposed to be better. We don't have evidence to support that. We have evidence to support that people are busier, and that they're tired-er, and they're very involved, but the actual data may suggest that our program orientation actually has kept a lot of people from developing meaningful relationships not only with God, but with each other. Again, I just think that whole coaching emphasis helps pick away at that wrong alignment and keeps trying to jerk the wheel back to the middle of the road.

Brian: So you said that just basic communication skills from coaching is something that a church can build a coaching culture around is developing some skills in communication, listening, hearing, speaking, developing a conversation, life-centric mindset beyond just satisfaction and programming. What else does a coaching culture bring to a church? What else defines a coaching culture?

Reggie: I think it can allow for people to have greater accountability and greater specificity about the greater intentionality about the path that they are pursuing. Instead of just the pinball moving through life, being knocked around from one experience to the other and hoping that somehow we look back and say, "Boy that was a great ride," how about helping people know what are the one or two things that you really want to see happen in your life over the next 6 to 12 months, or whatever. Well let's talk about that, and let's revisit that and see how that's working for you. We do that in so many areas of our lives. It's amazing how little we do it in the spiritual realm. Again, just assuming that if we get up every day and go through some routine... I have a friend of mine who was absolutely "religious," and I use that in quotation marks, about his daily quiet time, and he came to his own realization that, "I'm spending this time going through these religious activities at the beginning of each day, prayer and bible study, all that kind of stuff, but it's not connecting to the rest of my life. I'm still not treating my wife very well. I'm still not a happy guy at work." He needs help. That's what I'm saying. Maybe a guy like that ought to be, "Well in the next six months, I'd really like to learn to be kinder to my spouse." Okay, then what do you think that... You're the coach. What would you do about that? Who do you need to talk to about that,

and on, and on. Well now we're into something because most adults learn by problem solving. There are very few people that wander into a bookstore, or go to Amazon, and just randomly pick out two books, but no, there's something that drives them that, "I want to figure something out because I've got an itch there," or, "I'm hung up there," or whatever. I think we hand people these answers instead of getting to the problem we're working with which is their life, and so coaching helps open up the real issues, and then you've got to work on them.

Brian: Well I also heard you say that coaching culture has a better learning style for people.

Reggie: Absolutely. Yeah. I guess if I would think in bullet points, like you're bringing this down to, it would be a whole lot better wouldn't it?

Brian: No it wouldn't.

Reggie: Are you trying to model listening and paying attention or something?

Brian: I don't think I'm doing the best job I could actually. I may be trying too hard, but that's certainly a piece. Just want to make sure I've got my money's worth in this conversation.

Reggie: What I want to do is I want to get your notes from this. Send them back to me so I can turn it into a PowerPoint and package it.

Brian: A PowerPoint? Are you serious? It sounds more like a book to me. I'm a little offended that you think this is a PowerPoint, but whatever you think Reggie. You're the guy.

Reggie: You write the book, and I'll write the forward.

Brian: That sounds good.

Reggie: *How Coaching Changed Your Life and Made My Life Better Because of It.*

Brian: That's right.

Reggie: There's your title. That's really what we want to do is change the people around us.

Brian: *Why Cathy's Glad Reggie Got a Coach.*

Reggie: This is it.

Brian: That would be a good title. In the last couple minutes here. We've got maybe five minutes or so to keep this in a shorter version here. How have you seen churches move this direction? How have they gathered a coaching culture?

Reggie: Well the congregations that really go at this, really go at this. I mean they first of all, practice in their leadership. Whether it's staff meetings, meetings with their leadership volunteers. They model what they want to see happen in the rest of the congregation. So it's really important that that take hold. Coaching's not for them. Coaching's for us, and so staff engagement every week. Again, I'm amazed at how little developmental thinking goes into staff meetings. Most of it is about processing the calendar and activities and projects, and it's just crazy to me. I think people ought to be developing even through those kinds of experiences, so they go with the leadership. The second thing is they're intentional about bringing in training, like bringing you in, someone who's actually qualified as a coach

to teach coaching. Certain stratas in that teaching may be aimed at small group leaders with application for them. It may be aimed at ministry team leaders, staff leaders, whatever, or everybody in the leadership circle, but I think it's important that you actually train for it. Don't just think it will happen. Those two big things right there are the most important. If the leadership actually opts in, and as a commitment to it, they will train for it.

Brian: That makes sense.

Reggie: In a sense, they have to hone in money, resources. Not everyone is as cheap as you are.

Brian: That's the truth.

Reggie: So those listening to this, you're worth at least, at least what you charge. I'm thinking you should up the charge. You know, that takes commitment, and I think it's important to make that commitment. I mean we paid for offering envelopes for crying out loud, and we're still collecting money that way. Why in the world... Never mind. I don't want to hear this anymore.

Brian: No, it's an interesting thing. In the coaching world, coaching effectiveness as people pay, and maybe even the more they pay, the more effective it is.

Reggie: Listen, absolutely. This is just a fundamental rule about human beings. You've got to get some skin the game. That's why even in our developmental stuff when we just dump resources on people, whether we want to go to talk to charity or whatever, this is just true about human beings. People need to put some of themselves in something to value it.

Brian: Reggie, I thank you so much for joining me today in this conversation. I know that your books have been just right at the heart of mindset change for me on what church should look like and how to develop it, practical in theory all together, and I just appreciate the work that you do.

Reggie: Well, my goodness. You're welcome. You're doing the heavy lifting, though. I'm just running around talking. I want to commend you for it, and it was my pleasure to spend the time with you.

Brian: Thanks Reggie.

Reggie: You bet. Thank you. Bye-bye.

Brian: Thank you so much for joining us. 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*. See you next week.