



Coach Approach Ministries Podcast

Episode 12: A Coach Approach to Leadership

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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'm joined here today by Bill Copper, the executive director of Coach Approach Ministries. Welcome Bill.

Bill Copper: Brian, good morning to you. I hope you're doing well

Brian: I am doing well, thanks. Sometimes leadership seems like a black box. It just seems like magic happens. Leaders know what they want to happen, but they're not sure how to get anybody there, and then not everybody agrees on the direction, not everybody agrees on how much money we should spend, not everybody agrees on who should do the work, and it seems like great leaders, it just seems to happen. It's even like they know exactly what they want to happen, and just by sheer will power, it happens, but that's so rare, and really not the nature of leadership in general. I think as people try to figure out leadership, the default position is command and demand. I had a client the other day who said, just in the coaching, said, "I guess I'll just have to be hard-nosed about this," and you could tell it wasn't even his natural bend. He just thought that's what he was going to have to do. He was going to have to be harsh and unbending in order to move this ahead. A second position is abstain and refrain. I had another client say not so long ago that the organization needed this very specific change. He was very clear on what this change was, but he was just absolutely unsure about how to get his subordinates to implement it. So leadership does have a toolkit, and it definitely benefits from healthy mindsets, and coaching's just a great way for leaders to build capacity. So Bill Copper and I, and I'm looking forward to this, are going to unpack coaching leaders in this podcast episode. Bill, how do we get started on thinking about coaching leaders?

Bill: Well you're right when you talk about how some just seem to do it naturally and easily, and others, it seems to be kind of this struggle, and it's like any other skillset. When I look at those guys on the PGA tour, it seems like they pull off these incredible shots just so easily, and I think, "Well, they're just born with this natural skill that I wasn't born with," and I see them on Saturday and Sunday playing golf on TV. What I don't see is that on Monday morning, first thing, they're out there practicing. On Tuesday they're practicing. On Wednesday they're practicing, and it's all day long practicing those chips. I got to go to the Master's a few years back, and it was remarkable to me, I think it was on a Friday morning, and these guys are out there early in the morning, and they've got...

[pause]

Bill: Anybody that doesn't know how to do this. These guys know how to do this. They're practicing for it, and that's the reason it looks so easy and natural to them. Any other skills the same way. Those who speak, those who preach, it just seems to be natural. It's because they put a lot of preparation and work into it, and leadership's the same thing. Certainly you can be geared for it. You can be born with certain skills, but leadership takes some work. There's some effort and intentionality that goes into in, and as you say, our natural styles, and maybe these are old-school natural styles, are to look at the opposite ends. One is the "my way or the highway," command and demand, and the other is kind of a hands-off, I'll do whatever you want. As we look at those and kind of their more full definitions, there's some positives in that stuff. There's some things you can glean from it. There's also some real negatives in taking those extreme styles, and I think what coaching does is take the best of each of those qualities, add some coaching skills and mindsets to it to really come up with a third way to lead. Those who do it make it seem easy, but it's because there's some intentionality behind it.

Brian: There's just not a lot of training in this. I was teaching our... We have a 510 class at CAM called Coach Approach to Leading and Managing, and I was teaching this the other day, and I had some pretty good leaders in that group, and actually, I was having one of those moments where I thought, "I'm teaching these guys things they already know," and it was right at that moment actually, one of them stopped, he had a funny look on his face, and made me think, "Oh, what's going on," and he said, "This is missing from all our training." This is missing from all our training. We don't train people like this, and I was coaching a pastor the other day, and he said that he feels like his seminary training helped him to make people religious as opposed to be disciplined or change their lives. Leadership is not often taught well, and when it is, I do feel like there's the 41 principles, or whatever, and you think, "I've got to do it exactly like that guy, or I'm not going to be a great leader."

Bill: I think you're right. In a lot of roles that people that we work with in our coaching ministry, there's an expectation that they are leaders of a group, an organization, a church, whatever it is, and then there's an expectation that because they're in that role that they ought to have those skills, but as you point out, there's not an intentional learning of those skills anywhere along the way. I saw a statistic, I think on Tuesday, somebody posted that about 80% of their training in seminary was spent on preaching, teaching, and yet 90% of what they actually do every day has nothing to do with that, so they're spending all this time training on just a little part of what being a leader and a pastor might be, and they get very little, or no, training on those areas that they're expected to lead because of their position. I think it gives us a good opportunity. I've felt like you when we're teaching that leading and managing class. We've pulled together a lot of pieces that are very interesting. I don't know too many times where those elements are all put together in one piece, and so I think it's a valuable class. It's a valuable approach to leading and managing, and those are the folks who make it look easy.

Brian: Well I am a seminary graduate, and I was thinking about the 20% of leadership training I got, and some of it looked like this for a pastor... If you can find one of our churches, it's not one of ours because ours are so rural that you have to know where you're going, so anyway the analogy is like go out to the farmer's house, and talk to him about what needs to happen, and let him bring it up. Let it be his idea. Let him think it's his idea, and then you're able to go with it which is just, I don't know, it's just pure manipulation, and at least an idealistic guy like me's like, "No. I'm not going to manipulate people to get things done." There's not good training out there for leaders, and then coaching, I think, can really bring

an element to help us think, “How am I supposed to do it? How does Jesus want me to do it? What are really my skill levels, strengths that I can leverage to lead well?” I think there’s a lot of questions like that, Bill.

Bill: As you said, the defaults on the two ends of the spectrum, the command and demand or the hands-off, neither are really effective ways to do it. So when we apply the best of both of those pieces, the parts of those that are helpful and a coaching mindset and a skillset, as you say, the mindset keeps the skillset from being manipulating. So the mindset is not, “Let me make them think that it’s their idea.” The mindset is, “Wonder what their ideas are? Let me draw those out.” I think there are some skills we can build, some specific intentional skills we can build as leaders that really can change the way that our organizations are led, and run, and function.

Brian: So I’m thinking about two or three leaders I know, and anybody that knows me probably can know who I’m thinking about because they are high command and demand. Nothing happens without they’re okay. Nothing happens without their direction, and truthfully, I’m trying to think out of the two or three I know like this, I guess the two or three I’m identifying have been highly successful.

Bill: And that’s the piece of it that there has been a time, and in some context still a time, where there are some good qualities in those command and demand. There’s some times when that is the right approach is to take charge. Unfortunately, sometimes we don’t know when to turn that off, and we don’t recognize and accommodate for changing personalities in those that we lead, and we have a lot of leaders that make it about, “I’m the leader, and so this is my style, and so y’all come” versus, “This is the organization that I’m called to lead. This is who you are, so let me see how I can best lead you.” Those are just two different mindsets.

Brian: Not only that. We’ll get into situational leadership here in a minute, but Bill, what are some ways... I mean you and I are pretty high on coaching, and we’re going to find a few places, certainly, that coaching is not a great use in leadership, but there are a ton of great ways to use coaching in leadership. What are some of those ways?

Bill: Well I think when you start first looking at some of those things that leaders do, we use the leadership challenge as kind of a good way to look at some of the characteristics and behaviors that leaders should model, and then each of those there’s a place for a coaching approach to that. I think, for me, the number one key in turning a leadership model, or style, around is that first leadership quality from leadership challenge which is that leaders inspire a shared vision versus sharing an inspired vision, and man, if you catch just that, that so many of what we do, particularly in church, because our inspiration comes from a high source. Sometimes, I think leaders mistakenly think that they’re the only ones that get inspired with a vision and that their job is to share that inspired vision. A coach approach to leadership says let me inspire a shared vision. Man, that is a huge concept that if you can embrace that, that’s a coaching mindset that says let me draw out what God has put into this rather than put into them what he’s put into me. That changes the dynamic, and it changes everything about the direction of the group...

[pause]

Bill: ...earlier who kind of has an idea of what you do but doesn’t know how to get them to do it. I think this mindset shift can be the biggest change in that because so many times we think of leadership as

getting others to buy in to our vision, and what a coach leader does is creates ownership of a vision, and those are not the same thing. So getting buy in means I've got to sell you something that I have. Creating ownership means let's build something that you create, and you don't have to buy it. You made it. You own it because of your creation. Boy, what a difference in mindset that brings and what that takes on the part of the leaders is a bit of humility to say, "I'm not the smartest guy in the room, or gal in the room. I'm not the only person who has vision. I'm not the only person in our contact who hears from God about what should go on here. I am in a role, though, that can draw that out of the organization. Let me draw that out of the team, or the group, or the congregation, or the business to say, 'What is it that we ought to be doing? How should we do it,'" and not be the only voice that speaks into that.

Brian: That's a huge piece. Even as I was coaching a client who said, "I guess I'm going to have to be hard-nosed about this," the idea was, and it's not just that client, but many times you just see a leader say, "I know what needs to be done. Nobody else here cares. Nobody else here has an idea of what needs to happen. I'm the only one, and boy, it's lonely, it's frustrating as opposed to, especially from a Christian perspective, God's put people here on purpose with strengths, with ideas. The idea of leadership, I don't think it's always that I'm going to be here eternally, so I can build a vision into the organization that can go on without me.

Bill: You and I have talked about this before to the extent that an organization depends on you to be there for its vision to be carried forward, and that's a whole lot more about you than the organization in terms of the vision, and when you look at some of these other leadership challenges, the behaviors or practices of great leaders, all of them really follow that coaching mindset of inspiring a shared vision. When you think about leaders enabling others to act, that's one of those leadership challenges, and it's about enabling others, it's about giving others, empowering others, and this is not a leadership skill of simply giving permission, but it's a leadership skill of creating a dynamic, creating an atmosphere that embraces risk, that invites people to challenge the status quo, to constantly improve, that values the individual contributions that people make that fit who they are. Imagine how different that is in terms of a mindset of enabling others to act. It's different from a command and demand person who says, "I'll give you permission to do these things within these narrow parameters." That doesn't really speak to how people are wired and how God has created people to be, and it limits the success of the organization, so we could take a coach approach to that that really does give over agendas. It gives over solutions to other people and truly enables others to act. It's much more in recognition of how God's created others to be.

Brian: So let's take a minute and talk about situational leadership which has just been a huge ah-hah for me. It's something that came from, you know this better than I do, Ken Blanchard and Associates. It's something they designed to just give people an idea of when and how to apply leadership, and this has just been... In my coaching in particular, this has been really helpful to me just to identify the two sides of the spectrums. So one side of the spectrum is competence, and one side of the spectrum is commitment. So take one of those spectrums, and don't take them both yet, maybe, but take one of those spectrums, and talk about how to coach somebody through that spectrum.

Bill: Sure. So we talk about coaching being a great tool, but it's not the only tool. A coaching mindset starts with others have it in them. The coach believes in the other person's ability, their character, that they have it in them, and that our job is to draw it out of them. If you take the competence axis, that spectrum of on one end, I don't know nothing, on the other end, I've got is pretty mastered, well,

coaching doesn't really fit at the front end of that because we can't draw out of someone what's not in there. So when you think about situational leadership and different styles of leading, coaching's not a great style for someone at the beginning of that curve, of the competence curve, who doesn't have the skill set, doesn't have the knowledge, doesn't have the information, and so in those phases of someone's development within an organization, coaching's not the best tool. Let me say it a little bit differently. Coaching around those topics is not the best tool. It's not the best leadership style, so I can't coach you to understand the rules of accounting if you've never learned those. I can teach you those. I can help you apply it, but then I can coach you on how you're going to apply those in your setting. Those are areas where coaching can be. Great leaders understand what are coachable areas and what are not, and at the beginning of a competence curve is not a time for coaching.

Brian: I had this happen just the other day. The client had a situation where he knew exactly what process or procedure needed to be put into place, but it wasn't his job to do that. It was somebody else's, but he was the leader, and I think because he really did not want to be a command and demand leader, he was really, just honestly, confused about how to make this happen. So using that one spectrum of competence versus incompetence so that I either know how to do it, or I don't know how to do it, and it was clear that his subordinates did not know how to do it, and so there was, to me, this freedom that this one little spectrum put into place that we were able to come to some agreement that he just needed to tell them what to do, but there was a resistance in him.

Bill: Yeah, sometimes we learn a new skill, or new approach, and it's like having a shiny new hammer, we think everything's a nail. We want to go around pounding everything in with this new tool we got, and coaching is a great tool, but sometimes it's not the right tool. So let's don't force a coaching mindset in there in this particular coach where competence is not there, or somebody lacks the information, the skills. It's not in there to draw out, and when we stay in a coaching mode just for the sake of staying in coaching, that's not providing good leadership. Now, if the competence is there, then coaching's a great tool to draw that out because, as we know, people retain much better, apply much better, they have ownership because they created the solutions, but if it's not in there, providing a coach approach just creates frustration for both the leader and the person they're leading.

Brian: There's many situations people really appreciate being told what to do. They really do. If they just don't know what to do, and it's like, "Do this," "Oh great. Now I feel productive. Now I feel like I'm part of the team because you told me what to do."

Bill: And great leaders help people understand the why. Do this because here's what that's going to lead to. If we're only creating dependence on ourselves by telling people what to do, that's not the right approach. I would rephrase it to say people don't necessarily want to be told what to do, but they often want to learn how to do things that they don't know how to do, and that's a difference there. So if I don't know how to do something, I want you to tell me rather than try to draw it out of me.

Brian: I agree with you to some point, but I think there are some things that I really don't want to know the why. In this case, in this situation, tell me what to do, I'll do it, and we'll move on. So what you're talking about is the idea of commitment. So we want people to have huge buy in, and that's when we ask them why, right? So when we're talking about the spectrum of commitment from high commitment to low commitment, how do you coach along that spectrum?

Bill: I think here it gets to maybe the example you just gave. There's some things that you just said. It doesn't matter to you why? I think that's where the leader has to discern, is this an area where the person I'm leading, is there an opportunity for me to grow their commitment, and should coaching come into play there? There's kind of almost a bell curve. It's not quite like that, but at low commitment, low motivation, don't know, and don't care, that's a time where a leader has a different role than that as a coach and has to discern whether coaching can bring about more commitment, whether that's even necessary in this case, or do you just tell Brian, "Turn that knob and that'll fix the problem, and you're not ever going to need to know how to do that again, so there's no reason to go through the whole..." That's a discernment piece on the part of the leader. Too many times leaders and the people they lead get caught in this trap of I don't want to know how to do that or why to do that. Just tell me what to do, and I'll do it. A leader has to discern that might be what the person wants in this instance, is that what they need and the organization needs? So is it better for me every time I need that knob turned to say, "Hey Brian, turn that knob," or is it better for the organization if I help Brian understand, "Here's the purpose for turning that knob. Here are the times when the knob gets turned," and help connect that activity with the purpose, and here's what problem that solves, or here's how it benefits the organization, and then build within Brian some ownership of turning the knob himself, creating capacity in Brian rather than dependency.

Brian: I love the way you ask the questions, you didn't say it this way, but is it worth my time to explain it? There are questions to be asked from a coaching perspective. So is this person going to be here long enough for me to have been worth my time to explain it. Is this person being groomed to move into a leadership position where they'll need to know why we're going to do this? I've observed some leaders who feel like they have to explain all the why's, every time, and there's a lot of people standing around saying, "Okay, but I don't need to know." So that's a great question of when to build commitment and when to not worry about commitment so much.

Bill: And Brian, I want to challenge you on this. Not only is it worth my time, that's not the only deciding factor. The deciding factor for the leader is, is it worth that person's time? Will that person grow as a result of this?

Brian: I like that nuance.

Bill: Even if I, or even if my organization, don't see a one to one value in the time I'm investing, will that person grow? Will it help that person in their own... And great leaders are focused on that because what we understand is, the more we invest in other people, the more they will grow, the more the kingdom grows. Even if they don't serve in my congregation as a result of it, even if they don't assume a leadership role in my congregation, what great leaders realize is they will somewhere. They'll have an influence somewhere, and that way my influence gets shared through that person even if I don't see a direct result.

Brian: Yeah. Situational leadership, I just find that to be a useful topic, and you sir are a master of applying it, and I appreciate the time we're spending together on this. Hey, I just want to thank everybody for joining us today. You can find out more about what 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*. Thanks Bill for joining me today.

Bill: Good to be with you Brian, and everyone take care.

Brian: See you next week.