



Coach Approach Ministries Podcast

Episode 13: Questions that Create Discovery

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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 Chad Hall, the president of Coach Approach Ministries. Welcome Chad.

Chad Hall: Brian, I hope you're having a splendid day.

Brian: Oh, it's a great day. It's a great day when I get to talk to you. You probably think I'm just saying that, but I mean it today.

Chad: Unlike all those other days.

Brian: Well there are some days.

Chad: I'll take what I can get.

Brian: Anyway, I want to talk about questions today, and really, I want to talk about coaching should always result in some new awareness. I think a lot of times I see that missing in coaching. Whenever I observe poor coaching, it's often peppered with questions like, "What's the best way for you to accomplish this," which sounds like a great question, but it's like if I knew the answer to that, I wouldn't need you to ask me that question. So there's a lot of ways to create more awareness. It doesn't have to be in questions, and that's for sure. Many of the competencies can be used to create awareness, but Chad and I want to focus today on how powerful questions can spark discover, and neither of us works from a list of questions that we pull out of our pocket at just the right moment, but often, hearing a powerful question and thinking about why it's a powerful question can help a coach understand what kind of questions are better at creating awareness. So today Chad and I are going to look at ten powerful questions, and I'm going to be honest, these are ten questions I wrote down. Chad hasn't seen them, and Chad may only like three of them. We'll just be honest and pull them apart here and see why they evoke awareness or how they might better be used to evoke awareness, when might be a perfect time to use such a question? You ready for this, Chad?

Chad: Let's do it Brian.

Brian: So the first question that I have written down is, “What do you want people to say about you at your funeral?” Now, that’s pretty specific, and maybe it’s like when would we use something like that, but I even think when somebody’s making a plan... The other day I was thinking about planning. I was thinking about doing 15 minutes of practicing my guitar a day, and as I was brainstorming in another situation about how to ask powerful questions about that to create more awareness... What do you want people to say about your 15-minute guitar practice at your funeral? It sounds like an insane question, but it really makes me think. Why is that a powerful question, Chad?

Chad: Well I think that could be a powerful question when a person is really trying to clarify values. So when they’re thinking through... And it gets to what you were saying earlier, Brian, if I just say, “Hey Brian, what are your values?” “Uhhh...Jesus. Uhhh.” A lot of times, we have to use what I call an indirect question, versus a direct question. A direct question is, “What are your values?” An indirect question is, “What do you hope people remember most about you at your funeral?” They’re sitting around talking, saying, “Brian, man, I tell you, he really demonstrated this. What I liked about him was that,” or whatever. It comes indirectly at values, what you want your life to be around, purpose, or mission. It’s also a powerful question because it’s narrative, and I think we often times miss the power of a narrative question. It’s a story, and you’re inviting the client to pick up the story and to tell it in a powerful and true way for him or her versus, again, just a list. What are your top five values?

Brian: And I’ve recently seen a few coaches shy away from narrative, I hadn’t put it together until you said it this way, from narrative style questions because they’re concerned the client will talk too long, and say they’ve only got a 30-minute session, and boy, we’ve got to get to the end, so they’re a little nervous about asking something that’ll get me talking again.

Chad: That’s probably another podcast. We only have 30 minutes for the podcast so maybe we need to do another podcast on how to get over your fear the client’s going to talk too much.

Brian: Don’t be afraid of narrative questions because they’re so powerful. You’re going to get so much more out of a narrative that it’s worth the risk of running out of time. It’s worth creating some awareness as opposed to pushing the thing through with very limited awareness and coming up with, “Okay. I’ll practice it from 8 to 8:15 my guitar.”

Chad: “Okay. Aye, aye captain.” It reminds me, we’ve talked about this on several podcasts and webinars, Jane Creswell, one of our partners, she just has a great distinction that she makes between test questions and discovery questions. Test questions are questions where the responder searches all the boxes of knowledge in his or her brain looking for the right answer. What are your top three values? That’s a test question. Do I know? Narrative questions tend to lean much more towards discovery. They allow the person to wander around in their brain and find, or knit together, a response that they discover. As you mentioned earlier, the key to great coaching conversation is that new awareness is created, so there’s a discovery made, so your question about the funeral, it’s narrative, it gets people walking around in their brain, knitting things together versus searching for the right answer.

Brian: And it’s funny, even as the example I gave about me practicing my guitar 15 minutes, if I think about it from a funeral level, my quick realization is, nobody there’s even going to remember that I played guitar because it just wasn’t a big... It’s not going to come up about the things they’re going to say about Brian is, “Boy, could he play guitar.” As I think about the 15 minutes, what do you really want to accomplish with the 15 minutes because it’s not going to be something people are going to

remember. That's helpful. We'll move on to the next question here. It's the dream question which I know that I pushed against, initially, in my own practice, but I'm in now. The dream question is if money and time were no object, what would you do? Why is that a powerful question?

Chad: Well of course it removes barriers. It also creates kind of a sandbox, a playful sort of space where reality doesn't put a lid on creative thinking. In the sandbox, anything's possible. You get to kind of fantasize and imagine, and so that kind of question... A lot of people might say, "Gosh, money and time are the reality." I got that. We're going to come back to it. We're not going to live in this sand box, but it puts us in that playful place where we could discover something new, but then we can apply in reality once we do put those restrictions back on. So I like it because it gets the person in a place of suspending disbelief, and when you suspend disbelief, you can imagine something new, you can get somewhere new in your thinking, and you stir up new stuff.

Brian: And 99% of the time, what people come up with doesn't have anything to do with time or money. It's what blows me away about it. It's, "I did come up with a great idea." It's not, "I can't do it." I find that rarely happens. It not only gets rid of obstacles, it creates an optimism of, "Let's assume this is possible."

Chad: Yeah, and I think, you've maybe got this one written down somewhere further down on your list, but as a coach, I think a lot of people, especially new coaches, they don't ask those kind of dream questions because they're not sure how to follow it up. So just to think okay, a follow up questions once a person explores when money and time are no object, what would I do, and they say all that. What's your next question? Your next question isn't, "Okay now package that in reality." Down to earth now. Bring it down. No. It's open question like, "That's awesome. What do you take away from that? What do you most like about that? What did you notice as you talked about that?"

Brian: "What's that say about you?"

Chad: Yeah. It's not, "Okay. Now let's translate it from fantasy world into reality world."

Brian: That brings me to a question that isn't on my list, but I'm going to ask. I'm going to tell you this question anyway. It's just been a fascinating question to me to really open people up. It sounds a little too ooey-gooney in some ways, but I've been pretty successful with it, and it's along the lines of, "If Jesus were to give you a new name today, what name would he give you?"

Chad: I love that.

Brian: And I've used it in situations where people are thinking about their business and how to invest in it, so it's a very practical question in some ways, but it immediately moves to new thinking because most people don't say, "You know, I've thought about that, and I'm pretty sure it's Steve."

Chad: "I'm thinking it's Luis. It's Francisco because I love the way that sounds." You know, I tell you, that kind of question is very similar to sort of a thought exercise that the coaches training institute, it's in the co-active coaching book, where you help the person visualize their future self and then actually give a name to that future self. I think biblically we know that a name is powerful and that new names are powerful. I've asked that very question before with a little bit of a preamble. In Revelation 20, God gives everybody a new name, and it's written on stone, and only you and God know it. Well we're not going to come up with that name because only you and God are going to know that name, but if God were to

give you a new name, what would it be? I think to really help a person live in to an identity that they need to take hold of and sort of make a part of who they are for whatever the challenge is that's ahead of them, that's a really powerful question, and by the way, it's not a little, "Hey. Let's talk about that for 30 seconds and then move on."

Brian: Right. It's a narrative. When I've asked that question, people go, "Oh my. Oh wow." There's usually a lot of silence, and the last time I asked it, they said, "Here's the name." I don't remember what it was. It doesn't matter, and they said, "And I don't know why," and that's okay because you could tell it burst a dam somewhere to make them think in a different way and longer term, and you can push back. Sometimes I think when you have a shorter amount of time, the more, I don't want to say wild the question, but I was thinking about this guitar playing thing, and if a coach asked me, "Let's assume you play 15 minutes a day for the next year. What name are you going to give your guitar after that because BB King named his guitar?" It just makes you think in a different perspective, in a different way. Those questions can get old pretty quick. I mean you can ask too many of those.

Chad: That's the key. Those are kind of diamond ring questions. You're going to pop those out very rarely, but their very...

Brian: Diamond ring questions!

Chad: I just made up that metaphor, but... Because if you use them too often, they dig so deeply, and they could almost become kind of like a technique. They lose that power of being special. Part of the reason they're so powerful is because they're special. You use them rarely. I shouldn't say rarely, less frequently than you do, "What's your goal for this session?" Those kinds of questions.

Brian: So the example I used was to be creative with a question like if Jesus were to give you a new name. If Jesus were to give your guitar a name, what would he name your guitar? Let me give you another question. I don't know if we're going to get through ten of these. So this would be number five actually. No, number four. What's the worst thing that could happen?

Chad: I love it. Yeah.

Brian: Why's that a great question?

Chad: Go ahead and skip to the next question by being short.

Brian: Why is that a powerful question?

Chad: You know, it's powerful because one of the ways our brains work to create new awareness is through contrast. Contrast, we see things up against each other that are different, and it just accentuates the difference. There's my Webster's definition of contrast for us, but worst thing, best thing. Worst thing even seeing that it's not that bad or that it's terrible, and you can't live with it. It creates this sense of, "Oh. That's the contrast I have between what could go wrong, what could go right, what I could live with. It's just a great awareness creator.

Brian: I think all questions we ask have to be asked with a real sense of authenticity and honesty. So when I say, "What's the worst thing that could happen," that often is asked in the sense of, "Come on, really. What's the worst thing that could happen," and a sense of, "You ought to do this," as a statement, almost, but honestly, I find that when I'm given a topic, I tend to think, "Gosh. How can we

make this happen? How can we make this happen for people,” as opposed to, “Let’s take a minute and think about if you really want to make this happen? Is this the thing?”

Chad: And wouldn’t it be great if 30 minutes into the coaching conversation, we realized, “No. This isn’t something. I can let go of this.”

Brian: I’ve had that happen. I had a client who was thinking he wanted to get further education. It was just dogging him. Some other people he knew had a further education. He knew he could do it. There was just little pieces, but after we coached about it for a while, his conclusion was, “I don’t want to spend that time or money.”

Chad: And great is hard, so why do it?

Brian: But he was able to let go of it and stop wasting energy feeling bad that he hadn’t.

Chad: You don’t have to buy everything you pick up in the store.

Brian: That’s great. So the opposite question is, what’s the best thing that could happen? Is that different, or is that pretty much the same question?

Chad: I typically ask that... There are some questions I tend to ask in pairs depending on the response of the first one. By the way, I don’t ask them at the same time because then the person doesn’t know which one to respond to, and I tend to like what’s the worst thing that could happen with this as the first of the pair just because our minds tend to see what’s negative more quickly. If I ask them the best thing, they really are thinking the worst thing. They’re seeing all the negative things, and what we do have to do with those questions of worst and best sometimes is really invite the client to stretch. Like, “Come on. That’s not the worst thing. I want you to really think the worst thing ever. What’s the worst possible outcome for this? Okay now, what’s the best thing? That sounds like a good thing, but that doesn’t sound like the best thing that could happen. I want you to really use your imagination, and think about the best possible outcome here.”

Brian: I think it’s easier for people to think about what the worst outcome is too, and so if you ask that one first, we don’t like pairing questions too much, but if you’re going to pair these two, by asking what’s the worst one first, I think people have an easier time of thinking that through, and then once you’ve gotten rid of some barriers, and then ask what’s the best thing, they’ve got a smoother path to get out there.

Chad: And I’ve had some questions when I ask the follow up, “Okay, so that’s the worst, let’s look in the opposite direction, what’s the best thing?” They start looking that way, and then they actually mention some bad things, and I have to call time out, and say, “Wait a minute. Those sound like kind of bad things, and I already gave you a chance to respond to what’s the worst thing that can happen, and we’re not talking about that anymore. We’re talking about the best thing.” It just helps... Our minds gravitate a lot of times to negative.

Brian: Let me try this question out for you. I don’t know if you’ve heard this question before. If God could speak a word of grace to you, what would he say?

Chad: That’s a neat question, and I’m thinking that’s a great question in those certain moments where... Yeah, that would be beneficial to receive a word of grace. Depending on what’s going on with the client,

that could be really helpful. I also would say to anybody listening to the podcast, if you don't like the way that's worded, find your own way of asking that, and even according to certain tribes, denominations, they have certain ways of asking that kind of question. So make that your own, and what we're not trying to do as a coach is be God speaking to someone.

Brian: No, no.

Chad: I like that question because it creates a space for the person to hear from God.

Brian: Yes. That's certainly the hope, and you could push back on that. I don't want to put words in God's mouth, but God is a God of grace and forgiveness, and we need to have that brought up to us at times. I mean it's in the right spot. It's not an opening question. It's because we heard something we can tell they won't let go of, or can't let go of, or feel hurt by.

Chad: And that's a point for all of these questions. The world's greatest question asked at the wrong moment becomes the world's worst question, and man, I get to listen to a lot of coaching when I'm doing mentor coaching, and groups, and stuff, and hear that sometimes where the person says, "Hey. I want to talk about finding a new job," and the follow up question is, "If God could speak a word of grace to you right now, what would it be?" It's kind of like, "I'm sorry, what? What does it have to do with what I just said?" Although sometimes I'm just super surprised that their like, "Oh, that's the perfect question." I'm like I can't imagine how, but okay.

Brian: I know, I know.

Chad: By the way, that's a time where if your intuition is saying, "Ask that question," or the holy spirit is nudging you to ask that question, great. If it's your crutch question, that's not a good reason to ask it.

Brian: Agreed, and I don't think the opposite works either. If God could speak maybe a word of truth, but a word of judgement, no.

Chad: If God could speak a word of wrath to you right now, what would it be?

Brian: Here's a question that I think seems like the most obvious of all these questions I have, but for some reason, I think it's one we need to be reminded of how much awareness it can create. It's who can help? I just don't think people think about who could help. It's my thing. It's my problem. It's my responsibility. I don't want to do it anyway, so why would I ask anybody else. Who could help? Why is that a powerful question?

Chad: It's powerful because it does get people exploring, expanding, I think kind of considering resources and options. I'll tell you why a lot of coaches don't ask it, I think this is a bad reason to not ask it, I've heard especially beginner coaches say, "Well gosh, it sounds leading like I'm assuming there's someone who can help. Can I first check out to see if they want help, or if there are any people who could help, and then move?" It's like no, but you're making it too complicated. A reasonable response is, "Nobody," but you don't have to know that there's someone who can help in order to ask that question.

Brian: I'll push back because I've definitely said to people, "There are 8 billion people on this earth. Somebody can help. Who is it?"

Chad: And maybe in some way.

Brian: I think there's a principle to that. Some people are like, "I don't want to do it if somebody's going to... I want to do it on my own." That's really not the way the world works. Even as Christians, you can say, "I'm going to make it to heaven without anybody's help." Buzz. That's not the way it works.

Chad: I'm pretty sure that's Satanism in a way.

Brian: There is somebody who can help. I see this with leader's all the time who maybe even have assistants, or they have staff, and they don't use their staff well. They just hate to ask when they need a shove, in a way. So we don't want to ask a leading question, but correct me if I'm wrong, Chad, but I think there's a time, sometimes, because you're observing, and you're saying, "This leader's not using all the resources available to them. I'm going to say something pretty direct, and give them a shove here."

Chad: I think the shove is to help them think more broadly than maybe the way they're thinking about getting help. So "who could help" doesn't mean "who could do it for you?" It doesn't mean "who can lock arms with you and walk with you stride by stride through this project?" It could mean who could give you encouragement? It could mean who could you outsource one little piece to? Who could hold you accountable and that be motivating for you? There's just lots of ways a person could help, and so the question begins to help a person think not only who, but what kind of help would be nice? So I think it's a good question, and again, not one that we're going to ask every single coaching session.

Brian: Out of all of these, that is the one I would be most likely to ask every single coaching session. Every time.

Chad: It's the one that's going to come up most frequently, so far. Right after, if God were to speak a word a wrath. I think that's another one. I'll start using that one every time.

Brian: So here's question number eight. Who do you need to have a difficult conversation with? Now that's a question I just think that if somebody would have, I pastored for 20 years, and I think if somebody would have called me once a week and asked me that question, it would have been helpful.

Chad: Yeah. I'm trying to think of the context in a difficult coaching conversation when I might ask that, and I certainly can think of times when I have benefitted from that kind of question, and typically it's when I'm describing being in an environment that's not working.

Brian: I'm feeling stuck. I'm feeling like I'm not getting buy-in from people.

Chad: But I'm tending to describe a context that has a community, or institution, or organizational aspect to it, or even family. I would say that's part of it, the institution of family, and so when you're describing an environment that doesn't seem to be working, who do you need to have a difficult conversation with?

Brian: I think there's a lot of places for it. My little idea of topic of practicing guitar 15 minutes a day. I don't know that there's someone I need to have a difficult conversation with, but in any kind of situation where I'm working with people, which is most conversations. Many, many conversations. I think it's an intuitive question, that there's typically something there that is helpful, rather than...

Chad: When I was trying to learn to play the guitar, my wife needed to have a difficult conversation with me. Please. This is not for anybody.

Brian: The bad news is, I sold your guitar. The good news is, I got \$500.

Chad: There you go.

Brian: Here's another question. We'll finish up here. If you had 50% more confidence, what would you be doing different?

Chad: Wow.

Brian: I'm not sure I didn't get that from you, actually.

Chad: Well maybe that's why I like it so much. I don't know. I think that's a really good question.

Brian: Yeah, and it's in a situation. If you're feeling like someone's super confident, maybe it wouldn't be a helpful conversation, but if you're sensing some hesitation in your client.

Chad: Yeah, if you're hearing your client say things like, "Yeah. I just don't know," or "Eh. If I knew it was going to work out." You're not trying to use that question in a leading way like let me pump you full of sunshine, so you'll go do this thing that you probably shouldn't be doing. That's manipulation. That's not coaching. So when this kind of question comes in is when a person is lacking confidence. They're not lacking competence. They're lacking confidence, and it stretches their vision. It's like they have high-beam headlights. They can only see so far, and suddenly, they get a lot brighter. They can see so much more clearly, so much farther. They're able to proceed much more quickly, and that can become a really positive thing for them, and the coaching conversation is to help them clear the distance between where they are and their goal much more quickly.

Brian: Certainly about creating awareness. For sure. This last question, I again...

Chad: Wait a minute. Before you move on, Brian. The other thing I love about that confidence question is how it's not binary. It's not assuming they don't have confidence, and what if they did. It's assuming they have confidence.

Brian: It's brings some awareness to how much confidence they currently have too.

Chad: What if they had more. Just that normal instinctive, positive is really neat. Okay. What's the next question?

Brian: Well the last question, because we're going to wrap it up here, is how are you going to celebrate success? I think for me, that's one that is so helpful because it's not something I typically think about, but as soon as I hear the question, I think, "Good question. I'm glad you asked that." It could seem leading, I guess, that, "Oh. You ought to be celebrating success," but that's a principle.

Chad: I mean that's kind of like saying, "Well how are you going to get started," assumes they're going to get started. Yeah, it's kind of leading in that way. I am assuming you're going to get started.

Brian: I don't want to assume you're going to do anything.

Chad: But I am assuming you're going to have success. I'm not assuming what celebration looks like, and that's where I think, as the coach, we need to be really open to whatever the client has to say because their celebration may not sound a whole lot like celebration to us, but we adapt to what the client's preferences and values are, and in that way, it's not leading.

Brian: And I don't think you have to say, "You know, I'm not hearing you say anything about celebration," because I don't think you have to do that. Rarely do I want you to make a statement with a question, but I don't think you have to add that. I think you can just ask, "How are you going to celebrate?" It's a principle about accomplishment that you reward what you want to happen again.

Chad: And it kind of goes into that ICF core competency of managing progress and accountability. You might think, "How does celebration fit in there," but the idea of, "Wow, this is a really big issue for you," or, "This sounds like something that really is valuable to you." When it's all said and done, and you reach your goal, how are you going to celebrate?

Brian: Great question.

Chad: And that is a kind of motivation accountability structure of, "I'm going to recognize being finished with this in X-Y-Z way," and that can be motivating, can be affirming, can be something that's a reminder for us. It serves a ton of positive, powerful, kind of benefits for the client.

Brian: Hey, Chad, thanks for joining me today and talking about how to bring more awareness through questions, and thanks everybody else for joining us. We appreciate you listening, and we just want to be a real help to you. You can find out more about us by going to 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*. We'll see you next week.