



Coach Approach Ministries Podcast

Episode 17: A Missionary to the Corporate World

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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 Jane Creswell. Jane Creswell is a Master Certified Coach, serves as Chief Executive Officer for Internal Impact. Ms. Creswell is an innovator and leader in the emerging field of internal corporate coaching. She leveraged 17 years of product development and management experience at IBM to invent the role of organization coach and became the founder of IBM Coaches Network, a network of almost 500 coaches in 26 countries. Ms. Creswell has authored two books and enjoys speaking at conferences to inspire other corporate coaches and corporate employees. She is also one of the founders of Coach Approach Ministries, and it is my pleasure to welcome to the podcast, Jane Creswell.

Jane Creswell: Thank you Brian. Great to be here.

Brian: We're excited to have you. Jane, I want to start at the beginning, what did you want to be when you grew up?

Jane: That changed a lot when I was little, but I actually can remember a pivotal moment when I told my mother at five years old that I was going to be a preacher someday.

Brian: A preacher?

Jane: A preacher, and her response was, "You're a girl. You can't do that, but you can be a missionary." That stuck, so there was always something in the back of my mind, mother says I can be a missionary, maybe I should do look into that. When I was growing up, I participated in all kinds of missions activities in my church and read biographies and autobiographies of missionaries. My favorite were people who would be the first missionary to a particular country, and I was fascinated by that. That was always in the back of my mind. When I got into high school, though, I was more focused on what could make me a lot of money, and I'm going, "Based on what I've learned about missionaries, I don't think that's it."

Brian: No, I'm pretty sure that's not it.

Jane: So my focus shifted. I did some research, went to the library, and figured out what would be the most lucrative career that I can do with the kinds of grades I was getting in certain courses for the next thirty years after I might graduate from college, and it came out to be computer science. I thought, "Okay." That missionary thing got pushed aside, and I set my sights on being a computer programmer. That's what I studied in college. That's why you hear a little bit about IBM in my bio.

Brian: Where did you go to college?

Jane: I went to Auburn University.

Brian: Auburn? Crimson Tide?

Jane: No, no, no, no, War Eagle, War Eagle.

Brian: Oh man, I'm way off.

Jane: We're kind of that "other school."

Brian: Alabama.

Jane: This conversation might be over Brian.

Brian: It's funny, they're both Alabama, but people take sides pretty quickly.

Jane: Boy, do they.

Brian: It's not all inclusive.

Jane: Including me.

Brian: That's my fault, I'm a Midwesterner, so I don't take sides in that argument.

Jane: Ok, I'll give you a bye.

Brian: Thanks so much. I appreciate that. Fantastic, so you went to Auburn, and you got a degree in Computer Science.

Jane: Back in the day, Brian, there was no such thing as a Computer Science degree. This has been years ago, but I got the closest that you could do, and that was a degree in Applied Mathematics and a minor in Computer Science.

Brian: Got you. My brother graduated high school in '74, and then he got into Computer Science, but I have no idea what his major was. That was a brand new field for him. I'm not trying to give away your age because I don't even know.

Jane: I think I just did.

Brian: So in '89 I graduated with a Computer Engineering Degree, so it was full-fledged by '89.

Jane: Yeah, it didn't take long. It didn't take long.

Brian: So then you joined IBM right out of college?

Jane: I did. There was an experience that happened in between there that kind of sent me back to that original thought of being a missionary. I did summer missions when I was in college, and during my particular summer missions experience, I was supposed to teach vacation bible school to migrant children during the days and possibly their parents at night, and I noticed that not everybody wanted us to teach their kids. I thought, "How strange, for free babysitting. Those kids were safer with us than they were running around the harvesters," but some of the parents didn't want us to have anything to do with their children. I learned over the course of the summer that it had everything to do with how their employer treated them, and the employers who mistreated their employees, the migrants, didn't want to have anything to do with us either. That set me to thinking about my impending career in the corporate arena and I thought, "If a farmer can have that much impact on the eternal future of the people he employs, these migrants, I wonder if that will be the case for me at IBM." I became convinced over the course of the summer through my prayer time, and bible study, and just mulling over this, that I felt like the Lord was saying, "Yeah, and I want you to be a missionary to the corporate world."

Brian: That was probably just unheard of back in those days. Today, I think it's a great idea. I would encourage people to do that today.

Jane: Right. Boy was it unheard of because I talked to my supervisor that summer, he said, "No, you can't be that."

Brian: Yeah, "That's another category. You're a girl."

Jane: Not only am I a girl, but nobody will commission you to do that. No seminary will train you to do that. Nobody will pay your salary to do that, and I'm going, "Well, Adoniram Judson was the first missionary to Burma. He had a lot of obstacles." So I went back to those things that I read as a child about first missionaries to different countries, and they didn't let that stop them. It'll be me and God. The pivotal moment was my supervisor said, "You'd be a great missionary. Just pick something else." I just went, you know, my faith is pretty immature at this point. I was nineteen years old, but based on what I know about God, I don't think you pick something else. You just say, "Yes God."

Brian: Sometimes we get a calling, I know this happened to me. I get a calling to say, "Here's what I want you to do, and here's what I want you to do." You think, "Okay, well they don't go together. I have to wait and see maybe if one changes," but you didn't. You went to IBM with a missionary mindset.

Jane: I did. That's the reason why I stopped you there for a second because it transitioned. It wasn't so much about making the most money that I could make at IBM. It transitioned to what does it mean to be a missionary to, I didn't know it was going to be IBM, but I had it in my head I was going to work for a Fortune 500 company. So what does it mean to be a missionary to the corporate world. I didn't interview with anyone until someone came to campus from a Fortune 500 company, and it turned out that that was IBM. I went, "Oh, alright. That'll work. They're big enough." My first interview, sometime near the end of my senior year of college, and I landed the job. I became a programmer for the space shuttle.

Brian: That's awesome!

Jane: It was awesome! Now, I'm feeling really old, talk about age, I'm feeling really old now that the space shuttle is retired.

Brian: It's funny, actually, I thought the exact opposite. I thought that puts you later, but maybe we're both old. A solid memory for me is actually '85, '86, when the Challenger exploded, but that was well into the space shuttle days actually, wasn't it?

Jane: Yeah, it was. It was. I had actually transferred out of spatial work. By that time, by the Challenger accident. I'd switched, but my code was still running on the shuttle at the time of the accident, and for months, nobody knew what caused that. I had this niggling thought in the back of my mind, "Oh please Lord, please don't make it be my code."

Brian: And it certainly was not, obviously.

Jane: No, it wasn't but nobody knew at the beginning.

Brian: It's a programmer thing. I programmed for IBM as well, so some of my code was used and maybe still is on a certain machine, and there's just something when your number comes up. You think that's me! That's pretty nerdy there, but not everybody will relate to that, but I do, but I certainly do. So you get there, and what were some experiences you had that you were able to share your faith at IBM?

Jane: It was kind of hit and miss. Adoniram Judson wasn't a computer programmer, so I had a lot of translating to do to figure out what he did in his world, and what I needed to do in mine. I wasn't getting a ton of help from the church, capital T. It was just trying to try things. Some things that worked were taking people to lunch and having private conversations. Developing relationships with them, loving them, taking meals when they had a major crisis happen in their life. Things that we learn in Sunday school classes, and fellowship groups, and church, and stuff like that. That really worked. Some things didn't work. Particularly when I had gone into management. The higher I got promoted, the more I was cautioned about sharing my faith at work. The idea being that you don't want anyone to think that they're not getting promoted or being discriminated against because they don't share your faith. There were sticky situations that I had to be a high level of ethics and not violate but still try to figure out what does this missionary to corporate world mean. The last promotion that I was going to ever get at IBM, the guy who ran the whole site there in research [inaudible 00:13:05], by this time we had moved to Raleigh, North Carolina. The guy calls me into his office, "Congratulations on your promotion. Cut out the Jesus talk." Yeah. That was the whole meeting. It didn't last more than five minutes.

Brian: "Good news and bad news. Good news: we're promoting you. Bad news: Yeah, stop talking about Jesus."

Jane: Yeah, and I was so naive. In some ways still am. I just celebrated. I did this little dance all throughout his office all the way to mine. The IBM site there is so huge there. It took me about twenty minutes to walk back to my office. The whole while I am celebrating that he knows I speak Jesus talk! I must be a real missionary!

Brian: You're not celebrating your promotion. You're celebrating the fact that he was really clear that you talk about Jesus.

Jane: That's right, and I just was celebrating that, such a naive one that I am.

Brian: I don't think so. I think that's a beautiful celebration.

Jane: Well, but by the time I got back to my office, Brian, I realized what he had really told me was, "You keep this up, and you are fired sweetheart." So then I kind of saw that writing on the wall that if I don't change my behaviors, he knows, he's after me now. So, I had better have an alternate plan. This is where coaching comes into the picture.

Brian: Before you go there, what I also heard was, because I worked for IBM too, and it was certainly the most diverse place I ever worked, but having it really clear, because not only did he know you talked about Jesus, but I assume that people who worked for you, it was really clear to them, that you would not allow that to affect the way you thought about them as an employee. If that's true, which I believe it probably is, what an ethical, beautiful example that is to them that being a Christian means you won't play favorites. That means a lot, that'd make me more interested in Christianity if I knew it wasn't a club.

Jane: There certainly were people who did get that and were attracted. Momentum was building. I don't think he ever really heard me talk about Jesus because he was so far up in the organization. We never had a personal relationship or private conversations or anything, but he heard about it from others. I believe that's what he heard, but I also know that when people take on a vendetta or want somebody out of there it doesn't have to be the truth came out. The truth was I was not going to be discriminating against anyone, and that too was a part of my faith, but if somebody really had wanted to say, "She's out of here." There was plenty of evidence that I was not stopping, so I thought I need to have an alternate plan, but I learned a lot in those years about the more I got opportunities to share my faith at work, the better I got at being able to point to particular scriptures that were informing my faith and became a resource for people at work who would maybe never have a conversation with me otherwise, but when they got themselves in a pickle and felt like maybe I should have some spiritual guidance, I became known as the person that you go to for that. That did fuel the fire. There were lots of times where people would decide that that is enough, and I want to follow Jesus, what do I do next? That kept me going on that path.

Brian: That is so relevant for today.

Jane: That is still a big need.

Brian: As a minister, I pastored for twenty years, so if people said I really want to reach people for Jesus, I want to be a pastor, and nowadays I certainly wouldn't say, "But you're a girl." That's certainly not as big an issue today, depending on what tribe you're in, but for my tribe it's not an issue at all. I would probably say, "If you want to reach people for Jesus, go work at IBM" because you may think it's a lot easier as minister to talk about Jesus, but in many ways it's not. You get a pulpit, but you don't get to reach the people you were getting to talk to. You set yourself up as someone that if you wanted to talk to somebody, you ought to go talk to Jane. That sounds ideal to me. I'm sure it wasn't perfect, but you also got into some trouble there.

Jane: That's how the Christian life works. It's not all roses. There are challenges, and the more we're doing what we're called to do, the more people are going to want to stop us. It was not a cut and dry, black and white, easy road I would have to be careful to say.

Brian: I'm sure it wasn't. As we turn a corner there, this kind of set the stage for getting into coaching.

Jane: After that boss said, "Cut out the Jesus talk," it really concerned me after I got it. After I figured out I'm going to be fired if I keep doing this, and I'm not going to stop. This is entirely possible. I should have a backup plan. I talked to a friend at lunch, a Christian friend, who knew me and my situation and my calling basically, and she said, "Yeah, but have you looked into coaching? Because your management style is one of a coach, so it probably wouldn't be very hard at all for you to learn how to do that. You should look into the ICF, International Coach Federation." I looked into it, and the more I looked the more I went "Wow, this is me." I can do this because I already have been, I just didn't know it was called something. I didn't know it was called coaching. I didn't know there were skills and competencies and all those things. Maybe I could get better at it if I figured that out. My husband and I went on a Journey's of Paul vacation, which was seven days on the mainland of Greece and a three-day cruise of the Greek Isles, and while on that trip every day we're talking about, "Are you ready for me to leave IBM," and, "What is God calling me to do now," and all that. I came back from that trip, and I signed up for the ICF. I signed up for coach training. I hired a coach, and I got my first client all in the space of thirty days after that trip. I was like, "Wow!"

Brian: "Wow!" is right.

Jane: Yeah. Wow, that happened quickly, but we were both convinced of it. The idea at the moment was to build up a private coaching practice on the evenings and weekends and then when it got big enough, to leave IBM. That's not exactly what happened, but that was the idea at the time, an option.

Brian: In 30 days, you signed up for ICF. What's that look like?

Jane: You just go to the website and say, "Yeah, I want to be a member." That was all that was. Then I started getting their newsletters and information about it.

Brian: You're reminding me; you can be a member without being certified?

Jane: That's right. That was the case then, and it's still the case now. That was my way of saying, I'm going to do this regular research on this profession of coaching just by being a member.

Brian: Then you got a client.

Jane: No, first I signed up for coach training. I think it was in the first or second class that I took that the instructor said, "Now between now and next time we meet together, coach somebody," and I was like, "Really? I'm not ready to do that. I can't do that. What?" I'm always the good student. If the teacher says I should do this, I should do this, and they said, "The best idea would be to have a paying client." I didn't do that quite, but I did ask the woman who sat next to me in choir. I'm a big singer, always been a member of choirs. The very next Wednesday night at choir practice I said, "You wouldn't want me to be your coach, would you?"

Brian: I've said that several times, that's how we typically ask, "You wouldn't want me to coach you, right?" That's how we ask our first client.

Jane: She said, "Well, what is it?" I didn't even bother to explain what it was. So I explained, and I'm so glad there's not a recording of that explanation. She said yes, and I coached her for three years. I learned a lot by coaching her and jumping right in. She was the one and only person I never charged for coaching. After that, I went, "Man, if I can keep my first client for three years, I'm charging for this thing."

Brian: What a great affirmation of the coaching.

Jane: It was kind of over after that. I just went, "Aha! This is fun. I'm having a great time." The other thing, Brian, was I kind of saw it pretty quickly that coaching conversations are confidential. Therefore, I could share Christ, and who would know?

Brian: Confidential that way as well.

Jane: Yeah, so people weren't at that time, back in the day, they weren't all that excited about telling people they had a coach. They would like the benefits they would receive from having a coach, but it was a confidential conversation. I didn't tell them they couldn't share, but they didn't want to share. Coaching was kind of a secret weapon that people would want to have a coach so that they would have a leg up. I wouldn't be in a management role as a coach, so therefore my hands wouldn't be tied, and I could stick within the ethics of the coaching profession and still be able to be who I am and live my calling.

Brian: Jane, here's what I want to do. We've just broken into the coaching side of this, and I love the intro set up. Our podcasts are typically about thirty minutes, and there's no way we can do justice to the rest of this story. Would you be willing to come back, and we'll do a part two so I can really dive into this part of it?

Jane: Sure, absolutely. This is what I'm passionate about.

Brian: I'm interested so far. I don't want to go an hour, and I want to do justice. Let me just close this one up. Let me just thank the folks for joining us today. You can find out more about us at Coach Approach Ministries by going to www.coachapproachministries.org and downloading our free eBook, *The Beginner's Guide to Christian Coaching: How to Have Powerful Conversations That Really Make a Difference*. I hope you come back next week to hear part two of my interview with Jane Creswell.

[Outro Music]