



## Coach Approach Ministries Podcast

### Episode 25: Retired Pastor Building a Coaching Practice

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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 Cyril Johnston. Cyril's transitioning into a professional coach and has done so many things right. I wanted you to hear his story. Cyril pastored over 35 years, small and medium size churches. He now pastors churches as an intentional interim. You can check out his website at [www.ministrycoachcyril.com](http://www.ministrycoachcyril.com). I think you're really going to enjoy this interview. Well I'm joined here today by Cyril Johnston, and Cyril is a retired pastor, well sort of retired pastor, in West Virginia, and he's a part of our coaching community with Coach Approach Ministries. Cyril, I want to welcome you to the podcast today.

**Cyril Johnston:** I'm glad to be on board. Thanks for the invitation. Looking forward to sharing with you and learning from you.

**Brian:** Good, good. First of all, how did you get into the ministry?

**Cyril:** It was pretty much a response to a call from God, and it happened in my last year of college, and I didn't know what I was going to do in ministry, but I knew it needed to be in the church. That was my call. I started off in ministry being a full-time music minister back in the days when we had multiple choirs and all that, and after I'd done that for a couple of years, there was something missing. Finally, the Lord leaned on me during seminary. I had thought about preaching, and I was decent at it. I thought, "No, I really need to do my music," and the Lord leaned on me, and I was having a good music ministry, but it wasn't enough. Finally, I had to say, "Okay, if you want me to preach, I'll preach." I went home and started to fill out the paperwork to let the denomination know I was interested in a change, and before I had finished the paperwork, the phone rang, and it was a church wanting a pastor.

**Brian:** That's the way it works.

**Cyril:** That's how I got into the pastoring.

**Brian:** Pretty confirming of God's call there because he called you.

**Cyril:** Yeah. Talk about a call. It was a real call. I mean the phone rang. Actually, I've had three different churches over 38 years, and when it came time to retire, I wanted to keep on doing ministry, and coaching was just beginning to come in to our neck of the woods. I got involved with CAM, or whatever you were called back then, and that's how I got into it.

**Brian:** Before we go further, you talked about how the Lord really kind of leaned on you. I think people are interested in hearing how the Lord speaks to different people. Can you give us an insight about how the leaned on you, how you knew that?

**Cyril:** Well, in a couple of ways, in spite of the fact that my music was being really well received, and I was doing really well with it, there was just that missing little piece that just didn't click. I got invited to fill in for the pastor when he was on a long trip, and so I preached, and there was a lot of good response to the preaching. The Lord used that to say, "Look, this is where you're going." My biggest dilemma, you talk about what are the barriers within coaching, well one of the big barriers for me was I was afraid I was going to let go of my music, and I'd trained as a classical tenor, and I write, and all that, but my fear was I would lose my music. It's funny to be asked that today. I just told the congregation yesterday where I'm now an interim, and I'd been arguing. I heard a song by Ken Medema called Moses, and he talks about Moses throwing down the rod and then picking it back up, and he does great things with that rod of God. I was in the car by myself, arguing with God, fussing, and being very unhappy. Everything should have been all right, but it wasn't, and honestly, in the stillness of the car, I heard a voice say to me, "Dummy." I have a very good imagination, so it might have been God's voice, or it might have been God using my imagination, and the message that came was, "I don't want to take away your music. I want to enhance it. I want to increase your usefulness." That Sunday night when I got out the paperwork, I got a phone call.

**Brian:** That's very similar to my call. I was arguing with God in the car, coming back from church, and a still voice. He didn't call me dummy, but he told me to shut up.

[laughter]

**Cyril:** If God's going to speak to me, I was just assuming he'd be a little more respectful, but you know what, that's all right.

**Brian:** My mom wouldn't approve of a God who says shut up, but anyway, that's what he said to me. Let's stay on your music for a second. You've got a website at [sidebysiderenewal.com](http://sidebysiderenewal.com), and I've had the pleasure of hearing you sing. I think you sang Danny Boy at a gathering we had, and my, you do have a great tenor voice my friend.

**Cyril:** It's a great gift. It's a great tool, and I use all the time when I get a chance. A lot of the music I've written, I've written in a combination with the sermon, and then it goes on to either have a life of its own, or it doesn't. God did that. He expanded my music, and he expanded my usefulness in the kingdom.

**Brian:** I would say so. It was already pretty useful in the first place, I think. How'd you get into coaching? What was your entrance into coaching?

**Cyril:** Well my entrance was as I approached retirement, I didn't want to stop ministering. I was a but tired of the week to week pastoral responsibilities. Coaching just seemed like a good way to go. I have always had a love of the local church, and I have a great heart for other pastors, and it just seemed like a door that the Lord had opened. After my first visit to Holly Fields with you guys, it was confirmed. It became clear that this was an area with a series of skills that I could develop to continue my ministry, and I have. That's how I got into it.

**Brian:** And up to now, how have you used coaching.

**Cyril:** I'm sorry. Say that again?

**Brian:** Up 'til now, we're talking about building up a bigger clientele right now, but before that, how were you using coaching in your ministry?

**Cyril:** Well, I have used coaching in my ministry in that... Well I've had a series of interim pastors, so I've been able to use the whole idea of asking questions as opposed to telling with them, but I've also, in the previous year or two, I was hired by a church just to coach their new pastors. I just hadn't promoted it very much. It was just word of mouth. I would let it be known that this is what I did, and two different churches hired me to coach their new pastors over the period of a year, and just by word of mouth, I've coached a couple of pastors like that. I've also coached non-pastors. I've coached people in writing and one person who was also a recovery coach. So, that's pretty much how I've done it. What scared me was the business of self-promotion. Right out. Just didn't want to do it. My attitude was kind of, Lord I'm all prepared, send me some people.

**Brian:** He said, "Dummy."

**Cyril:** Yeah, he says that still every once in a while.

**[laughter]**

**Brian:** We find this all the time, and I think this is absolutely why I wanted to interview you. Not only do you have a great testimony and a great personality, but you're getting at what a lot of our coaches are. They want to coach, but they don't want to sell themselves, and so that is a difficulty. It's probably an overstatement, but the things that make you a great coach are the things that make you not a great salesman. You aren't yourself, right? So, we ended up, in June, having a Breakthrough weekend in Nashville, TN, and we brought in 12 coaches from all over the country to do two things. One, to get their PCC markers up, meaning that they're coaching at a higher level, and second, to help them figure out how to really gather a clientele. How did that come to your attention, and what made you decide to take that step?

**Cyril:** It came to my attention because you all sent out an email, and I was on the list. It was funny, when I got it, you said you had room for 12, and 11 had already signed up, and I thought, "Okay. I don't know whether you were that close or not, but I'll take you at your word." I was ready to be kick started again to get past this barrier, and essentially, I'm 72 years old. I don't know how many more years I'll have to serve the Lord like this, and I said, "Look, if you're going to do it, you better kick it into high gear. If you're not going to do it, stop doing what you're doing, and relax, and retire, and move to Florida or

something,” and that wasn’t going to work at all. You guys really helped get me going again, so that’s how I got in on it, made the arrangements, and it was very helpful.

**Brian:** What stood out to you at the Breakthrough?

**Cyril:** What stood out was first of all, there was a great comradery among the coaches and with you guys from CAM. There was a great sense of being, “Oh, I’m not out here all alone. There’s a bunch of others doing this. Some about my age. Some at various levels.” So, that was one thing. The other thing that stood out was that you all took me seriously. You took my desire to move on seriously. You just took seriously. So, I had lots of examples and lots of help. I saw a lot of people coaching. I did coaching, of course, while I was there, and I was able to say, “Look, I’m as good at this as I thought I was. I’ve got room to grow, but the confidence that I got from that, gave me confidence to move on and begin to promote.

**Brian:** I’m hearing a huge piece there where you said, “You guys took me seriously.” There was a sense in you that you thought you might not be taken seriously.

**Cyril:** Well it goes back to how did I describe myself, and I had been reluctant to say I’m a coach, and being there, I knew it was real stuff and I loved doing it, but it was wonderful to be in the environment where it was all right to treat it like a business. Coming out of pastoral ministry, it’s a little different. We don’t see that as being in a business, and even though we should be looking at it from a business view, at least financially, and also from the point of view of an organization, but as a pastor, the job is pretty well designed. You don’t have to create it for yourself. At least in my case, you sign an agreement, you go on board, and do what you said you were going to do. This is different. I was stepping over into this is a corporate world, in a way, and you all provide a bridge there for those of us combining ministry and business, and then I began to realize, if I was going to be a good steward of what God gave me in coaching, and my abilities, I was going to have to do the hard work from the business end, and that’s what began to happen.

**Brian:** Yeah. God gave me a word when I left the ministry and went full time. I say left the ministry, I don’t feel like I left the ministry, but I left pastoral ministry within a church. God gave me the word sustainability. The idea of asking for a price for my work, it was about sustainability because if I didn’t earn that amount, I couldn’t do it for very long. If this is what God wanted me to do, then I had to get paid to do it.

**Cyril:** And one of the ways God provides, I know is by given us the insight as to how to know what our sustainability is and what it’s going to require. The old phrase if God calls, he equips, and I realized he had already equipped me for this. I just wasn’t using it.

**Brian:** That’s a good word. Okay. So, you go to this Breakthrough weekend. You find out you’re not the only one which is really helpful to you. You gain some confidence in your own coaching. You think, “I can coach at this level. I can play with this league here.” We took you seriously, and maybe you started taking yourself seriously. “I can be an entrepreneur. I can get into this. I can do this.” I know that you called me a couple weeks after Breakthrough, and you were ready to roll. Tell me about that.

**Cyril:** The reason I called you was I didn't want to lose the momentum that had started at Breakthrough. We've all been to conferences where we get home, look at the notes, put them in the file, and that's the end of it.

**Brian:** Most of them.

**Cyril:** And there's some conferences, that's what should happen, but this wasn't really a conference. This was a different thing. I've never been to a conference where we sat in the hot seat and pitched our ideas. That was an extremely helpful piece. It was really easy. I recorded that session, and I listened to it and transcribed it on paper, and I thought, "There's good stuff here, and if I don't act on it, I'll lose it. Who can help me with it," and of all the people who could help me with it, you were the cheapest, so I went with you.

**[laughter]**

**Brian:** Ouch.

**Cyril:** Ouch. I know. That's not fair. That's not true actually.

**Brian:** No, it is true. Out of the three of us, I am the cheapest.

**Cyril:** Well it doesn't matter because you're exactly what I needed. I was thinking, "I had this session. I read some of your comments," and I thought, "Okay. Let's see if Brian's available." That's what we did. As you know, I've signed up for some more sessions.

**Brian:** Let's talk about some steps you've taken. You've set a goal to gain some clients. How many clients did you want to gain?

**Cyril:** We set a goal to have five clients running. That was because this is a piece of Side by Side Renewal ministries along with the music and along with my interim pastoring. It's not the full extent of my ministry. We set that goal. Bill had challenged me when I got back to talk to the denominational leaders, and you had challenged me in the sessions when I talked about Side by Side, you encouraged me not to ditch that theme, and keep that going. So, that's what I did when I got back. I started contacting the denominational guys I'm familiar with, began with my home base which is West Virginia Baptist Convention, and I got very positive response from what we call area ministers and from our executive minister, and I began to follow up on that, made phone calls.

**Brian:** You set up a couple events, or even attended a few events. Tell us how you approached those with the idea because you don't want to sell yourself. You don't want to be there, "Hey, I know how to do this. You should listen to me. You should pay me to do this," but you went in with a plan. Talk about that plan.

**Cyril:** The plan was one of the area ministers that I pitched the idea to, and it was actually out of desperation because I really want to do this, and I want it to be viable, and I talked to him about it. I told him why I thought it was good. I invited him over for a cup of tea at the house here. He said, "I could name a couple people right now who could really benefit from that," and when I talked to the other

area ministers, I think I talked to three altogether, each one immediately said, “Oh Cyril. I know people who need that.” So, the next step was okay...

**Brian:** Need what? I’m going to stop you. You said that people need that. What do they need?

**Cyril:** Well they each had pastors for whom they were concerned and responsible who could use some coaching. I wasn’t specific about topics yet or about issues. It was just, “Yes. People could you that.” So, that was very encouraging, and then I arranged with the first fellow I talked with, the first area minister, and he took me to each of his pastor’s meetings for a period of maybe six or eight weeks, and I cleared the schedule so I could go. In the meantime, we had been talked about boundaries, and we’d talked about finding our ministry. I had picked up from the Nashville experience the idea of your best ministry year yet. I called it your best ministry season yet, and then I decided the plan was I’d go to the meeting, and I shared with them the fact that several of the people I’d coached had said, “I wish I could be ministering in the way that I think God called me to minister.” That was one, and the second one was, “I wish I could have better boundaries to accomplish what I need.” So, I raised those issues on a little survey form, and I said, “If I were to offer coaching, or podcast, or even webinars on these topics, would you be interested?” Then I had a place for them to check, “I’d like coaching around this.” Each of these meetings had six or eight people. It wasn’t huge meetings. After each meeting, I had people who said, “Yes, I’m interested.” At the same time, the other piece of the plan was I’m trying to get my ACC, and I’ve got plenty of hours, but some of the people I’d coached are no longer available. One or two of them are deceased, one I couldn’t find, so I needed to pick up some more clients, and I remembered that Chad had made a challenge early on, a couple of years ago, about the way to kick start your coaching is to offer free. Well I wasn’t ready to do that, so I did real cheap, and I told them it’s actually, essentially fee. My normal fee for pastors is \$75 an hour. I’m willing to do five sessions for five people for five dollars. Five for five for five, and out of that I got maybe six or eight serious inquires. Of that group, three are actually in coaching and others are waiting to come on board. So, I have now reached more than the five clients. I think I have six now. So, that was the plan, and I have done that now with this now area minister, and I’m moving on to try to find acceptance and get that same invitation from others in our state convention, and that was the first piece of what I did.

**Brian:** That’s great. I love it. As I listened to it, I loved your statement, I think I remember that even from Nashville, it just resonated with me as a minister. Your best ministry season yet. If you can find a phrase like that, it just resonates with your niche. With those people you’re trying to reach, and boy, that reached me, and then to have a couple of pieces, I guess maybe itches that need to be scratched. One of them is, I’d love to be able to do ministry the way God called me to do it, and that may sound foreign to non-ministers, but ministers know exactly what that means, that there are expectations put upon them that feel like you’re just tied down, and you can’t do ministry. You can’t do what God called you to do. That’s a niche. If you could help me achieve that, I’d pay you, gladly, \$75 an hour. The other one you and I kind of worked through together was the issue of boundaries. Most pastors don’t have good boundaries. They leave their phone on too long. They’re unwilling to say no. They’re unwilling to say, “I can’t talk right now, and if you can help most pastors develop some healthy boundaries, they’re willing to pay for that as well. So, it’s not a matter, necessarily. You kind of change the context. You put a value on what you could offer as opposed to you didn’t ask, “You pay \$75 to get to sit down with me on the phone or in person.” You’re going to pay to get the result you’re looking for, and they’re happy to do it.

**Cyril:** And part of the emphasis I've gotten from you is this business of results. You've all said, "Nobody buys coaching. They buy results." By tagging it with specific areas, I think they were able to see that there could be a benefit in that specific area, and what I'm discovering as I continue the coaching is that it goes on outside of those areas. That's just where we got started. The other piece of my strategy that I wanted to finish up with was we had our state convention back a couple of weeks ago, and I took a booth at the state convention. I set up a display, and I passed out the you're best ministry season yet help, and I tagged my identity as Ministry Coach Cyril, helping you stay, and I've explained this is part of my conversation with people, I want to help you stay fresh, stay sharp, and love the ministry you're in, and I picked that up from you guys too, and it was very interesting how many people would stop and talk about that. Out of that, I have at least one, maybe two, people on the outside thinking of coming in. That's more than I've ever had before. I've done these conventions several times over the years, but the missing piece was, I guess there were a lot of missed pieces, but this was different. I felt seriously called to do this and was able to articulate what was going to happen very clearly. So that was the strategy, and that's where it is right now.

**Brian:** What's next?

**Cyril:** What's next will be to continue developing this with other church leaders. I have some in roads into the United Methodist Conference in this area and the American Baptist of Pennsylvania, they're Pennsylvania and Delaware combined, have their annual meeting. Because I served in Pennsylvania for a while, I had some interim there, and that might be my next... You had mentioned to me the sales cycle, so that's probably what's next. I'm enjoying coaching people who aren't... I have one client who's not in ministry, who's a writer, and I'm enjoying that, but for the meantime, I'm focusing on the pastors and church leaders.

**Brian:** That's great. Cyril, I just want to thank you not only for joining me on this podcast, but for becoming a friend, for being an encourager, just for your interim work. After being out of a church I founded, after 16 years, they did not get an interim, but I prayed to God they would get an interim because that's such a healthy strategy.

**Cyril:** What I'm finding as I look at my total ministry package, the singing, the coaching, the preaching, it's not one or the other. They seem to all run together, and one of the phrases I've picked up from some coach some place, "It's about me in that it's about what I'm being called to do," and they all come together for me, and so that's fine. That's the way it is.

**Brian:** That makes it a lot more fun.

**Cyril:** I love getting to preach. I love getting to sing, and I love getting to coach, so thank you Lord.

**Brian:** So what would you tell someone who's listening to this thinking, "You know, I was thinking about getting into coaching, but I'm just not sure anybody would take me seriously?"

**Cyril:** They're not going to take you seriously until you take yourself seriously, and that hit me when I get up to sing a solo, and I've sung with orchestras and all that stuff, you've got to have the attitude of, "I can do this," and I always have. When it comes to the coaching, it took me a while to have the attitude, "Yeah, I can do this. I can add value to people's lives," and preaching and singing are two areas that are

already accepted and already you don't have to introduce people to them. They know what they are. Coaching, you have to introduce people to it. I had to introduce myself to it, so they're not going to take you seriously unless you do, and there's a lot of work. It's not just learning to coach, but I will say that in ministry in general, the approach of coaching where I don't have to have all the answers, in fact I shouldn't even try to have all the answers, and I'm a lot freer. It's a freeing up experience to know I can work with people even though I don't know the answer to their problem. That's great. It's a great gift from God.

**Brian:** That's a great encouragement. You can find out more about CAM by going to [coachapproachministries.org](http://coachapproachministries.org) and downloading our free eBook, *The Beginner's Guide to Christian Coaching: How to Have Powerful Conversations That Really Make a Difference*. We'll see you next week.

**[Outro Music]**