



Coach Approach Ministries Podcast

Episode 26: Introverts and Coaching

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

Chad Hall: Brian, how are you doing this very fine day?

Brian: It's a great day. It's a great day to be coaching. It's a great day to be alive. It's a great day to be a follower of Jesus. There's all kinds of good things today Chad.

Chad: Super, good, it's hard to coach if you're not alive. I don't know if there will be coaching in Heaven, but...

Brian: I've had a few coaches who were borderline.

Chad: Yeah, ok.

Brian: So, not my favorite situation to be honest with you. In today's episode, we want to talk about being an introvert. Introverts can get a bad rap. I was discussing introversion with a couple of coaching students, both were near the stronger side of introversion scale, and they were concerned about how they came across to people and were even questioning a little bit of whether they needed to get counselling for their introversion. I remember hearing an interview with an introvert writer, and she talked about how on one occasion she would go out and teach and interact at writing seminars, and then she would spend the next two days in bed. I'm not sure if she was exaggerating or not, but certainly people are more draining to introverts. Chad, how did introverts get such a raw end of the deal?

Chad: Well, you know, I think the thing with introverts, if you're going to kind of bottom-line describe them, introverts have lots of ideas, they just keep them to themselves. I always say they put their best stuff in front of their favorite audience, which is themselves. What the rest of the world sees is not much, and so they get a bad rap because they just don't put out as much data as extroverts. People are wondering, "Hey, what's going on with them?" I think they leave a lot of room for assumption where

especially high extroverts, there's no room for assumption. You know what they're thinking and half the stuff they haven't thought. They're still saying that out there.

Brian: Absolutely, introverts probably have a rich internal life, and people don't see that. They have a lot of thoughts, a lot of dreams. There's definitely a lot going on in there. There are a lot of misconceptions about introverts: they're shy, sometimes they're shy and sometimes they're not. You and I are both slightly introverted, and yet we're not necessarily shy. It may depend on the situation for me.

Chad: I'll say the same is true for me, but I think when you look at someone who's introverted, especially if they have a strong preference for introversion, you could assume, you could misinterpret that, as them being shy. You could misinterpret it as them being reclusive or them being arrogant. They oftentimes have that misconception of being arrogant.

Brian: Snooty.

Chad: That's right, they're snooty. They don't interact with everybody else the way we are, they're too good. Well they might, but they could also just be quiet.

Brian: There are plenty of extroverts that think they're too good as well.

Chad: That's the thing, I think plenty of extroverts think they're too good, that's why they don't shut up. They love hearing themselves.

Brian: I think unengaged, maybe without ideas. They can be perceived that way.

Chad: Yeah, you know both you and I do a lot of online teaching and we have our webcams up. It's always interesting to have some introverts in the class. Sometimes they'll have their webcam on and they'll go an entire 90 minutes and not say a thing. It's easy to misinterpret that as "Oh, they've checked out." But no, they haven't checked out. Those are the very people who send the great comments afterwards, they ask questions after class, they send emails and those sorts of things. They're very engaged, just in a different way.

Brian: And as a facilitator, if I engage them by inviting them specifically into the conversation, always they have something to say. They have been thinking about it, they do have a response, they just don't feel the need or the desire, being compelled to have to say what they're thinking all the time.

Chad: That's right and that's one of the things that I love about something like Myers-Briggs, which is where we kind of got that term, that whole idea of introversion. It talks very clearly that these are preferences. So in the person that is in the classroom, they have a preference for introversion. That doesn't mean they can't speak out loud. That doesn't mean they can't contribute. It just means kind of their default setting is keep it to themselves. Now, they have something going on, they're just talking to themselves internally. It's the invitation to go off preference that will oftentimes allow them to share that wisdom, share that insight, share that great question with everybody else. Oftentimes the invitation is the necessary trigger to get them off preference. By the way, with all the things in something like Myers-Briggs, nobody wants to stay on preference all the time. That's just kind of your default setting. To get through life, you have to go off preference from time to time when necessary.

Brian: Chad, talk about the spectrum a little bit. Certainly, I'm slightly introverted, but people would have to get to know me to find that out probably because it's not so obvious, and yet some people are just extremely introverted. Can you give us a sense of the spectrum?

Chad: Yeah, and that's right, that's one of the things I don't like about a quick look at a Myers-Briggs score because in Myers-Briggs you're either E or I. You're extrovert or introvert. There's no other letter, the letter doesn't get bigger the stronger your preference. It's almost binary. The truth is, preference is binary. You do have a preference, one or the other, but the strength of preference is where we get a spectrum. When I run Myers-Briggs reports, I always run the ones that do have that spectrum. The way it scores it, you could have a 30 all the way down to a 1, preference for introversion, and then on the other side you could have a 1 to 30 extroversion. You've got to think, someone with a preference of a 1, 2, or 3, it'd look very different from a person with a 27, 28, 29.

The person with that really strong preference, it's going to take a lot to really get them off preference. They are going to tend to be much more to themselves, living in the world of ideas, concepts, kind of in their head, a rich inner world. An introvert has a rich inner world. Someone with that strong of a preference, you're not going to be invited into that world as often as someone with a 1, 2, or 3 strength of preference who might really almost come across as an extrovert because they're going to be more comfortable in extroverted situations. I think what you and I have in common Brian is we're kind of really slight introverts, so we can show up, be with people all day, that kind of thing.

A distinction I always make between myself and Bill Copper, Bill Copper can train all day with a room full of people and when it's over he'll go out with a few of them for dinner that night and just keep the party going. Whereas I'm going to train all day, I think you're probably the same way, and when the class is over I say, "Ok, I'm going to go introvert now," and get recharged by being alone.

Brian: Those are days I really wish Red Lobster had a drive-through. I'm hungry for Red Lobster, but I really don't want to be with people. So there's just a thought, there's an idea for somebody for the Red Lobster organization.

Chad: I'm sure they have to-go carriers.

Brian: Probably, you're probably right. When I first took the Myers-Briggs, it said I was an extrovert. I think I had a one or a two, but then the trainer realized that it wasn't quite fitting and just simply asked, "Do you recharge by yourself or do you recharge with people?" That's a great sign to give people a sense.

Chad: That's right, and people who are going to tend to be in the middle with a slight preference either introversion or extroversion, one of the challenges for them is they tend to recharge both ways. So, when a slight introvert is alone for too long, they do need the stimulation that comes from being around other people. They're always needing to waffle back and forth between alone and stimulation, and sometimes they even have a hard time navigating that "Oh what do I need right now?" Whereas people with super strong preferences, they know. The super strong extrovert knows "Oh, I need to go be around people." The super strong introvert says, "Oh, I need to be alone."

Brian: So one thing I want to say, real clearly because I brought it up at the beginning, is I don't think introverts need counselling for being introverts. As an introvert, I would probably think, "Well I know a lot of extroverts that I'd love to see get some counselling." So it's not just a general feel, that's not how you determine if you need to talk to someone or not is whether you're an introvert or not. Let's take a look at this from both sides of coaching Chad. Let's first look at the best ways to coach an introvert. It depends, some people have a hard time because you certainly, I'm sure, have to be really comfortable with silence.

Chad: That's right, you'll get much longer periods of silence. I tell you, if I was going to encourage coaches to one thing differently with introverts it's this: if you don't always do this with all of your clients, at least with your introverts, send them a prep form. Introverts like to think things through before they say things out loud. They like to come in prepared, they like to organize their thoughts. They just don't think and speak as quickly like there's a greater difference between those two. A prep form allows them to think through what they want to talk about. Go ahead maybe even get some focus to it. Maybe think through what they hope to walk away with. Now they're better able to engage the topic much more effectively rather than feeling like they're being put on the spot and the only way they can think is to talk. That's typically not an introvert.

Brian: Yeah, it's a real testament to coaching around the idea that you don't coach the problem, you coach the person. I think coaches can struggle with coaching introverts because they can't get enough of the problem to figure out how to help, but the real brilliance of coaching is that you don't need all those details, and so I think you can definitely start with an introvert with an assumption that they do know what they want to talk about. They do know what their problem is.

They have thought about it a tremendous amount, and then you can really ask some powerful, creative questions, and then you certainly have to give them the absolute room to process that internally, depending on how introverted. They're not going to process it out loud, but then the real prize comes. I think I've had great success with introverts, that the real prize comes when they realize you really are going to listen to their response. They're used to people not listening to their response. Maybe because it takes too long, but I always listen to their response, and oh my goodness, then you get invited into the richness of an introvert's internal thought process.

Chad: That's right, you'd better value what they say because they value it or they wouldn't have said it. Which is different for a person with a slight introversion or even an extroverted preference where sometimes you have to sort through the weeds and get to what really mattered in what they said. While an introvert, almost everything they say, again more of a mid to highly introverted person, almost everything they say is really valuable, otherwise they wouldn't have said it. So really listen to that, really be able to hear it, respond appropriately. If you respond in a way that's totally misaligned with what they just said, that's going to really be a problem in terms of trust and their willingness to share even more. The other thing is, it may sound counterintuitive, but a lot of times with introverts the conversation actually moves faster than with an extrovert because their responses are shorter, but they wanted to think through all that, they don't have to talk through it. They may give shorter responses, but you don't have to filter through all of it to get to the real meat. All they put out is the meat of what they're thinking.

Brian: The analogy I use between extroverts and introverts as I talk to coaches is that an extrovert, it's like he's trying on clothes and he wants to look in the mirror to see how it fits, so an extrovert may say things that they don't mean, they just want to see how it sounds out loud. That's how they process, and so as a coach you say, "Well earlier you were talking about this." You've got to be really careful because they kind of throw it out really easily, while an introvert, if they say it out loud that's it. They really mean it. It's pretty much concrete, you can count on it.

Chad: A couple other best practices with introverts, you don't have to match totally their limited talking. They're used to people doing most of the talking. As a coach, a lot of times we say great coaches maybe only talk 10 to 15 percent of the time. Honestly, when you're coaching an introvert you probably are going to do more than that. You're going to talk maybe 40 percent of the time. But you definitely don't want to go over the 50 percent threshold. They need to do most of the talking. You may find yourself doing more of the talking. Truth is, the introvert is probably ignoring half of what you're saying and that's okay, maybe that's comfortable for them, but they're also going to be comfortable with silence. If they're not comfortable with it because that's kind of been imposed upon them by society. You may just mark that territory as it's okay to be quiet and think.

They tend to like to write, so they even write some ideas before they say them out loud to you, and that's okay. That works. Extroverts love actions and results and people. Extroverts are just more action-oriented. Introverts prefer more that world of ideas and concepts, that sort of thing. So when you're going for actions at the end of coaching conversation, just know introverts, especially those with a strong preference, are not going to come up with a list of five actions and all this high activity especially around other people. Some of their actions coming out of coaching might be to continue processing the topic, continue learning it, maybe even pray about it, journal about it, those sorts of things. Those are totally legitimate actions.

Brian: I think a coach can help an introvert articulate what they're thinking. They're not used to saying it out loud. It depends on the introvert for sure, but you've got to be very careful as you talk about talking more. You're not just moving into your own thoughts and having more freedom to talk about what you want to say, you're spending more time really listening to what the client is saying and helping them to articulate that. Is that where you're going?

Chad: Yeah. That's right, a lot of your talking as the coach is going to be curiosity about what they think. Getting deeper into what is going on for them, and honestly the introvert can oftentimes love that curiosity, someone's interested. Although don't be surprised if at first they may be a bit guarded because they don't let just anybody in, so it's really important to create that trust, the safety, create that safe space where it almost feels like they're talking to themselves when they're processing with you. What you're doing is facilitating their thought process, not you sharing a bunch of your own stuff.

Brian: Their thoughts are sacred to them, and so as you hear them you have to treat them with a holiness that's appropriate, and then when you do, I find they open up.

Chad: That's a good point. Brian, what do you think are some of the advantages to being an introvert as a coach?

Brian: Well, one of the first obvious ones is they're better listeners. They're okay with quiet, and I think they're okay with not just having their voice in their head as much as well. I think they can be more focused. What do you think?

Chad: Yeah, I think that's true, and I think especially a lot of early beginner coaches, they're always struggling with, "I've got to come up with another question," and sometimes they're uncomfortable with being quiet while they come up with the next question. Introverts tend to be better at that. They've learned to be quiet, to process it internally and then spit it out externally. Especially if they can just get okay with being themselves in the coaching conversations, they're going to tend to be better at coming up with questions, listening, being quiet while they process that next question. I think they're going to tend to be a little bit better about bottom-lining it, and speaking direct communication, getting to the nugget of what's being said instead of all the extra verbiage that oftentimes surrounds what a client's talking about.

Brian: Yeah, and tell me if I'm wrong here, I think an introvert's less likely to be thinking while another person's talking, and maybe you were getting at that but I want to be really clear on that. They're an introvert, and they do all their processing internally, but I think they're much more likely to be at peace, really focusing on the listening when the other person's talking as opposed to an extrovert who not only likes to express themselves out loud, they're also talking in their head probably more than an introvert is as well.

Chad: I think it varies. I think an introvert is used to, in society, hearing a bunch of gabbing going on around them and can easily go into their own head even though people are talking, so I think they do need to be cautious of that. I don't think that's necessarily the default setting, that they're going to do less thinking in their head, but I think just like all of us introverts have to train themselves to be interested in the other person. For some that's easier than others.

Brian: Yeah, what's another advantage for an introvert as a coach?

Chad: I think introverts are going to tend to be better note-takers, they're going to tend to be noting the flow of the conversation where extroverts tend to get lost in the moment of a conversation. Introverts tend to be more intentional with their language, which is really helpful in terms of the crafting of questions. Introverts are also going to be a little bit better at coaching the person, not the problem. We say that all the time, but extroverts are so intensely satisfied by activity, whereas introverts are okay with getting somewhere new in your thinking. Like that's intrinsically valuable to an introvert. So introverts as coaches are going to be a little more curious about your world of ideas, beliefs, and motivations. They get more interested in that inner part of who you are versus that outer part of what you do. I think that's a huge advantage to be an introvert coach.

Brian: We love introverts Chad, that's what I'm hearing. They've got a lot to bring to coaching, and they've got a voice that needs to be heard.

Chad: That's right, they make great coaches, it's not a slam dunk automatic if you're an introvert you're going to be a great coach. You have things you're going to have to overcome, in some of the same ways as extroverts do, but you've got some really big advantages that can make you a great coach.

Brian: Well Chad and I really appreciate everyone joining us today, you can find out more about us by going to 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]