



Coach Approach Ministries Podcast

Episode 36: The Quickest Way to Destroy Your Coaching Practice

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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 Michael Marx, who I met when Coach Approach Ministries began discussing how we could partner with Christian Coaches Network International, for which Michael is the immediate past president. Welcome Michael Marx.

Michael Marx: Brian, it's a pleasure to be here, thank you for inviting me.

Brian: Let me read your bio for the listeners, there's a lot here: Michael J. Marx, Ed. D, Educational Doctor? Is that what that is?

Michael: Yes, that's right.

Brian: Is the founder of Blazing New Trails Coaching. He is a sought after business and life coach for those who want to explore new directions. Michael's purpose is to be a catalyst, and his greatest joy is to see people move from having a stalled life to a dynamic one. Michael holds the Professional Certified Coach credential, that's the PCC for ICF, the Professional Certified Christian Coach credential with CCNI, as well as being a Certified Professional Life Coach. He brings more than two decades of experience in teaching, coaching, and mentoring in an international arena. Michael is also the immediate past president of the Christian Coaches Network International and serves as the leader of, this is good, the International Coach Federation, the ICF, their Ethics Community of Practice. So, you are the lead dog when it comes to ethics in the ICF.

Michael: Yes.

Brian: And finally, in 2016, Michael published his book *Ethics and Risk Management for Christian Coaches*. He lives at 8,162 feet in the mountains of Colorado with his wife Joy and a dozen sled dogs. Boy Michael, that's a lot of experience there. That's awesome.

Michael: Yeah, I've been around for awhile and do a lot of things, but my greatest joy is helping people.

Brian: That's great, let me just ask you a question just getting started. When did you know you were a leader? How early in your life did you know you were a leader?

Michael: Well, there were signs of it back in kindergarten when the people that I hung out with, kind of the rat pack of my neighborhood, were in a school, and we came from the poor side of town so we kind of hung together. The teachers always complained that I was the leader, and I should lead them in a good way. I never got into trouble ever once Brian, but I always liked sending my friends out on little tasks that would get them into trouble.

Brian: Did you say friends? Or minions? I wasn't sure which.

Michael: I didn't know the word minions when I was six years old so whatever works.

Brian: Sometimes you see that really early in leaders and sometimes you don't, but it's always a good story. So, what turned you into coaching? I bet you at six didn't want to be a Christian coach when you grew up.

Michael: No, nor did I want to be a teacher, and then I became a teacher in Germany and added consulting on to that because I was also an MBA. Working with executives and working with businesses, I was just not teaching, and I was not consulting and I was trying to figure it out. So, I started reading and taking courses. Finally, just bringing it to a dissertation, and my dissertation mentor was looking at all my notes, and she said, "This sounds like coaching." I immediately went and researched everything on coaching, and it's like my tribe. This is who I am, this is what I do! I'd actually been practicing it de facto for years, and now suddenly there was a name for it. I was super excited.

Brian: I had a very similar experience in that I took Coach Approach Ministry's first class and was like, "This is me. This is it. This is what I've been trying to say." It was just such a release and relief. You are such an interesting guy, and I could talk to you for two hours but I'm not sure that people could listen to me talking to you for two hours so let's focus in on the book. The book title is not a grabber, "Ethics in Risk Management," I'm not like, "Man, I want to go to the beach and read that one," but there is so much important stuff that is really practical to the coach that I want to get into. Talk a minute about how did this book come about?

Michael: Well, a comment on the grabber, I sent this to someone for review, and she was just going to flip through the pages of it before she went to sleep one night and her husband came in an hour later and he said, "What are you doing?" She said, "I'm reading this book." He said, "It's 'Ethics and Risk Management'... I thought you were tired?" She said, "This is fascinating!" People are really surprised when they open the book. This lives, it breathes, it has its being. This is cool stuff, especially from a Christian perspective. I think there's an appeal for righteousness. The genesis of the book was that there are about four or five books that have ever been written on coaching ethics, and I've talked to most of the authors, and they're all not really very interested in writing another one. Of course, none of those were Christian, so a certain need was there, and there are courses being taught on ethics in different Christian schools. It's a one of a kind book, so I like to tongue-in-cheek boast, "I wrote 'The Book' on Christian coaching ethics" because there's only one Brian! When you have the only one in a whole genre by yourself, you have written "The Book."

Brian: I have the book, and I have not read the whole book by any means, I don't want to give the wrong impression, but I was so quickly impressed that as you start to read a chapter, you immediately bring it to life, it's not full of stuff that's just, "Oh my goodness, the rabbit trail back into the ethics is so interesting to you but not to me." That is not this book.

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Michael: And it is life, that's just it. It's life put out in such a way that people can say, "I can do that!" Not only can I, I do that. And how can I do it in such a way that no one is going to get the feeling that I'm disrespecting them or in any way taking advantage of them. That's about all that it amounts to.

Brian: A great book has conflict, right? And this is all about conflict. This is about the dilemma: here's your situation, here's what happened. Now what? There's so much, and you really grasp that and draw that out. The book came about because it was needed, but what was in you? You said the other guys didn't want to write another one, what did you have in you that needed to come out?

Michael: Well, ethics and risk management. The ethics part is pretty straight forward, there's a code. The ICF code of ethics, which like you said I lead the community of practice for, and then there's the CCNI code of ethics, which a lot of Christian coaches have asked me, "Can we have permission to put this on our website?" Well yes, of course you can. It's actually a code, that makes it a law which makes it not copyrightable, so of course you can have permission because you didn't need to ask to begin with, but these are all the types of concerns here. There's the ethics, and not necessarily how to avoid problems, but more so how to live rightly. I see if we look at ethics not as a punitive system, but as a pedagogical system. When somebody actually gets into trouble, it more becomes an idea of how to train this particular coach to not do this again.

Of course, right now we're really big on the training aspect, the whole ethics community, the Independent Review Board, which I sit on as well, the Complaint Committee, if you will. Our biggest thing is training right now. We're all giving presentations all over the country on a regular basis. I'll be giving five in the next couple of months on just that. So, there's that aspect of things, but the other part "and risk management." That's what's really unique to this book because the risk management has to do with basically the way I targeted this book: going for the small business owner. And Brian, that really doesn't matter whether you're a plumber or a website designer or an accountant, anyone in the service industry, you're pretty much going to have the same risks.

A lot of the book is really about business risk, it's what I've coached my clients on for decades, and that's what qualifies me. I'm not a trained risk management expert, I have an MBA, and I understand how people think. I've put it into a book so that people can get a relatively easy way of saying, "Okay, these are the big rocks, these are the pitfalls, these are the things to avoid." When you read the book, you can say, "Well, I can do that." That's really what I'm trying to get people to say. It's not going to be a tricky thing, you can do this if you just be aware of the hazards and have something, almost anything, in place before the event happens. That seems to be the better part. Prevention is the better part about it.

Brian: It's a perfect book because, if it was all legalese, no one would understand it first of all, no one would read it, and no one would implement it. But you've written it in a way that the everyday coach can put these things into practice, so good job, well done. Let's just get right to it, what's the easiest way to get into trouble as a coach?

Michael: Disrespecting the client. You'll do something that will get the client out of sorts, and then they'll push back and withdraw, and you'll keep on going, adding fuel to that fire. Suddenly the client's gone, and worst case your name is in front of the IRB, the Independent Review Board of the ICF, and we're looking at this saying, "Oh, well is this an ethical breach? Did you actually violate the code in how you disrespected the client?" It's really a question of keeping the client's needs and wants and culture. I

think that's a part of it that we just don't keep in the forefront is that your next door neighbor has a different culture than you do. You might really be very similar in many different respects, but you're not the same. I'm not the same as my brother, and I'm not the same as my next door neighbor. I'm really trying to keep those differences in the forefront. That is one thing and the other thing is that you put yourself forward as a professional, which is being done in a way that doesn't really ring true, and another professional complains about you. In other words, we get a lot of cases at the IRB about a coach and the complainant is another coach saying, "This guy isn't playing the game fair. I'm upset."

Brian: What are some of those ways that they're complaining about?

Michael: Misrepresentation. You're saying things in your advertisements that give you an unfair competitive advantage, and if they're not true then the other coaches in your community might get upset. For example, "Guaranteed results. Come to my coaching practice, and I'll guarantee your results." How are you going to do that? Your out is, "Well, the client never did his homework. The client never did his assignments. The client is at fault for the not getting results. My coaching was good, so you can't sue me for not getting results. I couldn't guarantee this because you're not doing your part." That's going to be your defense, and you will win in court on that defense. The fact that your lead statement, your marketing, "I guarantee you results" pulled people in on an unfair advantage, that was just a technique. It's unfair, you're doing something, I'm saying I'm going to guarantee you results, but I have no intention of getting results because I know they can't sue me for it.

Brian: We find that when coaches market themselves, they typically don't go far enough. I'm not going to say guaranteeing results but saying what benefits are. Saying clearly, "Here's what's going to happen." When you start to write that stuff out, it can feel a little vague. The more specific you can be, but there's the ethical dilemma isn't it? How far should I really go to say, "Here's what I can do for you," without crossing the line and saying something I really can't?

Michael: Exactly.

Brian: What's another way that coaches get into trouble besides disrespecting the client?

Michael: They don't honor personal boundaries. Ironically, Brian, we've had cases where, for example, a pastor and a client felt the need for prayer. It was a legitimate need, the client felt the need to be prayed for by the coach/pastor. Probably due to his pastoral style, he reached across the table and put his arm on the lady's shoulder. Well, there was a table between them, but she felt violated. She didn't like that touch. So, we've got a physical boundary. We've had cases where coaches have said, "Well, you're just so attractive, you've got all these benefits." The coach is trying to build up the client's self-esteem. Then we get a case saying that "the coach just really came on to me and was propositioning me and all these things."

Coach says, "That never happened." That's not the point. The point Brian, is how do people perceive these things? You'll get into trouble not on your intentions, but on the perception of your intentions. Boundaries is a big thing that people just don't respect the other person's nature, and I just think, Brian, that has to do with not paying attention. If you're really a student of your clients, if you're really a person that is looking at clients as a malleable thing, in other words they're coming to you to reform. That makes them vulnerable. That makes them in a place of weakness, and that's exactly why coaching is the best place for them here because that can become strength, that can become progress, that could

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become forward motion here. But that vulnerability is still always there, and if you're ignoring that in the name of "let's do this and go for it, get you what you need," and all these wonderful things that coaches do, you can actually cross the line to disrespect and that's where we really get into trouble.

Brian: Without meaning to. I was a pastor for twenty years and for certain you have instincts about the kinds of questions you should ask that are different in coaching, and you have instincts about physicality. You have to start with some real awareness, that's really helpful. I know I've found that true in my practice.

Michael: Let me give you an example. My example is asking permission. I started to say, "Can I have permission?" But that's exactly my point. In most of our cultures in North America, when you say to the client, "Can I have permission to pray for you? Can I have permission to give you an example? Can I have? Do you mind if?" It doesn't matter here. In most cultures in North America, it would be rude to say, "No." Therefore, "Can I have permission to pray for you?" You're reaching your hand across the table like you always do to put your hand on her shoulder. That's normal for you. She gave you permission to pray for you. The point of the matter is a permission question is a closed question. That, in coaching, is not always the best thing to go here. Because the answer in politeness has to be "Yes, I give you permission," it's not a good question.

So, what are the alternatives? My example client is always Frank, so Frank, one of the options is we could pray. How would it be if we did that right now? And Frank can say yes or no, I'm comfortable with that, I'm not comfortable with that. You know Frank, that reminds me of a situation I went through a couple of years ago. How would it be if I told you that right now? Really, Brian, it all comes down to trust. Trust is the most misunderstood or at least unobserved competency in the ICF's scheme of eleven core competencies. It's a skill. Trust is a skill, building trust is a skill. And when the trust is high, the client can say, "No Michael, I don't want you to pray for me right now. No, your story is probably really good, but it's going to interrupt my train of thought." The client has to be able to say "no Brian" to a permission question or it's not a permission question. We say, when we train people in coaching, "All questions should be discovery questions," and I like to quote my good friend Cheryl Scanlan, she makes a promise to her clients before the coaching ever begins, "I will never ask you a question I know the answer to."

Brian: I love that. I agree with that. I've made that statement many times. It's funny, as you're talking about the prayer thing, this happened to me yesterday Michael. I wonder if I'm Frank. I ran into a client outside of the coaching situation, and she stopped and she shared with me that she had some anxiety, and I knew it would be okay to ask, so I asked, "Can I pray for you real quick?" You're right, I said it closed question, so I'm learning here, and she said yes, and I believe that, but then I asked, because we were in a public place, "Is right here okay?" in that sense of I don't know if I asked that question perfect, but I had that sense of what's comfortable for you, and then I put my hand on her shoulder and prayed for her. I felt like I got two of the three there, but you just constantly have to be aware, thinking through how to honor the client, and I'm glad you're talking about this because I think we all need that reminder.

Michael: It's so easy to just do what you do because you're comfortable with it. "How can it be wrong? I'm totally comfortable with that."

Brian: Absolutely. So, let's go a different direction. What's the best way to use a model? I'm a leadership

coach so I'll use something like *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team* by Lencioni or Kotter's *Eight Steps to Leading Change*. Even when I say that, I say who invented it. I just now did. I give the credit where credit's due, but then I use that in the coaching. Where can you cross an ethical line there?

Michael: In several places. It's easy to use a tool that people are very familiar with and not be qualified to interpret it. For example, there's the Myers-Briggs, there's the DiSC, there are a dozen tools out there that the owner asks the people administering it to be qualified to interpret it. So, there's a training program. It is a breach of contract. It is a copyright infringement to use somebody's tool and not be authorized and qualified to do so. With that said, we've been coaching for a long time, you and I Brian. We're probably pretty familiar with the Myers-Briggs and the DiSC, and I'm not certified in either of those. It was a large part of what I studied when I got my doctorate in Adult Education, the Myers-Briggs. I can probably give as good an interpretation as anybody who is certified, but I'm not authorized to do so, so I would cross the line very quickly if I took your Myers-Briggs results or your DiSC or anything else and interpreted it for you. Now, you know your Myers-Briggs, your INTJ or a high D.

Brian: I am an INTJ. I know you just made that up, but I am an INTJ.

Michael: I'm an ENTJ, but that's the point. We know we're familiar with what we are and how that works and what that means. Well, maybe the client isn't familiar with what that means to be an INTJ or ENTJ and so forth. So, you would offer an interpretation for them. That might not be ethical for you to do. You can ask the client, "Well Brian, what does that mean for you? To be an INTJ." You're basically saying that judgement is higher in your value set than sensory. That spending time by yourself is a higher value than spending time with people. I know that about the INTJ, but do you know that about it? I'll just ask you "What do you think about that?" You seeing a tool that you're not qualified or authorized or certified for would really just be an ethical breach if not risk management factor here because you're basically dancing on copyright infringement. You're playing with a tool you're not authorized to play with.

There's that aspect of things, the bigger part though, and we had a discussion on this in the ICF ethics community of practice which I'm the leader of and I was not the leader of this discussion, I think it was in June or July of this last year, 2016, about tools. Because it was a hot topic. The question that we discussed for an hour among thirty, forty ethics people there, new and old and experienced in ethics or not, we discussed for an hour when do you introduce the tool? That was what was really being debated. Because some people say, "I start my coaching with the tool" and other people are saying, "No, I only introduce the tool later on." So I'll just present that as a debate. Obviously the idea of starting with the tool is "let me start with some awareness, I'll let you find out what your INTJ is or your DiSC or whatever and gain you some awareness really quickly," and the other side will argue, "No, you might be using a tool that is inappropriate, maybe not the DiSC or the Myers-Briggs but the Right Path would be the better tool to use," and you really need to get to know the client a little bit better before you can recommend the best tool.

Secondly, if you are an authorized person, and you have that tool and you say, "Ok, this is how I start my coaching." Are you manipulating the client to use a tool that they may not want to? They want to work with you because they like Brian, but Brian says, "Okay, we have to do a 360 before I'll even touch you." Well okay. Have you just manipulated them into buying something that they didn't really want to buy, but it was a prerequisite for working with you. I'll just leave that as a debate because I know what I

practice, but I don't know if there's a solid line between all of those because we discussed for an hour when do you introduce the tool, and left it open because really it's up to each coach to decide.

Brian: What I'm hearing is I think it might have to do with the confidence of the coach.

Michael: Yeah.

Brian: If the coach is confident in their abilities, they're able to listen and say, "Here is a tool that sounds to me would be very helpful," as opposed to if they're not very confident in that area, they may want to start with a tool to help them get started because they feel inadequate. Is that possible?

Michael: Yeah, if you feel inadequate as a coach and need a tool to start yourself off with, are you offering the client the best service? Maybe yes, but the biggest premise of my book is do what is right for the client not do what is right for you, the coach, in your coaching business. Do what is right for the client. People hear that and they say, "Of course, that makes perfect sense," but what you're saying here is "I might need to turn this client away because I can't serve their needs in anything other than this tool to begin with and that's not what this client needs to begin with." So, I have to turn that client away and refer them to another coach.

Brian: So, my confidence isn't in the coaching process, it's in the tool, and I know you talk about, as a trainer I talk about this all the time, as you're practicing coaching, the process works. I'm telling you, the process works. Trust it. That's where the confidence is built. By putting yourself out there, trusting the process, and then seeing its effect. And then tools are great to bring in for the right moment.

Michael: Yeah, I came up with kind of a slogan for that Brian, and I thought other teachers invented it and then I started talking to some people, asking "Who came up with this saying," and they said, "Well you did Michael." So, I own this one. I wanted to give credit to someone else, but I couldn't find out who it was and we all agreed I did, I came up with it, "Trust the client, trust the process." That's actually not new, but what I added to that was, "Trust the client, trust the process, trust the Holy Spirit." As Christian coaches, you will come into a Christian coaching call, and you are a Christian coach, that makes it a Christian coaching call, whether the client is or not. Most of my clients are not Christians. And if they are Christians, then I will say, "Remember when I told you when we first got together 'If the Holy Spirit speaks to me, I'm going to pass that onto you,'" and they say, "Yes." "Well this is what I feel He's saying."

To the non-Christian client, I will say, "You know, I'm just sensing x and y. What about x and y? How does that play in?" I'll usually try and put it in the form of a question, but I know, having worked as a Christian pastor and leader and prayer person, bible study leader, all of these things we've done in our Christian lives outside of coaching, that this is the Holy Spirit speaking into the situation. I think as Christian coaches we are obliged, in other words, it would be disobedience not to bring that in. It doesn't have to be a closed question, it doesn't have to be a slap-in-the-face observation, but it is an obligation to trust the Holy Spirit. I've brought stuff into the coaching situation where I'm like, "This is really weird. This is really, really off the wall." And when I say that the client says something like "How did you know that?" It's just this "Wow. I told you I'd speak in the Holy Spirit if he said something to me, and that's what I'm doing." That's really the distinction in my opinion between Christian coaching and other coaching.

Brian: Absolutely. Man, I've loved talking to you. I want to talk to you more. I'm looking at the time and

thinking oh, I'm going to get in trouble here if I ask another question, but I want to have you back and talk about something. More about this or you've just so many interesting things to talk about, and it's been so helpful to me, just as great reminders of creating awareness for the client, talk about ethics and risk management, but what this has really made me think about is awareness about how to best serve my client, which is why you wrote the book. How can people find out more about you Michael?

Michael: www.blazingnewtrailscoaching.com. "blazingnewtrails," one word. I do a weekly Facebook Live broadcast at 4:30 Eastern, which is 2:30 Mountain, my time. Living the dream, I have a lot of people that just say "Wow, that's pretty to cool to live at 8,100 feet with sled dogs. How can I make that happen?" Look at my website, watch my video, connect with me. I'd love to talk to you about any dreams that you might have, and how God can put that into action. You'd be surprised how willing he is to stretch you.

Brian: I love it, I love it. Thank you so much everybody else for joining us today. You can find out more about Coach Approach Ministries by going to www.coachapproachministries.org and downloading 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.