



Coach Approach Ministries Podcast

Episode 43: Leadership Comes Down to a Conversation

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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. Our podcast today is sponsored by our certificate in Christian leadership coaching. This is a nine month, ICF approved, coach training program that will prepare you to coach those around you, to set goals, take action, and reach new levels of success. We have a cohort forming in April, so if you're interested, go to our website at www.coachapproachministries.org/coachnow. I'm Brian Miller, strategic director for Coach Approach Ministries, CAM for short, and I'm joined here today by Scott Gress. Scott serves as leadership coach and a coach trainer, a consultant, and a leadership presenter. Scott and his wife Maria have two sons, Nathan and Steven, and reside in the overrated South Florida. I don't know if it's overrated or not, I just didn't want you to feel too good about it. You can follow Scott at his blog, www.scottgress.com. Welcome Scott.

Scott Gress: Hey thanks Brian, it's great to be with you today.

Brian: I met Scott, in person at least, a couple years ago at what we call the breakthrough weekend. Scott came in to take his own coaching to the next level, and two things just really stood out to me about Scott. One is, this is just one of the most likeable people you've ever been around. He's just got a great spirit, sweet spirit, friendly, has nothing to prove, just easy to be around. Second, this guy is tremendously competent. He has skills that you'd want to have in place as you're looking for leadership, as you're looking for development. This is a guy with skills and knowledge that's going to be helpful to be around. That was my impression Scott.

Scott: Thank you, I'm flattered. It's good to be with you today and talk a little bit about coaching. It's something that we're both pretty passionate about.

Brian: Yeah, how did you get started in coaching? What was your introduction?

Scott: That's a great question, and I'm going to have to give you the medium-length answer if that's alright?

Brian: Sure!

Scott: A lot of pastors, their dads are pastors. My dad wasn't, I've got to back there. He was raised on a farm, but he was an executive with Pontiac's Motor Division, so I grew up in a household where we talked business strategy, and sales, and promotion and all that stuff. So, I got a marketing degree and worked for a year out of college in a computer business, a computer industry, and then I went to seminary and became a pastor. After about seven or eight years, I thought, "Gosh, there's a lot that I could borrow from the business world and my business training experience that I need to get sharper on." I got a Master's in leadership, and towards the end of that, I thought, "Man, I could see myself just going back into my same practices if I don't do something to incorporate this more into who I am and what I do." So, then I had a conversation with a former college roommate of mine, who works for a leadership development firm, a secular firm, and he started talking to me about coaching. I got so intrigued, and he was doing it a little bit with me. He told me about a couple of secular coach training schools, and so I signed up and went through coaches training institute's five long weekends in their core program. That's how it got started for me.

Brian: I love it. Let me make the connection there; I want you to make the connection between you had this secular business background and you saw a lot of things that could be really helpful to you in your ministry and you got that degree in leadership. But then you heard about coaching, and you felt like that was going to be the glue so that you didn't lose it. Talk a little bit more about that. What you felt like that might do for you.

Scott: That's great because what I often say is that I think, ultimately, leadership comes down to conversations, and I wanted to learn how to do that better. The coach training became the way for me to learn how to have better, more powerful conversations and work with people. You know as well as I do, Brian, in the church we serve a lot with volunteers, and that's probably more challenging than folks who do things for a paycheck. I really wanted to learn how to do that better, and I just became so excited about the possibilities of coaching. I did a little bit with staff. We had a fairly large staff, I was a pastor of a church with a significant parochial school and, and also with lay leaders. Then it kind of went from there.

Brian: I love the piece that the connectivity is that leadership comes down to conversations.

Scott: Yeah, it does.

Brian: You knew all about leadership, and you knew all about ministry, and this coaching was going to be the glue that pulled them together. What a great piece.

Scott: That's a good way to put it.

Brian: You started some coach training. What were your first insights into coaching? What surprised you? I find a lot of people, what were you skeptical of?

Scott: In my mind, as a pretty formal, systematic theology denominational background, I was used to sitting in a chair in a class, you just give me the download, I'll take the notes and memorize it. The coach school that I went to, you sat in a circle, the two people who led it talked a little bit, and then you were set loose to do an exercise for a half an hour. It was really outside my comfort zone, and I was just trying to experiment with what I hardly knew anything about. It really stretched me to think out loud, to explore with people, not to categorize and problem solve but just to be curious. It was developing those

coaching muscles. A surprise or an insight that I got was that's a good, healthy thing to just explore together, to think out loud, and to discover those new insights and awarenesses together. It seemed like a great way to collaborate, rather than trying to twist someone's arm or try to talk them into it with a rational argument. I don't know if that makes sense.

Brian: The word that you almost used, you used a lot of words similar to this, is a partnership. Earlier, you were saying that leadership in the ministry world is much harder than anywhere else because you've got volunteers, and they don't have to do anything. Collaboration and this idea of creating a partnership, that's truly what coaching is about.

Scott: Absolutely. You really hit the bullseye there. With volunteers, their heart has to be in it, or otherwise they're just not going to show up. It's got to be meaningful, they've got to be appreciated, and it's got to be genuine. Boy, they can see right through it. You're trying to talk them into something, and coaching is a great way to lift up people and to encourage them and to help them to grow at the same time. Which, that's all in there too isn't it?

Brian: Absolutely.

Scott: As people serve in the church, that's really a vehicle for them to grow, not just to get the task done. In fact, I'd say that's even the primary thing, using it as a means by which people can grow. Coaching really became such a prominent part of my ministry about middle 2000s on.

Brian: And how did that change your church?

Scott: There was a time when I was frustrated, and I was just worn out, but what really became more and more true was that more and more people were affirmed and empowered to do things under the blessing of the leadership of the church and certainly under the encouragement of myself as the senior pastor. I'll never forget, after I left the parish in 2010, I ran into a guy who went to the church that I served in his retirement. Actually, he got there a year before I left, so it was maybe a year after I left, he ran into me and he goes, "Scott, I can't believe how many people do things around that church!" That was probably the best compliment I ever got about ministry. People say things about our preaching or our teaching which is great, but when he said, "there were so many people doing things," I just had an inner, "Thank you Lord!" That said to me that people had found their niche, and they were getting busy with serving the Lord and making a difference for the kingdom.

Brian: I'm trying to remember a phrase that I know you've used: "Less control, more... something."

Scott: "More productive, less controlling."

Brian: "More productive, less controlling." Two levers of which to push one up or push down, and they kind of go together.

Scott: I don't know whether it's just my tribe, but I think pastors try to do everything and over-function and just get worn out. There's a whole body of Christ there that imagine if all the gifts and the people got released. It would make such a big difference. That's kind of how I wanted to go, but coaching helped me get there even faster. It wasn't perfect, but I think we've made some headway there.

Brian: It strikes me, as I coach leaders, that the question that stumps them the most, it's just the easiest

question to ask them, is who could help you on this? They haven't even considered it. The word leader means you have followers, but they just don't seem to think that way.

Scott: Leadership isn't a solo sport, you know?

Brian: With coaching, you pushed it way out, and you got a lot of people involved, not just directly reporting to you but knowing what the mission was and moving forward. That's awesome. So, you left the parish in 2009? 2010?

Scott: 2010, yeah. As I was getting more involved in coaching, and people knew about that, there was a revitalization ministry that was starting up in our denomination. At some point, I got introduced to them, and then my local district president who I did a lot with in our district and the leader of this revitalization ministry ran into one another in the hallway of our conference somewhere and said, "Hey, we both kind of need Scott. Let's put together some kind of a job description that would fit him." It was a shared job, and I received a call to ministry to do that and to serve as a director of coaching for the revitalization ministry and the district. For the next better part of six years I was the director of coaching for the revitalization ministry and that turned into me doing a good bit of coach training. Right at the beginning of that, that's how I met Chad Hall and got involved with the Coach Approach Ministries. I needed to grow as coach. I felt like I needed some certifications. I wanted to pursue my ACC and ran into Chad's bio on the coaches training institute's search for a coach search function, and he helped me develop some coach training and did some mentor coaching to get certified. That really helped me to grow as a coach and of course you and he and Bill. I haven't stopped. That was six years ago now.

Brian: Well there's not much of a better compliment than getting hired because of who you are and then having them develop a job description for you. That's a compliment right there.

Scott: That was flattering, yeah. You get that phone call, and you hang up and you go, "Lord, was that you?" I couldn't see that it was anything but the hand of God so that I could spend even more time doing what I love to do with coaching. To me, I equate coaching with Aaron and Hur holding up the prophet's hands, and I like the idea of being in the background supporting other servants of God through that coaching function. I was compelled to say yes and accept it, although leaving the parish ministry is significant. You know that Brian, right?

Brian: I do, I do. Talk about some winds and struggles you had as the director of coaching for your tribe.

Scott: Sure. I think that the winds are that there's a lot of folks, and I coach a lot of pastors, who are lonely and who are working their butts off. Pastors are just my heroes. They work their tails off, and to have somebody who wasn't a church supervisor or ecclesiastical supervisor or a lay leader come alongside them and support them, they just ate it up. When they saw that I wasn't going to beat them up but take a coach approach, they really became excited about making some significant changes so that they could have some healthy boundaries and maintain some balance with family and work and become even more productive. Emphasizing where their strengths lie, so that they could get even better at what they're good at and have less guilt about delegating where they weren't necessarily gifted. Maybe the struggle part for me, while there's always the struggle of getting clients, it seems as if there's this impression that coaches work with the problem child.

Brian: Right, remedial.

Scott: Yeah, the remedial task. My sister worked in the executive suite for Proctor and Gamble in Cincinnati, and she tells me about how every single one of those vice presidents who all had PhDs and were making big bucks, each one of those folks had a coach working for them so that they could be even better and more productive and focused in their work. I'm always running up against the challenge of "Well, we're just working with the problem people." Then of course, the misunderstanding of what coaching is. "You're just another guy who's telling me what to do, I don't need that."

Brian: I've heard that for sure. "I don't need somebody else telling me what to do." It's interesting, often it's the one person in their life that wants to partner with them. That wants to help them achieve their dreams. It's a great relationship that you just don't get any place else. If a tribe, a denomination, wanted to create a position for a director of coaching, what are a couple things you'd tell them to think about?

Scott: That's a great question. I think that they would do well to take advantage of the coaching personally, so that they could model being coached. It lends a certain amount of credibility when you say, "Well I'm being coached. I'm really being blessed by it." You can talk about it personally, not just in the abstract as it were. Another thing I think, would be how are you going to talk about it? How are you going to promote it and how are you going to present it so that it could be defined properly, but then promoted properly as well? It's worth the investment for high potential people or high value people, which doesn't exclude those that need remedial help, but it says something about the value of the individual as a child of God. They're worth that investment no matter where they are in their development. These are the things that come to my mind right off the top of my head.

Brian: Those are really good. Take us into the now Scott. What's happening with you right now?

Scott: In the last year, I transitioned away from the revitalization ministry, although I still do some work there. I still partner with the district and my denomination, and I'm now formally attached to a regional counselling center and I'm sort of the face of their coaching and consulting. That gives me a lot of flexibility to not only work in my district but also throughout my denomination and even beyond my denomination. Having that kind of freedom is a little bit scary but kind of exciting too. There's possibilities all over, and where do you want to go with it? I found the need working with you guys, what did you call that thing we did in Nashville? Now I forgot.

Brian: We called it a Breakthrough Weekend.

Scott: Yeah! That helped me. I was right at that place I was beginning, so that helped me to focus in on who am I, who is my niche, who is my customer? So, I can be even more clear about that for me? Also, talking to people who may be blessed, God willing, to the work I do. I've done some writing and some training about coaching for our offices National Mission, which was a blessing. It's funny, the guy who's now in charge of that used to be a former client.

Brian: That helps, that helps.

Scott: He says, "Hey, now that I'm in this job, what I'm developing we could really use some coaching." He knows what coaching is because we worked together, and he knows how I would approach it. That turned into something. I'm doing more blogging, doing a little more taping some video blogs, and just

meeting folks. That's the fun part. I'm on my way to Orlando for a meeting of pastors tomorrow where I'm going to be able to talk about coaching and be able to introduce coaching. I hope to have a good demonstration of coaching, and then on Thursday I'm going to go a little further North to Ocala, Florida to meet with a number of other pastors and do the same thing. I find that it's easy to sit in your home office, sit behind a screen, and just hide, but the fun part is getting out there with people and saying, "Hey, how would it be if we just sat down together, and maybe I introduced the helping skill of coaching and did a little demonstration? Perhaps it would be helpful for the folks that you work with." That's what I'm doing right now, and that's where my emphasis is.

Brian: Goodness. When you go to Ocala, you might want to take a long sleeve shirt because it's not going to be 85, it might be 82. I'm looking out my window right now watching it snow, so I love that you had to slip Orlando back into the conversation. I love that.

Scott: Ocala I think is going to be a high of 65, so I'd say long sleeve shirt.

Brian: Oh goodness! Long sleeve shirt. Prepare yourself Scott. Goodness it'll be difficult and tough. I think you were also telling me you had just landed a new client that you were pretty excited about.

Scott: Yeah, you know, one of the things that excites me about coaching is it's a way to support leaders. It's a way for leaders to get more healthy. Organizations can change and become more healthy as the leaders become more healthy, and I've been working with a number of pastors and a number of pastoral leaders. One of my clients is the guy who works with young pastors, and I've been praying about, "Lord, is there a way that I could serve one or both of the seminaries in my denomination?" Kind of out of the blue but not really, I got a call from a professor from our seminary in St. Louis, and he says, "Hey, we're really changing how we're doing things. Rather than just classroom and books, we're dividing folks up into clusters, my word would be cohorts, and we're going to train some folks to be mentors for them. We know that those mentors will get anxious because they won't know how to do it, so I began to ask, 'Who's going to help us train those mentors?' Everybody said your name." Immediately, you're like, "Really?"

As it turns out, a couple of guys that I've trained in coaching, along my stop along the way with the revitalization ministry, they're now working at the seminary, so we talked about what it would do and what I could do in terms of training and what I could do in terms of follow up even, remotely by telephone. I just sent in a proposal, and they are writing a grant for that, and then the grant writer just called me up a week ago and asked me, "Ok, exactly what's this and what's that and how do I do this and what'll this cost and all that." He says, "The professor told me this is a done deal. We're just going to get the money, and we're really excited about going in this direction." What excited me was I'm not going to be necessarily working with the students, but I'm going to be working with some faculty that are going to be working with the students. I'm going four, six, or eight more the following year, so what an opportunity that I'd better commit to prayer that could make a big difference in serving the Lord his and his people and the evangelistic task going forward as mentor coaches work with students, but then as the students become familiar with the coaching process to then carry those habits and practices that they've experienced over into their churches and their ministries for the future. What a humble privilege that is.

Brian: It's an interesting progression I've heard here Scott. You started off by setting a congregation free

using coaching skills to empower them to lean into their strengths, to their heart, to make commitments, and then it went to a point where you started coaching leaders who, as I listened to your story, then became leaders of the denomination. No surprise there that I think the coaching was a help to them as they continued to grow and got new opportunities. Now you're getting the opportunity to invest right from the beginning so that pastors all over the country, all over the world, are going to have these skills built into them so that they can then be more fruitful, more productive. All for, I heard this in you very clearly too, all for the glory of God.

Scott: Amen, that's it. That's it. Strengthening the churches to be the light of the Gospel to the dark world. To know the hope and salvation that we have in Jesus, that's it.

Brian: Coaching is not the only tool, but it's a great tool that's really helpful for that process.

Scott: Absolutely. It's exciting, I haven't sat and talked about my journey outside of this little bit of time here, so hearing it all at once is exciting and humbling all at the same time.

Brian: Hey, Scott, thanks for joining me today, and thanks also to all the listeners out there joining us. This podcast was sponsored by our certificate in Christian Leadership Coaching, a nine-month ICF approved coach training program that will prepare you to coach those around you to set goals, take action, and reach new levels of success. We have a cohort forming in April, so if you're interested, go to our website at www.coachapproachministries.org/coachnow. We'll see you next week.

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