



Coach Approach Ministries Podcast

Episode 48: The Truth about Coaching Women

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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 July, 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 the Reverend Laura Stephens-Reed. A little bit about her, she believes in the power of the local church to change individuals and communities in the name of Christ. I like that. Her call is to increase churches' effectiveness by promoting health in congregations and in the people who lead them. Laura has been credentialed as a Certified Christian Leadership Coach, that's the CCLC that we're offering, our cohort, by Coach Approach Ministries, and as an Associate Certified Coach through the International Coach Federation. She's also been trained as a Congregational Consultant and as an Interim Minister by the Center for Congregational Health. An ordained minister since 2002, Laura has served churches in a variety of settled and interim roles, including pastor, associate pastor, and minister with age-specific groups. Today we welcome Laura Stephens Reed. Thanks Laura for joining us.

Laura Reed: Thank you for the invitation.

Brian: We got a great chance to hang out together. Laura was doing some research on how to better call ministers into a church, and she was doing some research and figuring out how to bring coaching into that. I just so enjoyed hanging out with her. I thought she would be great for the podcast.

Laura: I appreciate that.

Brian: No problem. Laura, I wrote a blog post a few months back, maybe it was a few years back. I don't think it was. We lose track of time so easily. It had the terrific title, "The Courageous Truth About

Women and Time Management- A Blog Post by Brian Miller.” So, the truth about women by Brian Miller, first of all, probably has some potential problems to that, and you wrote me a great note, saying you had some thoughts about this. I thought there’s got to be a time we could come together and bring this in. So, what advice would you give to a man writing about women?

Laura: Well, I think first of all I would suggest to a man writing about women to get input from women about their experience. I think women often experience the world a little bit differently and move about it in a bit of a different way, so to get some input and kind of have a dialogical approach to whatever the topic is.

Brian: I think that’s great advice, and I didn’t. I did not.

Laura: But you are welcoming dialogue now, and I appreciate that.

Brian: Absolutely, and I wasn’t thinking that I wouldn’t. I just had this thought. What had happened with me, Laura, and I’m just curious to get your input on this, is in my coaching practice, I’ve started to get the opportunity to coach women who are probably around thirty years old, who are leaders in their organization, maybe at a lower level, and the thing I’m finding about these women is they have this almost unlimited potential. What I really like about coaching these women is that, as opposed to a man I’m going to say, I think I’m an expert on men, being one. I’ve got some expertise there. They think they’ve got it figured out. They don’t always think they need more information, they just need people to get out of their way. What I was finding about women, it wasn’t that they felt like they needed input, it was that they welcomed input. Not just input, but they welcomed this idea of development. I just thought that was so good and so helpful. As I talk about it that way, do you see that? You also coach women under forty-five I saw in your bio.

Laura: Yes.

Brian: What are you finding about young women leaders?

Laura: Well, in terms of young women leaders in coaching, I’m finding that they welcome a space where their gifts and their wisdom are assumed. I come into coaching calls assuming that these are fantastic, amazing, gifted leaders, and we go from that point. Sometimes women don’t always have those spaces where those assumptions of their gifts are kind of a given.

Brian: Right.

Laura: Then we are able to have great conversations around whatever topic they bring to coaching because they do welcome a thought partner, they do welcome someone who asks thought-provoking questions to open, bring up their wisdom and their experiences, kind of help them bring those together in new ways.

Brian: I do find, I’m thinking back about my experiences and the conversations, I think the young women can lean into somebody giving them input, but as a coach I really like to set that aside and really draw out of who they are, their wisdom, their intellect, their abilities. I’ve just really enjoyed that. If you’re

sitting down with a young woman leader for the first time, how do you set the stage for the coaching?

Laura: When I do an introductory call with that person, I ask them about their goals for coaching, but then I ask them about their passions, ask them what they're really good at, I ask them when they've had one on one professional relationships before, what has worked well for them, and where they want to be by the end of the coaching relationship. That helps set the stage, and then I explain to them as well that my coaching philosophy is that I assume that my coachees are resourceful and wise and have access to the resources they need to meet the goals they're working for. They just need a little help getting to that place.

Brian: There certainly are some inequalities. There's no doubt, and I don't disagree. Actually, I was reading back through the blog post, and I'll put a link to it on the podcast, but I think I wrote somewhere that it just felt to me like... Here it is, "My expectation is that these women will [have] an easier time rising through the ranks because they are learning to expand their leadership capacity through coaching," and as I read that, that women will have an easier time rising through the ranks, I think I heard your voice in my head saying, "Uhhh, not necessarily."

Laura: Yes, there's an interesting phenomenon among the women I coach, and I tend to coach clergywomen. I'm a pastor. I tend to coach pastors as well, and especially in the ministry world there's a phenomenon where if a woman is very gifted, a strong leader, very well received, then she is perceived as the exception. Whereas, if maybe there's a mismatch or there's a conflict of sort, then the experience with that woman leader is generalized to all women. "Well, we had a woman pastor before, and it didn't work out, so we're not going to try that again." That's one of the ways that the inequalities can pop up for women. I think that happens in other fields too, not just ministry.

Brian: Oh it certainly does.

Laura: Not only are we trying to represent ourselves well. We realize we're carrying the burden of all womankind a lot of times.

Brian: There's no doubt. Women as CEOs of Fortune 500 companies, there's not a lot of them, and I can even imagine someone saying, "We've had a woman CEO before and that didn't work out so well." Where that wouldn't even be the issue of, "Well we've had a man CEO so we need to look for a kangaroo," or something different because that didn't work. Certainly, in men's basketball all the coaches are men. All the head coaches. But in women's basketball, and I don't know what the percentage is, but there are both men and women coaches.

Laura: Right.

Brian: There are very few fields, if any, where women are seen as the primary, that's who we want. Gotcha, and I appreciate that. So, how would you coach differently or would you, when you're coaching a young woman leader? How would you coach them differently knowing that there's this inequality, that they have to perform at a higher level just to be seen as this exception?

Laura: I think it's important to acknowledge that reality, but then also to work out of the woman's

strengths. One of the first questions I tend to ask when I'm working with women is how do you want to show up? How do you want to show up as a leader? How do you want to show up as a pastor? How do you want to show up as a friend, as a mother? And work from that point, so that it's not so much what do other people expect me to be and how do I bend to that, but what am I called to be? What is my purpose? What are the strengths that I can work out of and go with that? We really are leading out of what God has given to us.

Brian: As you're talking about that, I don't think that I would say anything different to a man. I would want to know how they show up, and I do want to be careful I think, and I'm just being really open and vulnerable, so this is the kind of dialogue so I can figure out how I should think about this as well because you're the expert, and I admit that. I don't want me to bring in the idea of you're going to have a harder time, you need to be prepared for that. I want to be careful not to bring that extra baggage in, but I don't want to be unaware that it's true in their situation. So, would you ever bring it up? Or would you wait until the client brought it up as an issue?

Laura: I don't know that I have ever coached anyone who was unaware that that was an issue operating in the background. Sometimes coachees bring it up. They might say "I want to talk about how expectations of me as a female leader are different." Most of the time we don't really talk about that issue explicitly, we just talk knowing that that's noise in the background. That that's there and it's a reality that we have to deal with, and a lot of times in coaching we talk about what we can control and what we can't control. A good piece of that is beyond our control, so what are the things that are in our control? What are the things we can influence and work out of that place of agency rather than reactivity?

Brian: I think the way I'm seeing it, the way it expresses itself to me, is that when I coach there's a whole other issue with young men right now. Young men do not seem to have much initiative, so to make the comparison is a whole different issue, but I would say young men who do have initiative, they don't tend to look at obstacles and think, "I can only get so far. I see a limit to how far I can move up," but I do see that with young women, and I hadn't really thought about it. It may seem so obvious, but I don't think I'd thought about it in such a gender-specific way. That the reason why they can't imagine themselves very far beyond their current level is because of the gender issue. Do you see that as well?

Laura: Yes, and just my own experience, I was called to ministry when I was in high school. I didn't actually see a woman in the pulpit until I was in seminary, so yes that is there. Kind of stoking the imaginations of women for what they can be and affirming them in their gifts and saying, "If God has called you to this, then the way may not be easy, but God will help you maneuver the obstacles that are in your path."

Brian: You're also bringing some awareness to me that the young women I've coached that I'm surprised they don't see the possibility, are not directly in ministry. The areas have been nonprofit and they've been education, and I think there's a much bigger opening for advancement even in, I don't want to get into our political system today, but even in our current presidential administration, the director of education, secretary of education is a woman. That's definitely an opening that's been made

available where you're not going to see that in many denominations, for instance. You're not going to see the same kind of openness for female advancement. That's a great point, go ahead.

Laura: There's the gender issue, but then there's the layer of other factors as well: race, family situation, sexual orientation, and class. A lot of times, those converge in a way that really provide some obstacles that women have to work around. It's not simply being a woman. It's all of these things converging to make the way a little more rocky for some other people.

Brian: Yeah, I like that, and I think the coach needs to have an awareness of this. Maybe bring an appropriate light to it and dare I say, and I could be wrong, sometimes too much light is brought to the issue and can create some assumed restraints that they just can't move forward because there's not opportunity. I'm not sure that's always the healthiest direction either, but I don't want to come across unaware either, for sure. What happened, I'll move you on in this conversation of what my awareness was. I was working with women leaders, very strong, healthy, good women leaders, and I began to come across the same, what we call a yellow flag word. It's kind of a warning, kind of a, "I keep hearing this over and over." The issue that would be brought to me was, "I feel like I need to be more productive."

Very often the reasoning might be because there's more workload, but many times it was because there might something personal going on where they needed to make more time. Someone was sick in the family at some level, and so they were coming to me with the topic of "I need better time management so that I can produce more." Now I really want to honor the client's agenda, and if they want to produce more, that's what I want to come to, but I was hearing this conversation time and time again, and I just kept hearing the question in my mind whether that was the Holy Spirit or just Brian deciding what the agenda should be. What do you need to stop doing? But without being any kind of condescension or, "You're doing too much." How would you speak into that?

Laura: In the people that I coach, a lot of times that issue pops up not so much in the language of time management but of self-care. "I am burning the candles at both ends. I don't have enough time for my work. I don't have enough time for my family. I don't have enough time for myself. How do I create greater margins, or margins at all, in my life?" I have a framework of five P's: Priorities, Permission-Getting, Planning, Parameters, and Partners that we work through to help them think about how they want to show up in that way, making a plan for actually doing that because the message that we tend to get is not do less, it's actually do more. How do push against that so that yes, we're doing the things we need to do, but if we keep just adding more and more and more things then there's no self left to give. We all hit that burn out point.

Brian: I think what you just did was what I needed to hear actually. You brought out some distinctions, that's what we would call them in the coaching world. The five P's. You would break up this issue of time management into five distinct areas and allow them, the client, to get some awareness of where they stood. Not just I need to get more produced, but they need to think about a much more thorough, more distinct way, some different spots, and then that might or might not bring to their awareness that they need to create some margin in their life. That's not what I initially hear. I definitely feel like I made a shortcut, and that's not necessarily the best way to do it, but to ask that question what do you need? I

know when I ask the question, and it might even seem a little out of the blue to them. What do you need to stop doing? I can tell that there's a whole area of untapped issue there that they need to think through. Not that they need to think through, but that they want to think through. You can tell there's a relief of maybe somebody finally noticed that I'm doing too much.

Laura: I think "What do you need to stop doing?" is a great question. I wonder about maybe even cutting that question in half: what do you need?

Brian: Yeah, in a lot of areas. I'm definitely going to put those five P's on the website as well and break those down. I think that's really helpful, and the five P's allow them to think through what do they really need. Because "What do you need?" needs a little more distinction for me to help me think about it more thoroughly.

Laura: I like to pull some theological threads too. Sometimes when I do webinars with my coachings or even in individual coaching calls we'll pull these threads of "Ok, we know the pattern of creation, and God rested on the seventh day, but when God rested, the world wasn't done." God is continually recreating, so we are rarely done with all the things we need to do, but if God could take a pause, and then the next day go back to the work of creating and recreating, then maybe we could do that as well. Then I also like to talk with my coachees about, since you're not going to get it all done, how do you give yourself grace at the end of the day and say "Ok, this is good?" At the end of each day, God said, "That's good." How do you say at the end of your day, "For today, this is good."

Brian: Great questions. I noted some action and results that I saw out of these clients that I had. A client identified a commitment that she had really enjoyed and saw fruitfulness but realized it was time to end this particular commitment, so the released area of commitment was picked up by someone else. There's that feeling of, if I drop this, there's a lot emotion to that. They don't want to drop anything, they don't want to see anything let go. I saw another situation where a successor was identified, and a plan was put into place to transition. I think that can be hard, not just for women, but maybe in particular for women to say, "I was successful and now it's time to let go and let somebody else." I could see that with anybody, but I just saw such good results of stopping a project, hiring a part-time helper. For me to identify what's specifically a gender issue, I don't think I have enough expertise, but I definitely see that even with men that they tend to not want help. It's because they're... I'm not sure exactly. Is there a difference between why men don't want help, different from why women don't want help?

Laura: I cannot speak to that, but it seems that what you're saying, yes, would be applicable to men and women. The thought also came into my mind as you were talking about these actions and results, what if churches and organizations could do these same things? Ministries will go on and on long past their fruitfulness stage. Maybe someone else in the community needs to pick that up. Maybe someone who's overseen the Habitat ministry in the church forever feels a responsibility to keep doing that, but there's someone else who's coming along who that would really be their passion, a way that they could serve God and their community. Finding that successor and intentionally handing that off. I think it's not just the things you're talking about, it's not just issues for individuals but for organizations.

Brian: Certainly, and our own identity speaks into that, of why we would not ask for help. That was one of your five P's, was partners, and I think that's a great piece. Laura, we're out of time. This has went so fast. I just really appreciate you coming alongside and helping me think through these things. I can't wait to get another chance to talk to you about a lot of different issues.

Laura: It was a pleasure. Thank you for having me.

Brian: Laura, if people want to find out more about you, where should they look?

Laura: The best place to go would be to go to www.laurastephensreed.com and that's Stephens with a "ph." There's a contact form, there's my blog. There's also a link to my scheduling tool where you can set up a free intro call if you want to explore coaching.

Brian: Fantastic. Laura, thanks for joining us and thanks so much to the audience for joining us as well. This podcast was 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 July, so if you're interested, go to our website at www.coachapproachministries.org/coachnow. We'll see you next week.

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