



Coach Approach Ministries Podcast

Episode 47: Supporting Big Steps

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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 the Coach Approach Ministries, CAM for short, and I'm joined here today by the executive director of Coach Approach Ministries, my friend, Bill Copper. Welcome Bill.

Bill Copper: Good morning, Brian. What in the world is going on?

Brian: It's a pretty good day. It stopped raining finally. I've stopped building the ark.

Bill: Very good.

Brian: Oh boy. Rain, rain, rain.

Bill: It's been a plentiful supply these days.

Brian: It's a cheap commodity right now. That's for sure. Hey Bill, what do you want to talk about today in our podcast? I think you've got a good topic.

Bill: Yeah. I've been teaching a new group of folks the last several weeks in our foundations class, our CAM501 class. We've got an online cohort going, and yesterday in the class, we were talking about coaching conversation models. In our classes, we teach several models as a way to equip coaches for whatever situation, or client, might come up. So, we were talking through a number of different conversation models, and if you recall, one of the models we talk about is the eight-steps model. It comes from the active coaching book, and I always like to walk through that model just to see what those authors in particular think needs to be mentioned as steps in the model. When teaching that segment, I always ask the class, "What do you see different?" Because this has got eight steps now. It's complicated. So, what do you see different? The group always picked out some specific areas, but one

the always comes up, if you'll recall, Brian, in that model, one of the steps is called, "Supporting Big Steps," and it reminded me how coaches have a role in that, and like a lot of things in coaching, there's a tension there, some balance that we hold in supporting big steps for our client without it becoming an agenda. I thought maybe we'd talk about that a little bit this morning.

Brian: That sounds great. That sounds great. What's the coach's role in supporting big steps?

Bill: It reminded me then, as it does now, one of my favorite stories from growing up, Brian, you know I grew up in Daytona Beach, FL.

Brian: I know, wonderful.

Bill: At the time, out in the parking lot of the Daytona International Speedway was the Daytona Beach Kennel Club and Greyhound Racing Center. That was the place where they had the dog races, greyhound dog races, and every year, they would bus all of us school kids out to the dog track.

Brian: I love that. Give you three bucks each.

Bill: And it was funny, they didn't allow gambling that day. It was kind of an educational thing. They would show us around, and show us the kennels, and show us how the dogs were raised, and tell us a little bit about the whole system. They said it was educational. I think it was just an excuse to get us to the dog track so that when we turned 18, we'd be used to coming out there, but one of the things I learned about it that I found fascinating then was there was this inside rail that goes all the way around the track on the inside, and attached to that rail, is a little cart, and a man sits in that cart, and extending out from the cart is a long pole, at the end of which, is a fake bunny rabbit. That thing dangles out over the track, and he drives this thing around the track, and that's what the dogs chase after when they're racing. Just fascinating to watch the races and watch him come around each time, and just as he passed the start-finish line, there they would go.

They would turn those dogs loose, and with all they had, chase after this fake bunny rabbit, and they explained how he had the most important job in the whole operation. His job was to drive the cart in such a way to keep that rabbit out in front of those dogs, so that it was the perfect place, not too far away, so that the dogs wouldn't run and say, "Forget it. I'll never catch it," and then they stop, but also, not so close that the dogs realize, "Wait a minute. That's not a real rabbit," and then they'll never race again. So, they talked about the enormous pressure he felt to drive that thing around in just the right spot. That's all mechanical now, at the racetrack, but back then, it was a person's actual responsibility to drive that thing around, and it's been a good metaphor for me, Brian, in my coaching relationships to explain the role I have as a coach in supporting big steps. It's that balance between encouraging clients to do more than they would to keep that thing out here, so they can't catch it. They can't get too close to the goal that it's not meaningful but also, not get it so far out in front of them that they just give up. It always gets me thinking about what role do we play? What are our responsibilities? What do we need to watch out for in supporting our client's big steps?

Brian: Well, it's so helpful especially in a leadership role. I know that was one of my biggest failures as a leader is I was way too far out ahead of everybody, and they couldn't see it, and they lost interest. So, if you had a coach who could help you think, "Let's keep it out there at just the appropriate amount," that's a pretty helpful tool.

Bill: I guess we would start by saying that the coach's role is not to set that agenda out there and to keep it out there, even in us talking about it. We can take on the role, even in our language where it sounds like we're the ones who decide. I'm not too far in front of my client. Well, that means that I've got somewhere that I think it ought to go and I'm waiting for them to catch up, and that certainly is one end of the spectrum that we want to avoid both in terms of how far the goal is, how much of a stretch it is for our client, but also who's agenda that is, who's goal it really is. So, you remind me of our first responsibility is to make sure that that goal or the steps that our clients will take, but it's steps that come from their agenda, that they're the ones who identify what they want to do, and not targets that we're out there holding for them because we think, "This will be a good target for you to aim for, this will be a good step for you to take." It starts with making sure we understand what our role is in terms of setting the agenda, of naming the goals. But then, what role do we have-

Brian: Well let me stop you there for a second and ask, because in the eight steps you were talking about, one of them is "Support big steps," so how would you as a coach begin to recognize that this is a big step, or how would you help the client clarify that this is a big step?

Bill: It's both of those. One is that, "We know this," and then we clarify, just as you said. We're noticing as our client talks about things that they might do, we're noticing what energy from them in describing it, we're noticing how it compares to what they've done before, we're noticing whether it's things they've already thought of and had already planned, or if there's something new. Remember, our role as coaches is to get them beyond what they would've done otherwise, and so part of what we're noticing is the step that they're talking about something new, is it different, and then Brian, it's simply to ask, like with so many things in coaching, it's to ask our clients, "How much of a stretch is that for you? How easy is that going to be to accomplish? How realistic is it?"

On the other end, if it's too far out there, and it's not our role to determine those things, but it's certainly our role to notice and to raise those observations with our clients with no attachments. So, we don't ask the question. A lot of what we communicate, in the form of a question is really just us telling them what they ought to do, we just lift our voice at the end to make it like we're asking a question. So, we share these things with no attachment, with no judgement. We simply observe things and then offer up those observations and get our client's input.

Brian: So, we could put out there, "That sounds like a big step."

Bill: So, I was like, "Big step?"

Brian: And test it, not hold it lightly.

Bill: That's right. That could be both an encouragement, it could be a direct message, it could be an observation. And, as you say, when we hold it lightly, that phrase is meant to bring awareness to our client, for them to think about that, the truth of that, "Is this a big step? Is it realistic? Does it stretch me enough?" Those are all great questions that we as coaches can ask, again not to serve our agenda, but to hold the client's agenda to make sure that we're holding that bunny rabbit out there far enough so that they've stretched some, but not so far that they give up.

Brian: I just want to clarify with the client if their awareness of this is a big step without me telling them, because it may not be, right? So, you could ask, "How much energy does this take as opposed to some

of the other steps you're looking at?" Because they may not have a full realization of whether it is a big step or not.

Bill: That's right, and so one way to ask is to talk about energy as you said, another sign about whether it might be a big step or not. It might be in terms of the impact it's going to have, how big of an impact might that have? What might be the cost? How well does it fit with who you are? All those things that we do that are meant to really plan our client's actions, help them plan the action so that it fits their situation and who they are. All of these things include the idea of, "How big of a step is this?" And then, Brian, our role can extend. You mentioned giving a statement like, "Hey, that sounds like a big step!" I've had coaches, very effective coaches that have told me in statements like that "I bet you could do more than that," and I've received that.

In the moment, I'm sure there are times when I would've thought, "Hey, wait, that's your agenda," but in those moments, I've received that as, "I can do more than that." It was a direct statement, it was held lightly, and it was an encouragement, it was a belief in me that I could do more. I guess that's what I'm talking about, that it comes to the coach holds that intention. How much of that is the coach's agenda for me, and how much of that is the coach tending to my agenda and wanting to help me, and to me, some of those statements are the perfect driving of the fake bunny rabbit. Keeping that thing out there, keeping it out there enough to make me want to keep chasing, but not so much that I give up, because it's not for me.

Brian: Certainly, the coach is going to have to have a ton of awareness about the client, the client's situation. If it's an individual kind of goal, a big step, taking a bigger step, that could be awesome. If they're in a leadership role or on a team, a big step, there's a lot of things to consider to make sure we're not leaving anybody behind. So, as a coach, you have to hold all that in your head as you're helping the client think this through.

Bill: Yeah, and here's the temptation. Our temptation sometimes is to just to hold that in our head to determine, "Okay here's what needs to happen." We do hold it in our head, but we're holding it on behalf of our clients, so we're holding it up there so they can see it, they can notice it, and they can process it, and so let's don't get into that temptation to hold all these things and then us do the processing, and that's the same principle for supporting these big steps. Let's hold them out there without attachment, our goal being that it helps the client with their agenda, and that it doesn't become ours.

Brian: Absolutely. I was just thinking that an easy way to handle that is to just ask the question, "Who?" and, "Who else does this affect?" just to bring that awareness to them, to allow them to figure that out. Very good, very good. What's next in this process?

Bill: Well, it is once a client is really clear about what an appropriate step might be and how big the step ought to be, and they've gotten clear because of our questioning, our encouraging, maybe our challenging. Then it's to help them get really clear on the steps it'll take to accomplish that, what they need to do to remove barriers for getting to those big steps, and then keeping a ton of encouragement and belief on them.

Brian: So, if you've got a big step, there's a least a hint to me that it could probably be broken down into some littler steps.

Bill: That's often the case, and so part developing the action plan may be putting that into the pieces that don't feel so overwhelming. So, a big step can be accomplished by managing a bunch of smaller steps. That's often dictated by the personality of the person that you're coaching. Some people are bigger picture and they need a little help with the details, other people are detail people that need a little help with the big picture. So, just as often, Brian, is our keeping that big picture, how can you paint that picture of that preferred outcome out there in front of them so that they have some motivation for managing all those steps. So, as we're helping them plan the acts, we want to make sure it aligns with the goal itself, if you take this step it'll actually get you to that big step, but also, that it aligns with the person, that this is not something unrealistic, this is something I can do because it fits me because of my personality and my preference, my talents, and those kinds of things.

Brian: I love how you're saying that. As a pastor, I was always the big picture guy, and some awareness that came to me is when an elder told me I need to think smaller, and I'd never been told ever to think smaller, right? So, think smaller steps. So, he was basically saying the bunny rabbit is too far ahead. The dogs have lost interest. So, just that awareness. I like how you were saying it depends, you have to be aware of your client. Are they big picture or detail? What did they need to support the whole big step?

Bill: And that awareness of our client comes after an awareness of our ourselves. Understanding, Brian, that you're that big picture person, you've got to have some awareness as a coach that, "I can get lost in the big picture and not think about the details, and if my client is the same way, one of us has got to be aware of that," and your responsibility as a coach is to flex to that.

Brian: And then you were talking about building encouragement, motivation.

Bill: Yeah, so, part of support is building the infrastructure, but it's also support in terms of spurring our clients on. It's providing encouragement. When we talk about encouragement in our coaching classes and the role it plays, encouragement encourages, it gives courage. Particularly when clients are facing big steps, they often need courage, and so coaches play a big role in helping people first of all see the big picture, see the step, break it into parts if that's what fits the situation, but also then helping the client believe that they can accomplish it, and that comes with helping give them give them courage. As always, our encouragement needs to be genuine. It needs to be specific. This is particularly helping in supporting big steps, tying something that we notice about our client to their ability to accomplish this big step. It needs to be timely, so we want to give them encouragement as we notice it, and it has to be relevant, so we want to encourage people in a way that's going to help them move forward in accomplishing these big steps.

Brian: Yeah, it's a great gift for a coach to help the client have motivation, confidence, an ability to get some quick wins perhaps in order to build some momentum, some momentum would be a part of that. That is so helpful. That's where a coach can be such a good support.

Bill: And, Brian, of all the things I've mentioned that need to define how we give encouragement, the most important element there is it has to be genuine. So, when we can genuinely encourage our clients, meaning it's not a program, it's not, "Well it's my role to encourage," but rather it is a joining in in their celebrating, and it being excited for, and believing in that they can really do this, and communicating that true belief that we have that, "Man, they can do this and it's going to be great for them," as opposed to phoning in our encouragement because we think that's our role. So, let me just, particularly

around this supporting big steps, let me challenge everyone and urge everyone out there, look for ways to be genuine in your encouragement.

I promise if you look you'll find reasons to be genuinely encouraging, and don't substitute your belief that, "Well, now it's my duty to give encouragement," and not be genuine in it, and then one other thing about encouragement, particularly around big steps, it usually does not include the word, "encourage." When we encourage someone to do something, we're really urging them to do it. When we use the word, "I encourage you," and we do this from the pulpit all the time, want to encourage you to sign up for the men's breakfast, I want to encourage you to do this, I want to encourage you to do that, and the truth is, what we're doing is urging people to do it, and so don't let the word encourage replace genuine encouragement. Our encouragement probably doesn't include that particular word.

Brian: Encouragement can be difficult to figure out I think. You certainly don't want to be the expert, your encouragement can't be, "It sounds like you've got a really good plan. I think it'll work." That's not necessarily encouragement.

Bill: Right, that really holds you out as the judge, but we can always encourage the work, and so, "Man, you really put a lot into that. You really believe this, don't you? I do too" and, "Man, just imagine what this is going to do for you," and, "You've been preparing for this for a long time, you've got this." Those are the kinds of encouragements that we're encouraging the person, and not their outcome, or their decision, or their process. So, we want to, just like in coaching the person, we want to focus encouragement on the person, on their process, on their, "personhood," if you will, and not hold out our judgement over whether we think their idea met our standard.

Brian: Absolutely. I would say a phrase I use sometimes is, "This is important work." It's got to be true, but, "This is important work."

Bill: Yeah, love that. Love that.

Brian: So, Bill, you've really given us a lot here to figure out what the coach's role is in supporting big steps. Anything else?

Bill: Maybe just this. Supporting big steps is not something comes up once in a while. That's what we're here for. That is our role. So, it's not one of those coaching skills that we ought to engage in once in a while, that ought to be the purpose for being here. As I said before, if our clients don't do any more, don't take any bigger step, having spoken or worked with us, then they would've taken on their own, then they've wasted their time and money working with us. We've got to help them take bigger steps, we've got to help them get beyond what they would've gotten on their own.

Brian: I love it. Bill, thanks so much for joining us today, and thank you, the listeners for listening and joining us today 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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