



Coach Approach Ministries Podcast

Episode 50: Make Choosing a Topic Easier

Published: June 1, 2017

[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 president of Coach Approach Ministries, Mr. Chad Hall. Chad, how are you doing today?

Chad Hall: I'm doing really well, Brian, how about you?

Brian: I'm doing good. Chad, this is our episode number 50.

Chad: 50? We turned 50. Wow.

Brian: So, if there's a sense that we feel like we're just over the hill here, that could be why. We just turned 50 today.

Chad: So, wait a minute. Does this podcast... Do we get free coffee or the senior citizens discount?

Brian: Well, we are now allowed to complain about a few things.

Chad: By the way, this podcast is yelling, "Get off my lawn!"

Brian: "What are those kids doing? What are they doing? They're going to get hurt." So, we are excited to have gotten to 50. That is really no easy task. We celebrate that, and we thank you for listening so much. It would be a podcast if nobody listened, I guess, officially, but people do listen. We've had well over 10,000 downloads. That just blows me away.

Chad: Hard to believe. Thanks for all the work you put into it, Brian. I know it's a labor of love, but it's

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still a labor.

Brian: You're welcome. Glad to do it. Let's dive into our topic today. This is a challenge podcast. So, this is a podcast where we are challenging our listeners, challenging coaches to take a step that will improve their coaching or improve their practice. The challenge for the month of June is make choosing a topic easier for your client. Boy, if you don't have a topic, it doesn't have focus, it's really tough to coach, isn't it?

Chad: In fact, if you have a client with no topic, pretty soon you'll have no client. You want to make it easy for them to have a topic.

Brian: They'll start asking, "What am I doing here? What's the point of this?" For sure. So, how do you start thinking about... Let's assume that this is a problem of some sort. You have a client. They're not sure what the topic is. I know that I have a new client. I just coached him for the third time this week, not this week, but I coached him this week for the third time, and I said, "What do you want to talk about today," and he said, "I'm starting to get the idea you're going to ask me about that every week, so I've thought about it."

Chad: He's a quick learner.

Brian: I'm sure I'd explained it to him, but it's funny that on the third one he says, "I knew you were going to ask me that." Well good. Real good.

Chad: That's not a sign of just brilliance, but he at least learned.

Brian: He's a great client. What are you talking about? So, how do we get started on this topic, Chad?

Chad: The way I think about this, if a client comes, and they don't have a topic for that day, and you said, "What do you want to talk about?" "I'm not sure." First of all, you want to be ready for it. What we're going to get a little later in the podcast, just what are some quick techniques or resources that you can leverage kind of in the moment, but before diving right into that, I think it's worthwhile to say that typically, when someone shows up without a topic, it's part of a larger issue, so we probably need to go upstream and see what's going on before they show up for the coaching call. What's going on that would lead them to show up without a topic.

Typically, they're showing up without a topic because there's a lack of buy-in, or they're not taking a lot of ownership of the coaching relationship, or there's something going on. Not always. Sometimes people just show up, and they say "Man, I was just so busy. I couldn't even give this any thought before showing up." We'll get to that later, but for now I'd like to say, you need to go upstream and think about what may have led to them showing up without a topic. Brian, I know you do a lot of third party coaching where somebody else is sponsoring or paying for coaching, and the client isn't paying directly. What have you seen in terms of how that affects a person showing up without a topic?

Brian: Well, there's two possibilities. One possibility, and this happens more than you might think, they're in crisis. It seems awfully serendipitous that I come along right when they're in crisis. I think

there's two reasons why that happens. One is godly serendipity, that God has placed me, and I just finished up with a client yesterday that I feel like God put me in her life, right at that time, to coach her through a real challenge. It just so happened. I didn't get hired for that purpose at all but very serendipitous. The other one could be that there's this sense that most people are struggling, they've got nobody to talk to, and when they finally get a coach, there's this release. There's something that's been going on for quite some time that they've not been able to handle or deal with, and so, I often find, Chad, that the first session with a new client, often, drives itself. No problem.

They've got something that is just driving them crazy, and they're ready to talk about it, and I seem to have built enough trust that that they can open up to me, or they're so struggling that they don't have any choice, they can't help themselves from opening up and talking about it. Which, can then mislead me into thinking this is going to be easy, this person really wants coached, but what happens is, we make really good progress on that challenge topic, and then on session two or three, we haven't really set anything up for the whole session, and there we are looking a little blank at each other.

Chad: I think you hit something there when you talk about setting it up for the whole coaching relationship. If we dive in and just start coaching them, we're probably going to make really fast progress at first. One piece of advice I want to give coaches who are listening to the podcast is, don't do that. You might be thinking, "That's a quick win. Let's get a quick win," and I would encourage, most of the time, we're going to be better served by the go slow to go fast philosophy. Go slow at the beginning, that is, set up the relationship. Set up what's bringing them into coaching. If this coaching relationship goes really well, where do they hope to be a year from now? Two years from now? Go slow by identifying some really big goals that they have in their life.

We're not going to coach on those goals, yet, we're just identifying them. Of course, go slow to do a really good intake. What's their story? Where are they in the story? What's next for them in the story, those kinds of things, so at first, that can feel like man, we're going slow. We're not getting to actions, and progress, and all that. What we're really doing is we're setting the coaching relationship up to have a lot of long term success versus taking care of an urgent, immediate need, and then, "Whew. I'm glad I got that taken care of, but I don't know what's next." Another way to think about that is setting the relationship up to begin with, gives context with the client and allows them to identify lots of things that they could be coached around as the relationship proceeds.

Brian: I definitely completely lean in to what you're describing, and I had an ah-ha while I was describing to you this type of client. I think what can happen is, and I'm curious to get your thoughts on this, I think what can happen is the first session, it feels like they're leaning over the cliff. Maybe it's just my thinking or my mindset that I really need to help them that first day, and let's say I do go ahead and help them that first day, and I get them a quick win. I think the mindset change, for me, is, for the second session, maybe period, the second session, if I don't do it the first session, I absolutely have to what you just described the second session. I should just come in with the mindset that that's what I have to do. If I haven't had the overall conversation with them about what coaching can do for them, what this is going to look like over the next six months or a year, or whatever, that I need to do it the second session, and I think there's a little pushback in my brain about doing that because I tend to think that... We've even

had conversations, Chad, do you charge the client for the intake call, right? So, there's this thing in my mind that says the intake call, getting ideas for the whole session, that's not really coaching. That's something we ought to do for free, but it is part of the coaching, it needs to happen. If it doesn't happen the first session, then it needs to happen the second session.

Chad: Yeah, and I would push to say don't pull them off the cliff. Now, and honestly, if it's some kind of dire emergency where health and welfare are involved, it's probably not coaching, for one thing. I don't know exactly what over the cliff means, or over the edge of the cliff. Part of what we're doing as coaches is we're helping people be more intentional instead of reactionary. If a client has gotten themselves into this pickle, or there's some crisis they're facing, they really need immediate help, that was going to happen whether they got coaching or not, so rather than give a quick intervention that alleviates that and now they're ready to get back to life as normal, probably getting into the crisis is part of a larger pattern, and even seeing that immediate crisis in light of patterns in their life, that's going to be a pretty good lens to look at their life through, to look at their context through. I would say if you don't do it the first session, certainly, do it the second session, but do it really early in the coaching relationship, and the longer you don't do that, the worse it is.

Brian: Oh, I agree with that. The longer you don't do it, the worse it is. That's absolutely true, and you're making me reflect on some of my coaching sessions. There's been a couple. It's not been the majority at all. It's the pushback of don't intervene. There's been a couple of new clients that I've had that are either so overwhelmed, or so angry, or so something, that they don't have the capacity to talk big picture with me. So, I'm able to coach a little bit of that out, and I do get the quick win with them as well, but then, what I didn't have in my mindset is, is go back quickly and get that overarching piece, or even the last half of a session, or something. I agree with you that we have to be very careful not to get caught up in the drama of it, and just assume, we need help.

Chad: We can have a rescuer mentality sometimes, or a Messiah complex. I'm sure no one listening to this podcast does, but maybe some do. Another idea is if you do that kind of quick win, even before the coaching, say let's address this today, but next time, we're going to look big picture, and go ahead and set that idea up. Again, so everyone kind of gets the metaphor here, if a client doesn't have kind of a North Star orientation, purpose, meaning, guiding, context for who they are, what they're about, where they're headed, what they want out of life, then they're just a pinball bouncing around, and every coaching session is going to be what thing has bounced you this time, and it's going to be just reactionary coaching. Part of what we're trying to do to help clients is pull them out of that because that doesn't work very well. That's really not a life well lived inside the pinball machine. By the way, for our listeners who are under the age of 30, Google pinball machine. You'll be amazed. You can get hours of entertainment from this device.

Brian: And also, Google Johnny Carson because it has nothing to do with pinball, but you're going to like that. You're going to enjoy Johnny Carson.

Chad: This is the way people talk at 50, right? You're 50th episode. Yeah, I think what we're onto here is set the relationship up well. Every coaching session occurs within a coaching relationship, and so, set the

relationship up well, you're going to have far fewer times when the client shows up without a topic for a session, but it's still going to happen. In fact, I remember, Brian, my very first coach, we had six sessions, and it was third party, sponsored coaching, so honestly, I wasn't paying out of my own pocket. I showed up for maybe our third or fourth session out of six, and he said, "So, what's the focus today?" I said, "I really haven't had time to think of a topic," and he said, "Alright. Well, I'm going to hang up, and when you have a topic, call me back." I was like welcome to the world of coaching. If I'm not intentional, I'm not going to get anything out of this, and he wasn't scolding or eternalistic with it. He was just very matter of fact. We can't coach unless you have a topic. I want to be clear, that's not the only strategy. We're going to get into some other strategies or techniques, but that certainly is one strategy. Say, "Well, when you have one, call me back."

Brian: It's challenging. People have a spectrum between invitation and challenge, and for those of us, like me, who are high invitation, and that can kind of scream, "What a jerk," but there is a mindset there that you probably never came back to another coaching session without a topic. Never.

Chad: That's right, and I had well thought out topics by the time I came back. I think what he was doing is he saw kind of a theme in my life at that point, just in the few sessions we had, where I wasn't being as intentional, and therefore, I wasn't being as productive and successful as I could be. It was just a way of kind of encapsulating that truth and saying you know, if you don't show up ready, you're really not going to get very far in life. Boy, that was not a lesson lost. That lesson really stuck with me, and that's been, gosh, almost 20 years.

Brian: So, I'm thinking about I've got clients who are in the middle of pretty big challenges. They know maybe they're starting something new, or they know where they're going, they're going through a big change, they know what the piece is, and every time they show up, they've got something that's a challenge that could really be coached about, and that's still in the overarching issue, but Chad, we have made the distinction about framework lately. I think that's been really helpful. So, I think another way to build a topic in place, I've done this, especially with clients that have went longer term, to coach through such things as *5 Dysfunctions of a Team*, or *8 Steps of Change* by Kotter, and the way I set that up is I say, "This week we're set up to talk about building trust, but we don't have to talk about that today if there's something more pressing," and sometimes there is something more pressing, and sometimes there's not. That's also, don't get me wrong, it's very agreed upon that we're going to work through something such as *5 Dysfunctions of a Team*. It's not me saying, "Here's what we're talking about."

Chad: Yeah, that's right. So, you set up ahead of time, here's a schedule of topics based on this piece of content that the client wants to operationalize in his or her life, or industry, or work, and you've got to stay with that plan unless there's a good reason not to for a particular session. I like that. That's kind of a preloaded... In a way, that's sort of big picture, what's something I'm really wanting to go after, or you know, kind of live into, and finding the right topic, so to speak, *5 Dysfunctions*, or whatever it is I think is really crucial. A little variation of that, Brian, I've had clients when they come in, and maybe they've gone into that maintenance place where, okay, we had big goals, we've reached those goals, now what? I've asked them, what's a book, or a principle from a book that you know but you haven't really put into place? It's really not a part of your life the way you'd like for it to be, and almost every time, the client

says, “Oh, *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*,” or, “*5 Dysfunctions of a Team*,” or whatever it is. I read this book on time management. I wish I could do that, or I read this book on whatever. The book kind of becomes the spark of the topic, and we’re coaching the principles of that book into practice, but you can coach for many sessions just on the principles from one really good book.

Brian: For sure. I was listening to some coaching yesterday, some student coaching, and the coach asked, just to break the ice, just to build relationship, the coach asked, “Share one challenge from the week and one joy,” or something like that from the week. The client shared a challenge, and then shared a joy about going to a conference that was really meaningful. The coach asked, dug in a little bit, “What was the best thing you got out of the conference?” Then it turned into a discussion about this learning. Now, certainly, the coach picked the topic, if you will, and they shouldn’t. However, it was a beautiful conversation about some learning and how to further that. It was really a beautiful conversation.

Chad: I would say that the coach kind of primed the topic.

Brian: It was close. On reflection, the client said that’s what they would have talked about, but there should have been just a little more check in.

Chad: A little more of an open-ended question to find a clear topic before you... And I think that kind of idea, what’s a book, or let’s build on the joy that you just had, or something else, these things do kind of prime the pump for a topic, but we only do that when necessary, so if is ready to talk, let’s don’t waste time trying to back our way into what the topic is. Let’s just ask, “What do you want to talk about today?”

Brian: And that’s interesting because the coach in this situation said, they only had 15 minutes to coach, it was a classroom setting, and because of the time, they wanted to get to the topic really quick, and I understand that, so there was a sense of the time. So, Chad, here we are. We haven’t done well, at least, the intake. We don’t have an overall piece. We’ve got a client today, and we ask, “What do you want to talk about,” and they say, “I have no idea.” One time, I was coaching, and my client said, I think he used the term, “Dealer’s choice. You pick today.”

Chad: That’s great. I can think of a few options here. So, if the listener can think in terms of a bullet list, let’s list off some things. One is, if you have a prep form, use the prep form during the session, and you could just say, “Well, I’ve got a prep form that some of my clients like to use. You might want to consider it, by the way, and here’s the first question.” My prep form has four or five questions on it. So, you could just read those questions. Let the client respond, and let a topic emerge from that. By the way, clients who use a prep form, come with a topic. So, you’re just investing the first 10 minutes of the session with the prep form. A second idea, so bullet number two, would be: be creative. Go total like sandbox. Make something up to spur a topic from a client. I did something like this a while back in a training session. I said, “I need a volunteer who doesn’t have a topic.” Someone said, “I’ll be coached, but I don’t have a topic.” I said, “Perfect,” and literally, it just occurred to me to try this. I said, “So, if you could go on vacation anywhere in the world, where would you go?” She had a response, and I said, “What is it about that that would be really fun, or meaningful, for you?” She described kind of rest, and beauty, and peacefulness, and my third question was, “Would you like more of that in your life now?” It was an

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intentional close-ended question because I don't want to assume that just because she wants that out of a vacation, means that she wants it out of the rest of... I might go on vacation where I skydive. I don't want more of that in my life. "Do you want it?" "Yes I do." "Would you like to talk about how to get that?" "Yes I would." We have a topic, and now we were off to the races, so to speak, with how can you get more beauty, and rest, and peace in your life.

Brian: I love it.

Chad: And be coached for 15 minutes. Again, I didn't choose the topic. I just chose how we would find the topic.

Brian: Yeah, that's good.

Chad: So, that's kind of a creative way as bullet number two.

Brian: Another one would be, "You're lying in your casket at your funeral, and you hear people talking, and you think to yourself, and you're still able to think for whatever reason, and you think to yourself, 'Aw man. I wish I would have...' What?" Just to create some... Or I wish I wouldn't have. I don't know. Something creative by pushing them way into the future.

Chad: It's almost a balcony view of one's life. I always think if I were laying there, I'd want people to say, "Look he's moving." That's a creative kind of idea. How do you spur some thinking from a client so a topic emerges. People could add to this list over and over. The key is don't pick a topic for a client. If they don't have ownership of it, it's your topic, not theirs.

Brian: For sure. Yours was great, the way of bringing that back around. Do you have one more bullet? We've got time for one more bullet.

Chad: Not really. My coffee ran out.

Brian: Oh my. Are you okay?

Chad: No.

Brian: Are you okay?

Chad: My coffee.

Brian: Oh gosh. I'm going to call this one then. I'm going to call an intervention here. Thanks so much for joining us today on our 50th episode. We're pretty excited about it, if you can't tell. 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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