



## Coach Approach Ministries Podcast

### Episode 54: How Coaching Can Help with Hiring

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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, boy, you better hurry, and get to the site at [www.coachapproachministries.org/coachnow](http://www.coachapproachministries.org/coachnow). Today, we're going to talk to Laura Stephens-Reed about how coaching can help with hiring, especially in a ministry situation. I'm Brian Miller, strategic director for Coach Approach Ministries, CAM for short, and I am just thrilled to welcome Reverend Laura Stephens-Reed.

**Laura Stephens-Reed:** Good to be with you today.

**Brian:** Laura believes in the power of the local church to change individuals and communities in the name of Christ. Her call is to increase churches' effectiveness by promoting health in congregations and in the people who lead them. Laura's been credentialed as a certified Christian Leadership Coach. The very program I was outing earlier by Coach Approach Ministries. An Associate Certified Coach, ACC, through the International Coaching Federation. She's also been trained as a congregational consultant and an intentional interim by the Center for Congregational Health, and has been an ordained minister since 2002. Laura, you must have been ordained when you were 12 is my only guess.

**Laura:** I'm pushing 40. I'm looking forward to that birthday next month.

**Brian:** Well don't push 40. Don't push it. That'd be my advice. Laura has served churches in a variety of settled and interim roles, including pastor, associate pastor, and minister with age-specific groups. Boy, it's just great to have you today. So, how did you get interested in this topic of hiring a minister?

**Laura:** Well, I have been through a number of search processes myself, as a candidate for settled positions and as a candidate for interim positions, and I've been on the other side as well as an interim

minister in congregations that were looking to call a settled minister. I coach a lot of clergy women who are in the search and call process, and in the course of all of this, my own experience and that of colleagues, I have heard of congregations doing the search process really well, and I have heard of, and experienced, some congregations doing this process very poorly.

**Brian:** I've heard 80% more of doing it poorly.

**Laura:** There are a lot of horror stories out there, and I have quite a lengthy blooper reel myself, but as an interim, I think of that ministerial transition time as a real season of opportunity. It's something that we don't rush. It's a time to get reacquainted with our mission as a congregation, where God is leading us to impact the world. If we do that well, then we can really live into where God is calling us, and if we don't do that work well, and if we don't do the search work well, then we end up with pastor-parish mismatches that result in conflict and anxiety, and that distracts us from doing the work that God has for us. So, that, paired with my experience... And I had read about this grant that is the basis for doing this project, and I had actually sent it out in a newsletter that I had put together for my denomination to some clergy, "Hey, apply for this." Then it just hit me, I would like to apply for this, and I would like to use this to study how we can better resource the call process and search teams. So, that's how all this kind of came about.

**Brian:** Well, I'm thinking about all of our usual coach approach listeners, podcast listeners, and I think there are two things that they might really take away from this conversation. One is, if you've been around church long enough, you've seen a bad hire. You've seen a bad hire, and Laura has done some research on this, and she knows some ways to fix that, and she also is starting offering coaching around this. We'll give out a website address. We can give that right now. It's actually [searchingforthecalled.org](http://searchingforthecalled.org). That's her website. You can find out how to get more information from her about how she could help you. That's one area.

Hiring better would make us all happier in the church, and then the second way to think about this, if you're listening to this podcast, might be that you'd like to have a coaching business, and Laura has thought through a package, she's thought through what she's offering, how it's going to look for the client, maybe even how to talk to the client about it, and I think there's a lot to glean from that. So, we're really looking forward to that. You mentioned two things, I think, that are really separate, I just want to make the distinction. There's an interim process and there's a search process, and I agree with you that an interim process would be fantastic, but it's not essential, necessarily, to go into a hiring process.

**Laura:** That's correct. I do have a bit of a bias toward the interim process since I am an interim minister, but yes, they are two separate things. There is a transition time whether you have an actual interim minister or not, and an interim minister can help you make the best use of that transition time.

**Brian:** Gotcha. So, what are some things you learned? You got a grant, you did some research. That's how I met you. We got to partner with you a little bit in the research. What are a couple things you really took away that really surprised you or are essential for the hiring process?

**Laura:** In reading and in talking to several different populations, I talked to searching settled, and interim ministers. I talked to judicatory leaders, search team chairs, people who participate in middle judicatory bodies that help congregations and ministers in transitions. As I was listening, the theme that really started to bubble up was that of hospitality. The processes that went really well were characterized by good hospitality, and the processes that went south were characterized by a lack of hospitality. So, the framework and the tools that I have designed are all built around how to welcome the voices of the Holy Spirit, first of all, hospitality toward the Holy Spirit, involving God in the process, but also welcome the voices of the congregation as a whole, the larger community, and the candidates. How do we make this a process that doesn't just bless us as a church but is a blessing to others as we carry it out.

**Brian:** You already went into some definition there of what hospitality can look like. The first picture I get of hospitality is there's some coffee, and there's some donuts, so what would really improve this search committee is that we have coffee and some donuts. That may be part of it, but it's not even really. So, there's a hospitality and a welcoming first of all, you said, of the Holy Spirit. Talk about how that could look for a minute.

**Laura:** Well, there are tools in this framework that are designed to help search teams create more space for the Holy Spirit to move. Now, the Holy Spirit is always going to speak. We can count on that, but sometimes we have to work hard to attune ourselves to that. So, there are tools for discernment in this framework that help amplify the voice of God as we're going throughout the process, and for example, I give a basic outline of what discernment is. Here's kind of the flow of discernment. One of the tools in the framework is how do you design a search team meeting where you have tasks that have to get done as part of the search, how do you weave that together with these discernment pieces so that you are doing worshipful work?

**Brian:** I love that. So, that's the hospitality of the Holy Spirit. I'm just thinking on this one. There was a hospitality to the community at large.

**Laura:** Particularly in the early stages of the search, or maybe even before the search begins if you have an intentional interim minister or a transition facilitator, there's usually some sort of self-study involved, and part of a congregation being in touch with its mission is knowing the gifts and the challenges of its geographical context. So, actually going out in the community and finding out where people are already doing really good things that our congregation that our congregation can join in...

**Brian:** Now, you're talking about, there's a congregational element to community, you're talking about the city, perhaps, the community.

**Laura:** The neighborhood.

**Brian:** The neighborhood? Wow. I don't think most people think about hospitality in the community when they think about hiring a pastor.

**Laura:** Well, I think that could be a missing element. While we're doing that congregational self-study piece, which is a setup for putting together a congregation profile that we then send out to the

candidates. A piece of that is knowing our context, and knowing where we can partner with people, knowing what needs aren't addressed in our larger context, and knowing where we have access where we can help meet those needs. So, that's part of the hospitality to the larger community is listening and finding out, okay, where is God drawing us into ministry in our surrounding context.

**Brian:** When I think about that, I think we could solve a lot of conflict problems. If everybody was aware of such things as even a political bend of a community, so that it doesn't instantly create conflict. It's not bad to challenge sometimes but just to know an awareness, or about a style that's really appreciated in that community. Whether that community appreciates an intellectual argument, or they appreciate a warmth of presence. I think that as we're talking about the community, I'm also thinking that most of the things that are true about the community are also true about the congregation. What would be some distinctions for the congregation?

**Laura:** Well, and hospitality to the congregation, what that kind of means to me in this framework, is hearing from the congregation, hearing their stories, hearing how the church has impacted them, and where, because of that impact, they might be ready to serve God in the congregation or in the community. So, giving the congregation some appropriate channels for input into a congregational profile and into the kind of pastoral leadership that they're looking for going forward.

**Brian:** And I think, maybe this is my own curiosity because I've seen some hiring lately, the more I've seen lately is at an associate level, more of a worship pastor or a youth pastor, or at a denominational level where it feels harder to say what the congregation is. How does your framework think about not just the senior pastor, but other kind of positions?

**Laura:** Absolutely. The framework is designed with solo or senior pastor searches in mind, but it can be tweaked. For example, I have served as an intentional interim associate pastor, so in that context, there was the larger congregation that I needed to think about how my particular congregation, which was primarily youth and parents, connected to that larger congregation, but when I was doing some self-study pieces to help the church put together its profile and search for a settled associate, my primary congregation was youth and parents. Yes, defining what the congregation is is really important. It could be the church as a whole, it could be a demographic within the church, or in the case of a judicatory or denominational leader, it could look even bigger than that.

**Brian:** You already made me think some new awareness would be at a denominational level, the congregation might be the pastors in that denomination. The community might be the churches more at large, a bigger field. You could go farther than that, but it gets more murky, I think, at that level. You've used the word framework a couple times, and I really think that's a key importance as we're talking about coaching. There's a distinction between a coaching package and a coaching framework, which over the next few months, Coach Approach is going to start helping think that through, but when you talk about a framework, what does that even mean? Give us a sense of how you're thinking about framework.

**Laura:** In this particular case, I have divided the search process into a certain number of stages, and the first stage is waiting on readiness, deciding on the right time to start a search, and the last stage is  
Transcribed by Alyssa Miller

resourcing the minister for a fast start. There's a lot that happens in between there.

**Brian:** What are some of the lot? I'm curious.

**Laura:** Well, there's the congregational self-study piece. There's a gathering, a search team, and helping that search team gel, and helping that search team learn about discernment, and shape their search process around discernment, set a process before getting started in earnest so that process pieces are settled in advance, like how to make decisions and when certain things will happen. Then, actually putting together a congregational profile, sending that out, discerning who to interview once you've got resumes or profiles and how to go about that. Once you get into those latter stages, how to navigate that, some different things to think about in terms of how do you see the candidates in action, and once you've honed in on your candidate of choice, how to navigate that, how to present that person to the congregation, how to covenant with that person so that it's really not employer/employee, but it's a mutual ministry kind of relationship, and then get that person off to a great start.

**Brian:** But you have a framework that says here's a structure that's best practice to work through for hiring. That in itself is a great, great value. Just to be clear, with coaching, the client sets the agenda, but the coach can bring a framework that client either agrees to or doesn't agree to, or maybe, and I don't know how you would do this, but maybe they agree to portions of it. They say, "We would like you to guide us through these parts of the framework that you're providing."

**Laura:** Right. For example, in each of these stages, there are different sub-headings, but one is, "Essential Tasks to Accomplish During this Stage," and that's a good piece of where a coaching might occur. How do you as a search team go about accomplishing these essential tasks in a way that is faithful to who you are as a congregation?

**Brian:** Can you give us one example of how you would coach a piece of this framework?

**Laura:** Well, there's the essential tasks, as I just mentioned. In each section, there's also key reflection questions. So, those are coaching questions in themselves for search teams to consider, and then I also include some best practices for each stage, so there can be some coaching around that. How might you go about implementing these best practices? Which ones work for you? Which ones don't? There's also, something that I have not seen in other books, or manuals, or approaches to search processes which is, a piece from each stage from the candidate's perspective. Here's what's going on on the other end of the line, and if you know these things, if you know the candidate is experiencing these things, what do you do with that? How do you respond to these concerns, these emotions? How do you be as hospitable as possible to the candidates knowing that they are probably experiencing some of this?

**Brian:** So, you're creating some perspective shifts in the framework to say here's some different ways that this is being seen, either by the candidate, or by the congregation, or by God, or by associates. There's so many ways, and you bring that issue before either individuals or a group so they can then have awareness and think about how they want to respond. You don't tell them how to respond. I think that's a beautiful piece of it. You invite them. The other thing I really heard in that, something that we forget sometimes, is that coaching in its heart is a learning process. It's not a how-do-take-action

process. It has that benefit, but it's a learning process, so I did a congregational study, but what am I learning from that? What have I learned from that? I think that's wonderful, Laura.

**Laura:** Well, I'm coming from the perspective that people on search teams are capable, they are faithful, and there are just some peculiarities to calling a clergy person that are different from HR in the secular world or other processes that they might have been involved in before. So, if they know better, then they're going to do better, and this is all about helping them know better so they can do better.

**Brian:** So, Laura, as I'm listening to what you described, what I'm stunned by, struck by, is that this is a niche for coaching, you have a framework and you provide coaching, that if it's not done well, not by you, but if they don't put enough emphasis on doing this right, there is such a potential for loss. So, the expense of what you might charge for this, and I have no idea what you might charge for this, if you're a typical coach, I would tell you to double it because we typically think, "Oh. I don't know I want to be nice. I want to give value. I want to make sure you get more value. I want you to be happy with it," but this is such a valuable piece because if you don't hire someone to help you with this process of hiring, the potential for loss, and I don't know what the statistics are, but it's got to be high, is so great in money, in time, in human potential, in trust. There's so much area for loss that I think the value of what you're offering is just screaming to me, "This is worth paying for."

**Laura:** Well, and the flip side of that is there are benefits to this that extend beyond simply calling a new pastor. Done well, a search process can help a search team grow deeper spiritually, and that can have spillover into the congregation as a whole. A process that is done well can strengthen relationships with denominational partners in the community. A process done well can bless candidates, and then those candidates who don't come to your church, then go on to other churches with a better sense of their gifts, and they're prepared to fuse health into those churches that they serve, and a search process done well sets up your newly called pastor for a fast start, so you can jump right into that mutual ministry together and focus on the mission that God has for your church.

**Brian:** As I'm thinking about coaching in general, something one of our partners, Bill Copper, said a while back, it's just one of those pithy statements that just stuck with me, that people don't buy coaching, they buy results. You just named five or six results that are so essential that as I hear them, I think I don't want to miss those results. As I think about you have a framework, and there's coaching, and then there will be learning which is all essential and true. As I think about marketing what you're doing, I think, that sounds interesting. That'd be nice, but when I think about the benefits that you just described, not only the potential of loss, but also the setting of a fast start, improving my denominational relationships, building more capacity and trust, I think I can't afford not to buy that.

I'm just pointing that out because for our listeners, I think that's just such an essential piece that you are able to describe so well. So, let's move into another section that I think's important for thinking how to set up a coaching business is that you have a list of things that would help discern whether this is for me or not for me, and we've learned, from a marketing perspective, you want it to be somewhat precise, so I can look at your questions, look at your website and say, "This is me. She's talking to me. She needs me to call because I'm the one," or look at it and say, "That's not for me. Clearly not me." As coaches, we

tend to be a little murky and say, “I can probably help you no matter what. I mean no matter what your situation is, I could probably help you,” and that’s not what you want. You want it to be pretty clear. I’m just curious to some of these questions you have to help define that.

**Laura:** Sure. Well, I come from the free church world, and in much of the free church world, the search process is structured by each congregation. They’re creating from scratch how this is going to go. So, if that’s your case, this framework, these tools, will really help you navigate the search process in a clear and forward moving way.

**Brian:** And that world’s expanding. The free church world is probably expanding more than the non-free church. Non-denominational’s a trend.

**Laura:** Absolutely. This was an ecumenical project, though, so I talked with a number of people in denominations where the denomination or the judicatory recommends a particular process, but sometimes, even when that is in place, a search team could benefit from additional tools. If that is your case, this framework and these tools can simply layer over the process that has been recommended to you by your judicatory or denomination.

**Brian:** Perfect. That helps me to binary, is that me, or is that not? What’s another one?

**Laura:** If you’re simply looking to infuse your search process with more spirit, if you’re trying to figure out how to ground this more spiritually, then this framework could work for you, and then if you’re just interested in making the process more hospitable overall to all the parties involved, then this framework and these tools will help you do that.

**Brian:** I want to dive in a little deeper on the spirit. So, I think when you talk about spirit, it can do one of two things. It can make people think, “Oh man, yeah. We need more of that,” or it can make them nervous to say, “What you think that means may be different and it makes me scared.” How do you set people at ease when you talk about the spirit?

**Laura:** And probably talking about the difference between decision making and discernment is important here. Decision making is done based purely on an intellectual exercise, it’s done by humans. Discernment is a process that takes into account all of that same data plus some, but it invites God to speak into the experience as well. In church life, we are grounded in the spiritual life. We are trying to be disciples of Christ. We are trying to follow the purpose that God has for us, so this framework will help clear a space for God to speak into. God’s always going to speak, but this will allow your search team to hear that voice better, and be guided by it not just by what do we want? What do we prefer? It’ll be really what leader does God want us to have at this season of our churches life?

**Brian:** So, I hear a distinction there that I think’s really important. You have a framework that helps create space for the spirit, but there’s such a wide spectrum of how we think about the spirit that coaching would allow you to come in and say, “How are you, uniquely going to hear the spirit, call the spirit, discern the spirit?” There are definitely different ways that people would put emphasis on scripture, or a revelation, or a prophecy, but that’s not for everybody, so your framework would design

space, and your coaching will allow uniqueness of how we will hear the spirit.

**Laura:** Absolutely. This framework is designed to be as nimble as possible, as customizable to your particular context as possible. So, yes, those are the kinds of questions that we might talk about in coaching. What does this mean for you in your context? What does that look like?

**Brian:** And then you got to the hospitality one. We're running out of time because I think I could talk to you about this for an hour, and I want to talk to you about other things on another podcast. We want to be faithful to our listeners to try to stay around 30 minutes here, but the hospitality one, which you mentioned next, was... We did do a search process for a denominational leader, and just by conversations with you about hospitality really made me think, especially, about hospitality for the candidates, and how to have them have a good experience no matter what the choice was. I just thought that was a brilliant... And I don't know of another framework that looks at it as deeply as another framework.

**Laura:** The number one complaint that I heard from ministers through all my interviewing and surveying was, "These congregations don't communicate with us." You might even have a church fly you across the country for a weekend visit, and preaching for the congregation, and never contact you again which just kind of blows my mind. Basic hospitality things like that, and this framework helps you think through what you need to tell candidates and when because that's going to make those candidates feel encouraged, and supported, and eager to talk with you, and even if you don't choose them, it's going to put them in a better state of mind to enter a search process with another congregation.

**Brian:** For sure. I have a friend who, six months after candidating, was called and said, "You're hired." He hadn't heard anything for six months. By that time, he'd already taken another church. It's surprising what people don't think of, and that's just one example of a framework you provide. So, if people want to know more about you or this process, where should they go?

**Laura:** Probably the best place to go is my website. It's [searchingforthecalled.org](http://searchingforthecalled.org). I also have a Facebook page if you just search "Searching for the Called" on Facebook. There's on there, in addition to previews before this website was launched, I also have a few videos that I've recorded and links to some articles that I think are relevant to the search process.

**Brian:** And if someone would want to hire you for the search process, should they go to Searching for the Called? Is that how they can start the process with you?

**Laura:** Absolutely. I have a contact form there. They can reach me by that. They can also email me at [laura@searchingforthecalled.org](mailto:laura@searchingforthecalled.org).

**Brian:** [laura@searchingforthecalled.org](mailto:laura@searchingforthecalled.org)

**Laura:** Correct.

**Brian:** Laura, I appreciate so much the work you've done in this. I think it's a great work you're doing. I thank you for sharing not only the process, but thinking about how to have a coaching business with us

today.

**Laura:** Thank you for the opportunity.

**Brian:** Sure. I'm hoping we hear more from you in the future on this podcast. Thanks so much for everybody else joining us. This podcast was sponsored by our certificate in Christian Leadership Coaching, which is where I know Laura has invested some time and has got her to a place where she's got a business and a niche with this. It's 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 you're going to have to hurry to get into that one. It's still possible, very possible, and there will be other cohorts forming later, but I would love to see you get into this one. If you're interested, go to our website at [www.coachapproachministries.org/coachnow](http://www.coachapproachministries.org/coachnow). We'll see you next week.

**[Outro Music]**