



Coach Approach Ministries Podcast

Episode 59: Creating Awareness in Your Client

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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 October, 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. How are you doing today, Chad?

Chad Hall: Brian, I'm having a good day. It's even better now that I'm talking to you.

Brian: Oh man. Thank you so much. Today's a challenge day, Chad. You're working out. It's not leg day or arm day. It's coach day. It's challenge day. We are challenging our coaches to step up their ability to create awareness in their client. This is just such a major piece. It's the eighth competency the International Coaching Federation mentions, but to me, this is a pretty high-ranking competency.

Chad: Without this, you're not really going to do much coaching. We've talked about this before, Brian, that sometimes, when we're new to coaching, or we've trained people who are new to coaching, they're kind of like, "I can't get the client to move forward. The client's not taking action." It's akin to trying to drive a car that's out of fuel, and new awareness really is the fuel that moves a client forward. When they have new awareness, then they can take new actions, and it's out of those new actions that they get new results which is the progress they're looking for from coaching. If all we're doing is taking an inventory of what they already know, that's not new awareness. That's old awareness. That's where they are now. So, as coaches, we have to be really good at helping create awareness for our clients.

Brian: In our hour glass model which we just love and teach a lot through Coach Approach Ministries, the first thing we do on the top of the hourglass is create awareness around the issue, around the topic,

and the way I've described it in the past is, if you don't do that, then the client brings two or three building blocks, and when you get to designing action, you've still got two or three building blocks, and they just kind of decide, "Well, I'll take action on this one or that one," but if you create awareness, suddenly you have seven or eight building blocks, and you have so much more material to create something effective.

Chad: It's a great reminder, Brian, that there's awareness being created throughout a coaching conversation, so some people mistakenly think, "Oh. The awareness comes near the end when we're thinking about what options do we need?" No. Awarenesses happen all throughout the conversation. To begin with, it's their awareness of where to focus. It's a kind of narrowing awareness. What part of this is most important? What part of this do I take action on? What part of this has really gotten stuck? Those kinds of things are discoveries along the way, and then near the end of the conversation, it's more about what could I do about it, what are my options, exploring, expanding, that kind of stuff, and then at the tail-end of the coaching conversation, there's new awareness around commitment, motivation, accountability, those sorts of things, about really turning those new awareness into real action out there in the real world, but there's awareness happening all throughout. It's just a matter of what kind of awareness needs to be happening at what stage in the conversation.

Brian: It sounds almost counterintuitive to say we're going to create new awareness in a client. Where would new awareness come from? How do we even begin to think about what new awareness is?

Chad: It's funny because we're a little redundant in our language. We're saying create new awareness, and you could just say, "Awareness." You're suddenly aware of something, but the ICF calls it creating awareness, but the idea is clients are creative, they're resourceful. They have the capacity, just like their creator, they have the capacity to create, to go somewhere new in their thinking. They could come up with new knowledge. They could maybe make some new connections with things they may already know, but they haven't put them together in this particular kind of way. There are a lot of opportunities for new awareness.

Brian: There's a famous story that we've passed around where one of our founders, Jane Creswell, was working with some kind of engineer on trying to figure out the best way to encode data, or something along that line. Do you know what I'm talking about?

Chad: I think so.

Brian: You certainly could tell that story better than I because I'm failing at it right now.

Chad: Well, it reminds me of like five stories, so keep going.

Brian: Long story short, she didn't know anything about this, so she couldn't bring new knowledge to the situation, but she asked a lot questions that created new awareness, and at one point, the engineer was able to say, "Oh my goodness. You just saved us millions of dollars. I now know, obviously, which one of these two to pick." New awareness was created in this engineer by Jane's coaching.

Chad: The moral of the story is, the new awareness did not come from the coach. Often, we think if the

client's going to get new awareness, it's going to be my old awareness, but it's new to him. It's kind of like hand-me-down awareness. The stuff I know, I'll pass on to the client, and it will be new to them. No, that's not the way it works in coaching. We actually stimulate the creativity of the client that they generate new knowledge, new ideas, new connections, new insights, new perspectives.

Brian: I had a client the other day just put it this way. He was looking for a quote that I won't try to do, but when you're around a coach, you feel smarter, and when you're around a consultant, you probably often feel dumber. We want to help people not just feel smarter but be smarter. We want to enhance their abilities right there. So, Chad, let's dive into this. What are some ways to create awareness that we can talk about that might be helpful to challenge our listeners as coaches that they might be able to try this out?

Chad: We talk about four things, and these certainly aren't the only four, but there are four that come to my mind immediately, and one is just to get pushier, I guess you'd call it, when it comes to challenging your client to expand options, or to go somewhere new in their thinking. The truth is that being a client is hard work, and you burn a lot of calories creating awareness. When we ask a client, "What's a different way to go about this, or what would be a best solution," and they come back with, "I don't know," or, "This is something I've tried before," that kind of thing. We've got to get pushier. We've got to be willing to challenge them to do the work, to burn the calories, to go somewhere new in their thinking. That can sometimes be a challenge for us to bring a challenge to the client, but that's why they hire us. They hire us the same way someone hires a physical trainer to say, "You can do it. Lift that weight."

Brian: Immediately, I'm thinking of I had a client this week that I said, "Name five characteristics about this," and I picked five on purpose because it seemed like he wouldn't have five. He'd have maybe two or three in his head, and by challenging his to five, by being pushy about five, that would cause him to create new awareness.

Chad: And I love that because notice what a stretch that is. Name two. That's easy. That's kind of like saying lift this weight, and you always know you can do it. Five? I'm not sure I can do that. Well, we'll never know until we try, and even if he only came up with four, that's stretching his thinking, but it's also dialing up his creativity. Just the very effort of doing it means he's going to be more creative through the conversation.

Brian: You just made me think. I remember another client that had become a Sunday school superintendent, and the problem was they didn't have enough teachers. That's got to be a really uncommon problem, right?

Chad: No, I don't think anyone has ever faced that, but go ahead.

Brian: Same with nurse workers. I said, "Name 12 people you'd love to have as Sunday school teachers that aren't currently teaching." To my surprise, she named 12 boom, boom, boom, boom, boom. My next question was, "Name another 12."

Chad: Wow.

Brian: The awareness right there was there are people to talk to.

Chad: Yeah, and see, that's a great point, Brian, because it's not just the new awareness was, "Oh. I thought there were only 12, and there were actually 20." No, that is a new awareness, but that other layer of there are possibilities everywhere. That's a new perspective, not just a new name to add to the list, but a new perspective maybe from a scarcity mentality to an abundance mentality. That's an awareness.

Brian: Be a little pushier. What's another one?

Chad: Yeah. So, I think a second one would be to just ask better, more thought-provoking questions. That would be in contrast to questions that just invite the client to cover familiar territory. You and I hear this all the time in our mentor coaching. What have you tried before? What's worked in the past? Those kinds of questions. Come on. Those are kind of inventory questions is the way I think about them. Let's look through the files. Let's look what's worked before. Not necessarily tried and true but certainly tried, and we really want to ask questions that don't invite the client to just rehearse what they've already come up with.

We want to ask questions that really provoke thinking, and to me, that's just a real key to creating awareness. So, I try to never ask a question that I think the client knows the answer to because that would not create awareness if they could just regurgitate, but you don't always know what the client knows, and you don't want to ask, "Have you ever thought about..." So, you just have to take a risk sometimes, and if the topic is we're trying to get a breakthrough on this issue, one question you could ask, because I don't think you know exactly... I've learned that this is an area that they need to explore. What do you think of when you think breakthrough? Get them to explore a little deeper in their own definition. That's a great reminder too that thought provoking doesn't necessarily mean going wider in their thinking. Sometimes it means going deeper in a current thought, defining a key term, really going deep in terms of their understanding of a particular value to them, or whatever. You can find a lot of value in just going deeper with where they are in their thinking because they get somewhere new, and that's the thing. We want to ask questions that get them somewhere new in their thinking.

Brian: The most thought-provoking question I was ever asked was by a student, and the question was, "What do you want Jesus to do for you about this issue?" What are three things you want Jesus to do, and honest to goodness, you say you don't know what the client already knows, but that just provoked... My brain exploded.

Chad: Right. A question like that provokes thought, and you know it because you kind of have to stop, and you almost apologize to say, "Wait a minute. I have to think about that," and of course the snarky part of the coach is, "Well, yeah. That's kind of what we were hoping for."

Brian: That's why we're here.

Chad: It's like you've got to go somewhere new in your brain to even begin to formulate a response to

that, and that's the kind of questions that create awareness. By the way, that's not to say to all of our listeners, "Always ask that question." That's not it.

Brian: It must have come from the listening. My coach must have heard that I was relying on my own strength alone. He knew I was a Christian, and it literally brought tears to my eyes. You talk about the awareness. It didn't bring awareness to me just of the three things I wanted Jesus to do. It brought an awareness that this isn't just on me, and I'm not the most powerful person in this equation.

Chad: That's interesting, Brian, because it kind of helps me rethink the, I said, thought-provoking questions, and what you just said there was also an emotion-provoking question. When we're talking about new awareness, it's a good reminder to me, as a thinker in Myers-Briggs, that it's not just about thinking. It's also awareness about new emotions. There's a super high percentage, I don't remember how much it is, of how much of life is really that intuitively, emotionally driven versus the rational thought driven. New awareness could be new thoughts. It could also be new emotion.

Brian: I too am a thinker and not a feeler, so the most thought-provoking question I ever remember asking my client was, because it just felt necessary, they just felt stuck, and they needed something to press them out. I asked, "If God were to give you a new name today, what would that name be?"

Chad: I love it.

Brian: To me, it just sounds so much like Barbara Walters saying, "What kind of tree are you?" I think, what a dumb question.

Chad: Oh, I like the tree question too. No, I don't, not really.

Brian: But it wasn't a dumb question. Boy, my client had to think from a different part of the brain, had to think about it in a different way. It was fascinating.

Chad: It's interesting because even if they don't get somewhere really specific, tangible, practical, new awareness with the question, the very exercise of going somewhere new in their brain, I really do think softens them up to be more creative in the rest of the conversation, and I also think we're hanging on what I was thinking about as the third way to boost your client's creativity, and that one was to boost your own creativity in terms of what you're willing to try and to be kind of risky. I think those thought-provoking, emotion-provoking questions often do feel kind of risky to us as the coach. You're like, "I don't know. This might sound too woo-woo," or, "This may be too much of a stretch or they may not understand the question," or whatever. If you don't have a little bit of sense of, "This could go terribly wrong," you're probably not pushing your limits as a coach in terms of your creativity.

Brian: So, what's the most creative, maybe not the most creative, but when you think about creative questions that you've asked?

Chad: It's interesting. For me, those creative questions tend to not be just single sentence questions. They tend to be more of thought experiences, or thought experiments, where we might do a visualization exercise. Those sorts of things. I'm not really one that asks, "When you think about this

challenge, what color is it?" "Where do you feel it in your body?" I know coaches who do that, and they have good success with it, but mine tends to be much more visualizing, putting yourself in a different part of the world, looking out, what do you see, what does that tell you, those kinds of things. Sometimes creativity around conversations. Sometimes I'll just pull a person either out of thin air or out of a conversation that we had 10 sessions ago, and say, "What would the guy at the hot dog stand you were talking about the other day say about this?" Again, that could go horribly wrong depending on the client, but you've got to try things if you're going to get somewhere new.

Brian: Creativity is risky.

Chad: It is risky. It's not dangerous, but it is risky. I don't know the distinction, but I think there is one.

Brian: I don't know that you have to be the most creative person to use this. Like the question about what's your new name, I'd heard somebody ask that, and I thought this is the perfect time to ask it. I don't ask it every time, but this is an internal shift that needs to be made in this client, and I had another client the other day that was needing to make an internal shift, and I recognize it, I observe that, and he was a thinker plus. I was asking some feeling kind of questions, and he even said, "I don't think that way," and I just told him. I said, "We can't make an internal shift with thinking questions." He was like, "That's true."

Chad: That's a great example, Brian, that the riskiness, often, in a creative question, or thought-provoking, emotion-provoking question is that it's outside the client's comfort zone, so it's kind of going against the grain of their typical patterns of behaving, or thinking, or processing. We go with the grain when things are moving forward, but going against the grain can really provoke a lot of new thinking and feeling.

Brian: Good, good, good. You mentioned four points. We've had three.

Chad: Hey thanks for keeping score. Let's see. Oh yeah, the fourth one I was thinking of was maybe on the other end of the spectrum from being creative, risk-taking, what water mammal are you kind of thing, but the fourth one is just develop a tool or a resource that's designed to generate or spur client creativity. You don't have to just use questions. Questions are powerful. Questions do provoke thinking and feeling, but you can also develop some kind of tool or resource. It could be a worksheet. It can be a model. It could be an exercise, some kind of fieldwork, but developing those and having them on hand as trusted tools and knowing when to use them, that can really go a long way in helping spur client creativity.

Brian: Can you give us an example?

Chad: Yeah. One that I use a lot would be the strengths versus skills model. This comes from our friend Jane Creswell who developed it almost 20 years ago, and people who've had our training know this model, so I won't go into it, but it's just this are you working out of developed skills that have a foundation in who you are, or are you kind of pretending to be someone else? It's a model that I can use interactively with the client. They draw it. They draw a little stick figure for where they are on the

model, and it can be very powerful.

Brian: Yeah, and probably any kind of assessment, for one, and I was thinking of, and I think this fits that, and you wouldn't want to overuse this, but I'm just going to say it, a quote. So, one time I was being coached, and the coach said, "That makes me think of the quote, 'There are three kinds of people: people who make things happen, people who watch things happen, and people who say, 'What just happened?'" What surprised me was how much awareness was created in my head when she said that. That was a resource.

Chad: That's a resource, and man, that's a great reminder, I think, Brian, this is why, as coaches, are we the experts? No, we're not the experts. Should we always be learning? Should we always be gathering? Should we always be noticing? Absolutely because when we're talking to a client, you never know when some resource that you've come upon along the way is going to be really helpful for the client in unlocking their new awareness, and what I heard was that this person didn't deliver that to you with a fine point of what your takeaway should be. It was just, "It reminds me of this," and then that generated new awareness, spurred you to kind of generate your own new awareness.

Brian: Yeah. It was just shocking to me, and I don't remember the specifics, but I just know three or four things just popped into my head immediately about my topic right after she said that quote. We just think creating awareness has to be about questions, and direct statements can, and should, create awareness as well. I want to give you one more shot here. We have all these listeners, and this is our challenge podcast. So, why don't you give a direct challenge to our listeners about creating awareness.

Chad: I would say find one thing you can do to improve your client's ability to create awareness. So, maybe of the four things that we've mentioned, you might pick one, and you might want to get really specific about what that one is. You might think, "Oh. I need to get pushier, and I'm going to experiment with that this week, or this month." You might think, "I need to ask more thought-provoking or emotion-provoking questions. I'm going to write some down as a resource to begin to integrate them into my coaching conversations." Maybe you think, "One specific thing I want to be more creative." You may just after your coaching calls for the next month just reflect on, "Where could I have been more creative in my questionings?" It could be tools, resources, that kind of stuff you might think, "Yeah. Here's a tool I already have. I'm going to use it to look for ways to spur client new awareness in the coming month." Just one specific way that you can begin to coach just a bit differently in order to create awareness with your clients.

Brian: Challenge accepted.

Chad: Boom.

Brian: Thanks everybody so much for joining us. Next week, Chad will be back, and we will be talking about his new e-book, *Nine Things It Really Takes to be a Great Coach*. We've done a couple parts on that already. We're going to finish it up next week, and we hope you'll join us for that. 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 October, so if you're interested, go to our website at www.coachapproachministries.org/coachnow. We'll see you next week.

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