



Coach Approach Ministries Podcast

Episode 61: How to End a Coaching Relationship Well

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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 my good friend, the president of Coach Approach Ministries, Mr. Chad Hall. How are you doing today, Chad?

Chad Hall: Brian, I'm having a good day because earlier today we got to do a webinar together, and it just gets better, like better and better as the day goes on. Webinar and now a podcast. It's great.

Brian: It's a good hang out day for a couple of nerds.

Chad: Yup.

Brian: Many people might want to be outside hiking or scuba diving. We enjoy the on-air podcast webinar. That's our forest. I don't know.

Chad: Could we do the podcast while scuba diving? If so, I don't want to.

Brian: I don't either. Whew. You scared me to death there for just a minute. Hey, we have a topic for today that you brought up that I thought was a really good one until I figured out that I didn't understand the topic. Then, I re-realized, it's a really good topic. So, the topic is how to end well, and I just had in my mind how to end a leadership position well or a position you've been in, and you meant something different. What did you mean?

Chad: So, what I mean by how to end well is how do you end a coaching relationship because we talk a lot about how to begin a coaching relationship. How to get a client, how to get a market, how to sell,

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how to contract, how to have the intake session, get off to a fast start, all that kind of stuff, but coaching relationships have a lifespan, and eventually, they have to end. How do you do that well? That's what I'm hoping to talk about today.

Brian: We all have that experience of a relationship ending, a friendship, whether it ended well or it didn't end well. I didn't have a lot of girlfriends in high school, college, but my experience with ending it well, I knew it was over when they told me. So, I don't know how that relates to this. I hope that's not the relationship we have with our client, that we'll know when they say, "Yeah, Brian, we're not going to see each other anymore."

Chad: That's the podcast episode on how to end. This is the one on how to end well.

Brian: How to get over being told, "It's over." That's not this podcast session at all. That's hilarious. So, we should start with, first of all, just thinking about there is a length to a coaching relationship. Just as there is a length to the life of a church, and nobody likes to think about that, but no church has existed for all time and will not exist for all time, but not every coaching relationship, in fact, every coaching relationship will end at some point. So, what's a good length for a coaching relationship?

Chad: A caveat I would have on this one is when you are on the front end of a coaching relationship... Potential clients tend to ask this, "Well, how long will we work together?" I find it's really helpful on the front end to have what we might call more of a Kronos answer. So, the two forms of time in the Greek New Testament, Kronos meaning chronological, what's the clock say, what's the calendar say? Then there's also Kairos, it's time when you know it. Well, on the front end of a coaching relationship, you do not want to give a Kairos answer because it sounds like forever. How long will this coaching relationship last? Forever. You will always be paying me for coaching.

So, I think on the front end, we want to give more of that Kronos answer. Six sessions, 10 sessions, 6 months, whatever is in our contract, but that's always like a minimum. Also, that's like a right amount of time. Most of the people I coach, we do 10 sessions. We may add a few on to the end of that if need be, but when it comes to a long-term coaching relationship, how long is just right? I think that's more of a Kairos answer. We kind of know it when we know it. There are signs. There are signals that the season of coaching has come to an end, and it's time to either hit the pause button or maybe even hit the stop button and just end the coaching relationship. In general, I would say coaching relationships need to last 6 to 10 sessions just so people can set goals, take actions, move forward, maybe even set another goal. When we talk about lengthy, long-term relationships, sometimes those can last a year, two, three, four years even.

Brian: Let's talk about the length. Let's unpack that just a little bit. That's interesting you said 10. I almost always do six at a time. I feel like six is probably a minimum. You've got to have at least three just to get them in the mindset of coaching, for them to understand, to get in the routine of it, and then I like to have at least three more when we're going along, and if we were to renew that, I'm pretty sure I would do another six unless I'm working for an organization. Then, I tend to do it by calendar year and say we'll do ten this year for each client. I think that puts a firm boundary on it. So, we both know, I as the coach know, and the client knows, that on the sixth one, if they're paying attention, there's a

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conversation that needs to be had at the end of that conversation. So, let me put you there. You're at the end of that tenth session. When in the session do you bring it up, or do you bring it up, and what do you say?

Chad: One thing before that. I will mention, the reason for having a limited number, whether it's 6, or 10, or whatever, is people tend to run harder when there's a finish line. Even if we renew after that, it's just better to have some kind of milepost, or finish line, or whatever you want to call it. In terms of when we get to that finish line, I usually bring it up the next to last session. I might even bring it up before then. I might say, "Hey. Good session today. We've got five more." "Good session today. We've got three more." Definitely the next to last one, I'll say, "Hey. Next time is our final session. It's a normal session, so bring a topic, but we will also talk about what comes after this." I just always feel like it's more comfortable for me, and I hope it's more comfortable for the client for me to bring that up.

Brian: You may be doing it right, and I'm doing it wrong. I'm just thinking about what I do. I definitely remind them that the next one is the last one that we have scheduled, and then I don't typically bring it up until the end of that session, until the end of the last session. That seems to work okay, as well. I don't see much difference. I think they either know one way or the other whether they're thinking, "Oh. I definitely want to continue this or I don't." I think it's pretty binary, and I don't think there's anything I could do. I think it's important to know, I don't think there's hardly anything I could do to sway them to say... Unless I had another package, particularly, like a high-performance pattern. You'd need to bring that up beforehand.

Chad: It sounds like we handle it in similar ways which is give them a notice. Part of what you want to tell them before the last session is you may have your calendar off or they may have theirs off. That's really awkward. I've had that happen before where I'm thinking it's our last session, and they're like, "No. We've got one more," or they thought it was the last one, and on my calendar, I thought we had one more. It's not the topic of the last session. We talk about the last five minutes. We talk about even as the session ends, we may even extend beyond the hour a little bit. What I like to do is give people options, and I call it today is our last session. So, my default setting is we're done after this unless you want to renew or unless you want to go on a maintenance plan. Now people have options. To end means you could start back in a year, you could start back in six months.

That's great, and sometimes that feels more like a see you later versus a goodbye, but people oftentimes are really interested in coaching once a month on a maintenance plan or on an as-needed basis, more that kind of maintenance plan. If we've done 10 sessions over 5 months, gosh, I'm perfectly open to doing that. Part of that is, I think you and I both have this kind of agrarian mindset, Brian, of there's a productive harvest kind of season, and then there's a fallow, give it a rest season. I just tend to think that's a good way to go through life is getting coaching, motivated, moving forward, setting goals, reaching goals, and then maybe just living into those goals for a while. That might mean we take a break from coaching so you can come back and be more productive later.

Brian: What I heard interesting too there was the difference between, you may have to do this depending on how you're wired as a coach, you said I may have my calendar wrong. On the Myers-

Briggs, I'm a strong J, and my first thought was, "I don't have my calendar wrong. I know exactly what session this is whether I'm the coach or the client. As a strong P, you may not know, and that's okay. So, you have a different sense about how to approach that. So, I know the first paying client I ever had, I got to the sixth session, at the end I brought it up, and I was too emotionally attached. It was fine, but I think you've got to go in with the assumption that it's probably a good idea we take a break. If you don't want to, that's fine, but what we agreed upon was the six sessions. I had a chiropractor that there wasn't an amount of sessions, and for months, he'd say, "I think one more, and that'll do it."

Chad: You don't want to be that guy.

Brian: No, no, no, no. I finally just stopped making appointments.

Chad: You know, one of my favorite, I don't know if it's a Roman god or a Greek god, but the god Janus is the Roman god of passageways, doorways, hallways. I think coaches would be wise to have Janus as kind of our representative here. We want to embody that in terms of clients don't know how to enter into and exit the coaching relationship, and so what we want to do is have the keys to that. We want to help them through those passageways, those doorways. We need to handle that in a way that makes it comfortable for them, and to me, that's what it means to end well is when we come to the end of the contract, to be able to communicate that clearly, to be okay with it, to reduce the awkwardness of it. If you haven't thought about it beforehand, you're going to make it awkward. I think that's human nature.

Brian: I think the number one thing, depending how new a coach you are, how many clients you have... You and I both know people who have a ton of clients, and when somebody ends with them, they think, "That's it. I'll never replace that client. It's over," and it's not. It's not over. You're going to get another client. It's going to be okay.

Chad: That's right, and you might get that client, but not if you make it weird. Your goal isn't to get or keep a client. Your goal is to help people. So, help them end well, and people do business with those they know, like, and trust. They're going to feel comfortable coming back to you versus if you make it weird like you're trying to hold on to them. They're never going to come back because they know if they work with you again, you're not going to let go again. Make it okay.

Brian: So, let's move on and talk about this Kairos moment. Kairos meaning just a sense of what's going on in the moment. For me, at my end, if there's six sessions, I might have this feeling of this needs to go longer, or not. I also probably need to think about, because there's some organizations where I coach people outside those organizations, or for a limited time, and I probably need to start earlier so they have a sense of how they could continue if they wanted to because they didn't set it up, so I think that in a business sense, there could be some wisdom to that. You talked about the length. I have a couple people that I've coached for five years. Once a month, probably not steady once a month, but consistently for five years, and you're right, there's a sense of they aren't thinking this is a sprint. It's a different kind of relationship, and I think one thing to note is, that's okay. They appreciate what it is, I think. Although, like you said, I'm agrarian. I want to see fruit. I want to see harvest, and I wonder if it's not time for a different coach or a fallow ground. I'm not sure about that. What would be some signs to you, some indications, of a Kairos at the end of a relationship.

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Chad: I think one is that they've reached a goal or had a harvest of some significance. So, they've had a big breakthrough, they've had a transformation, they've had a big mindset shift, and they have begun to live into that. They've found a new rhythm, a new set of habits, those sorts of things. By the way, I want to be clear that I'm not saying, once someone has a big breakthrough, stop coaching them. That's the worst thing you could do. If they have a big breakthrough, they have to operationalize the breakthrough and have it become a new normal in their life, but once it becomes their new normal, that may be a great time to say, "Let's take a pause for a while. It seems like you've got this. Let's move out of the way here. Let's let you do it instead of doing coaching around it." The other would be if a person has come into a coaching relationship, and they've had a very specific goal throughout the relationship. So, if they come in wanting to write a book, once the book is written, and it's out there, that's probably a good time to see if it's time to end the coaching relationship. If you're a health and wellness coach, and your client wants to, I don't know, lose a certain amount of weight, or train for a triathlon, whatever, when they reach that big goal, that's a good time to sit back and say, "Now what's next?"

Brian: Yeah. As I've listened to you, I think something that I hear, a Kairos moment for me is, I don't know if this is the right wording, but when something becomes operational. So, they couldn't figure out how to get started, but now they're started, and they're firing on all cylinders, and this has happened to me, even as a client, that I've got a coaching session coming up, and I've even called my coach and said, "I just need to work that hour. I know what I need to do, and I need the hour to work." That's a Kairos that they may just be operationally set for the time. I think what I might do, in that case, if we still had some sessions left, is I might say what would make sense to put an appointment out there so that we have one scheduled? We might need to skip a month to give you a chance to harvest this crop that you're taking in.

Chad: Yeah. I think that's right, and I think sometimes a sign of that is that they come to the session without a clear focus, not sure what to talk about, maybe talking about the thing they've already talked about three times even though it's working for them. By the way, that's an important caveat, "Even though it's working for them," not that they brought the same thing three times in a row that's not yet working. That means they need coaching.

Brian: I was thinking too about a recent client. I've coached him for quite a while, and I don't know whether he's going to renew, and there's a little bit of a Kairos that he's coached with me enough, he's also been trained as a coach, and he made the observation that he doesn't need maybe coached around the smaller things because he does that himself now. He's been a coach long enough, he has the training, he coaches himself, but it's really good to talk to me about the big thing. So, as long as there are some big things, that's great, but otherwise, it could be time for some fallow ground.

Chad: And you know, I've talked to enough coaches, and I'll tell you, I've really experienced great coaches, people I respect, and there are two mindsets about this. I know some coaches are of the mindset that a person always needs a coach because there's always something. On one hand, I kind of get that, but on the other hand, I don't think that's the way I operate. I know not everybody always needs a coach, and I also wonder if everybody always needs a coach is a bit too self-serving. That seems like the kind of thing a coach would say since coaches want to coach, but I want to make space for

people... If you're a coach, you're listening to this podcast, you think, "Gosh. I find that we never run out of things to talk about. They're always getting traction. They're always moving forward," that's great. Good. I really mean that. Good for you. Good for your clients, but others of us, it's more a rhythm, kind of seasonal, and so we need to be able to end well.

Brian: True for me. I'd say, maybe, you need to know your own rhythm. Every quarter probably, I think about what's next and figuring out how I'm going to accomplish things over the next quarter. There's at least a couple months where I just need time to operate, to take action. So, let's do one more thing here, Chad. Let's list 23 things that you could do to not make you or the client feel bad about ending the relationship. We're not going to do 23. I was just trying to give you a number that...

Chad: We could shrink that to two or three.

Brian: Okay.

Chad: One thing is to celebrate, and invest the final 5, 10 minutes saying, "What stands out to you?" By the way, I've heard people do this awkward, badly, it's a euphemism for "tell me how great I am," that's not the way to do this celebration. You want to celebrate what the client has accomplished, but that's a great way to make it less awkward. This is not like some kind of memorial service for our coaching relationship. This is a celebration of everything that came out of it. That's one way. A second idea kind of pings off of the celebration, is to ask for a testimonial. You know, "I've enjoyed coaching you. I would enjoy coaching more people like you, and one thing you could do to help me have that opportunity is to write a short testimonial," and just ask for it. You might even offer to write it for them, but then, edit what you write. Clients sometimes want to help, and the only way they know to help is to continue being your client, but if that season is over, writing a testimonial, offering a testimony, gives them a chance to be of help, and people like to be generous.

Brian: You said, "You could write it for them," which I'm assuming several of our listeners just gasped. Gasped, can't say that very well. You can't write a testimonial for someone. Actually, that's kind of a best practice in a lot of ways because if you ask people to write a testimonial, they write way too much, and you're looking for a sentence or two, so if you can give them a structure which they can then tweak, they really appreciate it because they don't even know what to do there.

Chad: It's like someone who says, "Can you write a reference letter for me?" If I really want to write a reference letter, the biggest hang up is doing the writing. I want to give you a good reference, but what do I say? So, as the coach, when we say I'll write it for you, and you can tweak it, you can edit it, man, that is such a gift to the client because they get to do what they want to do which is give a testimonial. They don't have to do the part they don't want to do which is actually come up with what to say.

Brian: Another thing I might do at the end of the session, end of the relationship, is tell them some great things I've observed about them. You've got to be careful with that, I think, but I think another thing is to celebrate not just what's been accomplished but the partnership and just note of how much I've enjoyed this relationship, and I don't want to lie. I've learned a lot, I've just enjoyed... And I'll miss it. I think that's a grieving piece. It's not a make you feel guilty. I've so much enjoyed hanging out with you

and listening to what you're trying to accomplish. I'm going to miss that. Something that I have never been able to do that maybe we ought to do is ask for referrals.

Chad: Yeah. Coaches who really do have a full book of business, are good at this. Again, you want to do it in a way that it's not awkward for you or for the person. Even just rehearsing how would I say that? How would I ask for a referral? The more weird you feel saying it, the more awkward it is for the client, so you want to ask with confidence. One of the things I think coaches do well throughout the coaching relationship is we just make things okay, just from our presence. We make it okay. Whatever's happening right now is okay, including asking for a referral. So, practice how you want to say that. Practice having the confidence to say it. Don't be spitting the words out as you come up with them, like I am right now trying to say this, but make it easy for the client by being ready.

Brian: I just recently had blood taken, and the nurse was asking about... She said it was her first time, and it was not her first time. I knew it wasn't her first time. Clearly, it wasn't her first time, and she said, "I tell new nurses, 'You go in there like you've done it for years because the last thing your patient wants is to think you are unsure about this,'" and I would say, it's almost surprising to me, that if you want to ask for referrals, just ask with confidence and like you're going to treat them with care. If you're going to hem-haw, don't even ask because you're messing around with somebody's vein there, and you're going to poke it wrong. It's going to hurt.

Chad: Let me stab it again. No, please don't, don't.

Brian: Alright, man. We thank you so much. We thank you listeners so much for joining us, and we enjoy making these podcasts, and we've heard from several of you that really enjoy listening to them. We appreciate that feedback a lot. If you don't want to miss any of our podcasts, I invite you to subscribe to our podcast at iTunes or at Google Play because if you subscribe, there's no way you'll miss next week's where I'll be interviewing pastor Joel Oliver about coaching when you're the leader. We have a lot of people asking about, "How do I coach when I am the leader?" I'm really excited about that conversation. 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 will see you next week.

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