



Coach Approach Ministries Podcast

Episode 64: Coaching Strengths More Effectively

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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 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 world traveler, executive director of Coach Approach Ministries, Mr. Bill Copper. How you doing, Bill?

Bill Copper: What do you say, Brian? Great to connect with you again. It's been just a little while. I've been here and there.

Brian: Here and there. You've been, well... I guess if you call Moscow, and Singapore, and Rome here and there. I would say you have been here and there.

Bill: You left off a few, but yeah, it's been quite a whirlwind, but it's good to be back in the saddle and talking with you today.

Brian: London, Paris, Sydney. I followed it, man. I was living vicariously through your photos. It was wonderful.

Bill: It was quite a trip. Fairly quick, 16 days, to go all the way around the world and try to see some of the different places around the world that you've heard of all your life. It felt like a whirlwind but really fascinating.

Brian: I told people you did it in a hot air balloon. I think about half of them said, "Yeah. He would. It sounds like that."

Bill: I think that would take 80 days, though. Unless I had good internet connection, I'm not sure I could function.

Brian: True. What was the most remarkable thing you noticed on your trip? Because you've traveled

before, but what kind of surprised you this trip?

Bill: I think it was the lack of remarkability. I have traveled quite a bit, not as much internationally, but we went to a lot of places this time. We went to Oslo, and Paris, and Rome, and Moscow, and Delhi, India, and Wellington, and Honolulu before coming home, and I think the thing that surprised me the most was there wasn't that much of a difference in all of those places. People are people. People were gracious. People were helpful. People were going about their lives, and they were laughing, and they were shopping. They were doing all the things that we were doing. Maybe with the exception of India, which was an outlier in that, you probably could have dropped me in any of those cities, and unless I could read the street signs, I probably couldn't have told you which city I was in. There's so much similarity. Some obvious differences in each one that made them unique and gave them each character which was fascinating, but I think I was really struck by how everybody's the same, all over people are people.

Brian: That's a good word even as we think about the world being in some chaos. The good news is, people are people, and they want a good life, and they want to live. They want to be happy, and that's going to be helpful to us in the long run.

Bill: Yeah. I also found that, probably, as an American traveling in some of those countries, I think I had maybe some expectation about how I would, or our country would, be perceived, and I found that it just wasn't the case.

Brian: That's good news.

Bill: Everybody was very gracious. It was kind of cool.

Brian: So, today is our challenge podcast. Once a month, we do a challenge to get people to take an extra step, not just informative, but try to make a move, and this month's challenge is coaching strengths more effectively, and I brought on Bill Copper because not only is he a knowledgeable coach, but he is a Gallup-certified strengths coach. So, we have an expert in the house. Bill, what is the principle around coaching around strengths?

Bill: Great question, and I do spend a lot of time in this area of strengths because I think it fits well with coaching. I guess what I like about the concept of coaching around strengths and focusing on strengths is that it really does place an emphasis on what we already do well. In other words, the things that we just naturally are good at, and not just okay at, but things that are strengths of ours without really thinking about it, without putting much effort into it. If you think about so much of our effort about developing ourselves, a lot of leadership development, a lot of management, is focused on finding your weaknesses and trying to fix those.

It's finding what you don't do well and trying to do them better. There's some things we have to, some basic skills we have to develop and so forth, but boy, so much of what we do is spending a lot of time, resources, energy, emotion onto trying to shore up weaknesses, and maybe, maybe at best, we'll get to neutral on those. We won't completely suck at them. If we put a lot of effort, we can get to neutral, but focusing on strengths, we're already doing very well in those areas, maybe without even noticing or trying. So, when we focus on doing those things, if we actually try, if we actually were intentional about developing, and focusing, and centering on our strengths, then there's a whole lot more room for

growth, a whole lot more room for success in those areas than in pouring everything into our weaknesses and trying our best to fix those. I actually think there's a biblical principle where we talk about the body and how God equips the body. He gives us certain strengths, and gifts, and abilities, and all those things in order to do things well that he's gifted us at, and the bible tells us he's gifted somebody else to do those other things, and I think all of that kind of ties together that if we can focus, whether it's in our coaching, or in our management, or in our lives, if we can focus on the things that we naturally do well, it recognizes this is how God created me. It recognizes these are the things that I just do naturally, that I love to do, typically, and so, if I can focus on doing those even better, man, you can really soar with those as opposed to the norm, which is focusing on fixing what's wrong.

Brian: Yeah, so two things there too. We can, as individuals, we can lean into what we do well. I think a lot of times our strengths are what we enjoy doing. I'm sure there are things that we aren't good at that we enjoy doing, but it allows us to really focus in on what we do well, how we can show up best. Then, it also shows us how to work with others best, to let them work with their strengths, and identify their strengths, and let them do what they're good at.

Bill: You know, something you said just triggered something for me that's kind of a, I won't say it's a pet peeve, but maybe it is for me and my coaching, and that is that the things that we do well are things that we enjoy. They're things that we enjoy doing because we do them well, and somehow, maybe particularly for the church, we've told the lie that if we're only doing those things that we enjoy, that's somehow selfish, or that's somehow not as honorable a service as if we're sacrificing, or suffering, or doing things that we just don't really like as if our highest service to the creator, who made us, is to ignore how he made us and act in other ways rather than recognizing, leveraging, putting into use the preferences, and the talents, and things that he gave us and using those in service to him as opposed to struggling over here in these areas that we just can't stand. I don't believe the lie that the struggling, the suffering, the sacrificing is the higher caller. Are there things that need to be done? Certainly, but as I said, the biblical principle is he's gifted and equipped somebody to do that, somebody in the body, and when we're doing things outside of our creation, outside of our design, we're not only not doing it well, we're not liking it, we're also taking away someone else's opportunity.

Brian: Another glance at that, that you pointed out to me, is that we sometimes think that because it's so easy for us to work in our strengths, that anybody could do it, and therefore, I ought to do something else. If anybody could do this, I ought to find a way to pull more weight, and that's just a blind spot, a lack of awareness that no, we are particularly good at this, and we should be doing it because it's easy.

Bill: Exactly right.

Brian: So, let's take a look. How would you begin to coach strengths, then? That's the principle of coaching strengths. What would be a couple steps you would take to coach someone through strengths?

Bill: I always start with kind of identifying strengths. Something you just said triggered that in me. We do them well and think that's no big deal, and that's one of the ways to identify what our strengths are, to take those things that we do well that we don't think is any big deal, and the reason we don't think they're any big deal is they just come naturally to us. We don't have to put much effort into it. There can be a lot of coaching around identifying what our strengths are because we don't necessarily identify them ourselves as strengths. They're just who we are. A lot of times, we can do some coaching around

identifying those things, and there are a number of ways to do that. You mentioned introducing the topic today that I was a Gallup-certified strengths coach, and one of the really popular ways to identify strengths are through the Strengths Finder assessments. Most people probably have heard of those, and I certainly believe that there's a lot of valuable information that can come from that, and I'll say that when I took those assessments, I was somewhat surprised by some of what came out because for them to identify something as a strength of mine that, to me, seemed no big deal. That opened my eyes to say, oh, the reason I think that's no big deal is because it's a strength of mine. So, one way to help people identify what their strengths are is to use some kind of assessment.

Strengths Finder is one. There are other ways to get at that in terms of assessments. A couple of other ways that I have found helpful, and a coach really helped me with this some years back, and that is to find those things that frustrate you about someone else, and oftentimes, the things that frustrate you about someone else, what's behind that frustration is it's so easy for you that you can't imagine someone else can't do it. Therefore, it must be that they won't do it. That came home to me in a coaching conversation. I was in church administration, and I know this will come as a shock to you, and most folks, but I wasn't always on the same page with the youth minister in the church. I know, you're shocked.

Brian: I was going to say the worship minister.

Bill: No, the youth guy was brilliant at what he was brilliant at and just awful at what he was awful at. The things he was awful at were the things I was brilliant at, and so, things like accounting for all the money, getting people registered and signed up, crossing all the t's and dotting all the i's before you headed off on a mission trip. All those administrative-type things. Keeping up with receipts, all those kind of things. He was just terrible. Not just terrible, didn't seem to care all that much that he was terrible. So, from my perspective, it couldn't have been that he couldn't do it because who couldn't do that? Who couldn't keep up with receipts for crying out loud? What my coach helped me see was the reason that you think that is because it's a strength of yours. It's not for everybody. It's not a strength of everyone, and what I had allowed myself to believe about this person was not that he couldn't do it but that he wouldn't do it. It led to so much frustration.

Sometimes the things in others that frustrate you are often a sign that it's a strength of yours. You can't imagine that someone else can't do it so easily. I think some other ways to find out what your strengths are is to find out from others what they think. Again, because it comes so naturally to you, you don't think of it as a strength, but when you ask others, and they tell you, particularly when they tell you, and you think, "Aw. Come on. What are you talking about?" That's probably a good sign that it's a strength because you don't recognize it. I remember that when we first were forming Coach Approach Ministries, we did a lot of exercises, team building type stuff, and one of the things we did was we would recognize in others, "Here's some areas of strength that I recognize in you, and here's why, and here are some examples of that," and I remember hearing some of those things from my colleagues and thinking, "Come on. You think that's a strength? Everybody can do that," and it really was an eye opener for me that the things that others see in you that they consider strengths and you don't, that's probably a good sign that it is.

Brian: What are some things that your colleagues saw in you?

Bill: Well, there was an organization. There was a following up on details. There was a pushing back against ideas. I can remember some of those folks, their ideation was off the chart. They had a new idea, a new vision, new something all the time, and my strength in that was to go, "Hold on a minute. Let's see how this will work." Now, I wasn't one who came up with ideas. That wasn't my strength. In fact, I fought against that for a long time because I thought all the cool kids had ideas. I didn't. What my colleagues said was, "There is nobody who takes an idea and makes it happen like you do," and I thought, "Yeah right. What are you talking about?" The truth is, that is a strength. Those were some areas of strength that I had that I didn't recognize because it just came natural to me. People who are listening to this, or your clients as you're coaching them, one way to help them identify areas of strength is to find out from others, "What do you see in this person that maybe they don't see, that they think is no big deal?"

Brian: I saw that happen to me. I was working with another guy on a project, and as far as laying out how the project needed to go ahead, I could sit down and just write that all out, the strategy of it. I had it all figured out. Then we were doing things like we've got to find a meeting room, and we've got to do a little research, and we've got to book this thing. I've got to do my part, so I would say, "You know what, I'll do that," and he would say, "Okay," and I wouldn't get it done, and then he'd say, "You know, I can take care of that," and he'd have it done in an hour. It's really easy to look at that and say there's something wrong with me, but the thing I brought well was the strategy, and I was all over it, and he's good at the execution. He could have it done in 15 minutes if I let him do it.

Bill: This is just a little bit of a tangent, but one of the ways to really leverage that in a team environment is for the team to recognize, and value, and honor all of those. I think sometimes we tend, maybe you tend to, like you said, I want to do my part and get all the stuff done because you wanted to contribute, you wanted to play, you wanted to show that you could do it. Kind of the same for me. I wanted to participate in the ideas because I thought those are the things that people really value, and I just sucked at it. What my team members did is they really valued that execution part. They went out of their way to say, "Man, that is so important for us." So, when you tend to be strong at things that are not the headlines, that don't get top billing, it's important for the team to really value, honor, and recognize that contribution as well.

Brian: That's good. So, identification of strengths. That'd be the first thing you'd do in coaching is help people identify the strengths on their own, of people around them. What's another thing you would do?

Bill: I think the next area is to try to select, once you kind of understand, "Hey. Here are the strengths that I have," is to select one or two of those and learn how to develop those. Strengths it's like a muscle. You can build them. In fact, as I said at the beginning, I think that developing those muscles bear much more fruit than those where you're just so weak at. Don't spend time focusing on areas where you're weak. If instead, you focused on I'm really good at this particular skill, you'll get better at it. What you find is there's much more room to grow in those areas. You get much more success in growing in those areas than in trying to fix those that are wrong. So, I think the next area of coaching in strengths, after you have identified what they are is to identify which one or two you want to develop. How do I get better at this? Then look for solutions, strategies, resources, so forth to help you get better at those things you're already naturally good at. Now you begin to put some intentional focus on them, and you find yourself really growing.

Brian: Build those muscles, and what was coming to my mind was also learning to look for when it's not your strength of how to pass that off, how to ask for help. So, building your muscles and also learning not to fall back on things you're not strong at.

Bill: Yeah, and it kind of flows into the next area of when you're coaching someone, what else do you do with strengths, and that is the application of those strengths. Not only do you identify, here are my strengths, I get clear on that. I've done some things to help build some of those strengths, so I can get better and better at it. The third area is, the next area is, how do I apply those strengths in what I'm doing, in my situation, in my current role. This is one of my favorite areas of coaching around strengths because I find that maybe particularly administrative, but maybe not, maybe it's everywhere, we tend to accomplish our goals, or our assignments, or our roles, in ways that the last person did or in ways that are expected, using the same skillset, the same methodologies, and we get trapped in them because it's not who we are, it's not one of our strengths. One of my favorite things to do is to help people, once they've identified, this is a strength, I'm good at this is to then help them figure out, how do you apply that strength to getting accomplished what you want to get accomplished? How do you make application of what you're good at to accomplish this goal, or this task, rather than the way you're doing it now. One of my favorite examples of that is serving a couple of different pastors who, part of their role, both of them's role, was to provide pastoral care for the church, pretty typical. One of those pastors, he sat by the bedside and held the hand of everybody who was... He would drive three hours to be at the hospital if you were having hangnail surgery, and sit there, and drive three hours back. He loved it. It filled him up. He was energized by it. It was his strength, and that church would say, "We've never had better pastoral care than when he was our pastor." Another pastor I served whose responsibility also was to provide pastoral care, the church was located about a block and half from the local regional hospital, and he never darkened the doors of the hospital, and that church said, "Man, we never had better pastoral care than when he was the pastor," and the reason is, he used his strengths of organizing a vast team of pastoral care givers. He recruited them, he trained them, he sent them out, and Brian, if you sneezed in church on Sunday morning, three people visited you that afternoon to see if you were okay. They were great at it, and both those pastors accomplished their job using their strengths. Now, if either of them had to accomplish that same role doing what the other did, it would drain them. They would feel no energy. They wouldn't be very good at it, and it would fail. So, what I loved doing is helping people who are accomplishing a role or a task in a way that doesn't fit their strengths and helping them figure out how can you do that same thing using your strengths, out of how God created you to be. Sometimes it's just giving them permission to do that as a God-honoring way to act. Also, helping them figure out strategies for, "Oh. If I use this strength, and if I used that strength and used it in this way, I could get it accomplished, and rather than feel burned out, I'll feel energized, and I'll have better results from it. So, there's just so many ways to leverage this concept of strengths in our coaching. We can help people identify them. We can help people really develop those muscles. Then, we help people apply those strengths in a way that makes sense for helping people accomplish what they have to accomplish, and I don't think there's a more satisfying coaching relationship, that I've had, than those where I've helped people begin to live out of those strengths that God's granted.

Brian: Bill, I sure appreciate your time pouring into coaches how they can coach around strengths better, and thanks so much for the listeners joining us. 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. Next week, I will be talking to Mark

Deterding, who has built a strong leadership coaching practice. I'm really looking forward to that. This podcast was sponsored by our certificate in Christian leadership coaching. 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 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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