



Coach Approach Ministries Podcast

Episode 71 : Coaching Physicians

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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 the first of the year, 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 pastor Ken Jones. I was interested in talking with Ken because we've done some work with the Christian Medical and Dental Association, CMDA, and they recommended we have a conversation with Ken. Just to set this up, Ken has pastored for the last 49 years, still is on staff at a church and doing some work with specific service out of that church. He's written three books, working on the fourth. His wife hopes he finishes it very soon. She's tired of him writing the fourth book, and he's a PCC certified coach with the International Coaching Federation, and his specialty is coaching doctors. Welcome to the podcast, Ken.

Ken Jones: Thanks Brian. I heard you many times, and I always find your podcast great. So, it's a privilege, really, to be joining you.

Brian: Goodness. I really admire your ability to discern a good podcast when you hear it. So, we talked about a topic here today, the ins and outs of coaching physicians, and the first question I asked you as we got to know each other, Ken, is are you a physician?

Ken: No, I'm not a physician. I don't even like to go to the doctor, and I spend hours every week coaching doctors.

Brian: Gotcha. So, where did that start at? How did that come about?

Ken: It's been about 16 years ago, now. I went to a new doctor for a physical exam. I had a bunch of tests that were done, and my wife wanted me to have this physical finished. So, I went to get the results

[Transcribed by Alyssa Miller](#)

with this new doctor, and he probably spent 10 or 15 minutes with me talking, “You’re in great shape. Don’t worry about your health,” and as we talked, just sat talking, really, not about my health at all, just kind of visiting, he said, “What do you do on Wednesday afternoons?” I said, “I work. I’m a pastor.” He said, “Well, I get off on noon on Wednesdays. Could you come to my house on Wednesday at one o’ clock?” I said, “Yeah. I guess so.” He said, “Oh great.” He took out his prescription pad, and he wrote down his home address and his cell phone number down, and gave it to me, and said, “Okay. I’ll see you on Wednesday.” So, that evening, I went home, and my wife said, “Did you go to the doctor today,” and I said, “Yes,” and she said, “What did he say?” “He said he wants me to come to his house next Wednesday,” and she said, “What for,” and I said, “I don’t know, he didn’t say.”

So, the following Wednesday at one o’ clock, I went to his house, and he said, “Yeah, Ken. Come on back. I’ve got some lemonade here, and we’ll sit on the pool,” and we talked for an hour and fifteen minutes or an hour and a half, something like that. He said, “Well, I got to go get my girls from school, got to go pick them up. Can you come back next Wednesday?” “Yeah, I guess so.” So, I came back the following Wednesday, and the following Wednesday, and the following Wednesday, and all we did was talk. At least I thought that’s what we were doing. It was just a visit. He didn’t come to my church. I had no doctors in my church, but he had a 50th birthday party that he sent an invitation for my wife and I to attend. When we went to his party, he came over.

There were about 80 or 90 doctors there, it was a huge deal, and he came over as we were sitting at a long table and said to the docs that we were sitting with, and we were just visiting with them, and he said, “Did you guys meet Ken and Randy?” They said, “Yeah, we’re just sitting here talking,” and he said, “Ken is my mentor.” Then, he turned and went to get something to drink. I leaned over to my wife and said, “I had no idea he thought I was his mentor.” A couple of weeks later, he and I were having coffee together, and I said to him, “Hey, you know, when you introduced me as your mentor to all those doctors, I had no idea you thought I was your mentor.” He said, “You are a life coach. It’s who you are. That’s what you do, and it’s what you should be doing if you feel God calling you to that. My wife and I,” she’s a doc to, “My wife and I are prepared to help support you if you feel like this is what God wants you to do.

Brian: I didn’t even know that’s what I was doing.

Ken: I said to him at that point, “What is a life coach?” I had never heard the term, Brian. I’d never read a book on it. I knew nothing about life coaching.

Brian: What year is this, Ken?

Ken: That would have been 15 or 16 years ago.

Brian: That’s about the beginning of coaching, late ‘90s, early 2000s. What you’re saying is interesting. The most successful coaches I’ve talked to, and I’ve talked to several at this point, they just tell stories like this where people want to be around them. Whether it’s in business, or in this case, medical field, there’s something about them that’s just helpful to be around. They aren’t doing coaching. They are being a coach, or they are being a wonderful human being. There’s a lot to be said about coaching is just

to show up well, to be the kind of person that people want to be around.

Ken: I think, obviously in the area of Christian coaching, the two great assets that are indispensable, love God and love people. If you love God and you love people, those are two incredibly important things that you have to possess if you're going to be effective as a Christian coach. I believe, in terms of the niche idea, Brian, God has given me an extraordinary love for doctors. I love doctors, and I tell doctors, whether I'm teaching them coaching or I'm coaching them personally, "I love doctors." The Lord has just given me a heart for doctors, and doctors don't have a lot of people who love them, quite honestly.

Brian: They definitely have to set up boundaries because I know there was a physician I had invited to our church, and I think he really wanted to come, but his nurse even told me, "He doctors everyone at your church, and there's no way he'll be able to just worship because everybody will want a piece of him, and it won't be possible." That's for sure.

Ken: I hear that a lot.

Brian: Oh my goodness. They need somebody to talk to, and you're set aside for them to talk to. Let me ask you, and I don't know if you know the answer to this question, just made me curious, when you were just having conversations by the pool, before you knew you were his mentor or his life coach, what was the percentage of conversation? The percentage of where you talked, the percentage of where he talked. Were you pouring into his life as a mentor might? Was he asking you questions or were you asking questions? That's not a trick question. As a coach, we ask more questions, but that first, initial time together that kind of showed him you're a life coach, what did those conversations look like?

Ken: I probably would differentiate, in terms of what I think is the crux of your question. When I was in his office, in that first encounter, I think I did most of the talking, and then he said, "Could you come to my house?" When we sat around the pool, as I reflect back, I think he did most of the talking, and I was asking questions, but I didn't really realize what I was doing. It just seemed natural to me.

Brian: So, you were even saying, before we started recording, that physicians... You're not a physician. You don't even like going to the doctor. You certainly are not any more familiar with doctors, except you've coached a lot of them at this point, and you even mentioned in a niche, I want to point that out, it's almost better if you don't have much expertise.

Ken: It sure helps in terms of staying in a coaching mode. In the early days of my coaching, the doc that really helped me get going told me that he had a patient that he thought really would benefit from coaching. Would I be willing to talk to her? I said sure. He said, "Well, she raises Arabian horses for a living. That's what she does." I met with her, and we coached probably for six or nine months, and she had this Arabian horse business, and I know nothing about horses. So, I think that reality... I think it's better, really, if you don't have a clue about the business that they're in, and it keeps you in that mode of being dumb as a rock when it comes to what they're all about in terms of their business, but you can be an effective coach just the same.

Brian: I wasn't going to say dumb as a rock. I was going to finish that sentence with a curious listener. It

makes be an effective listener because I don't know anything. I can't speak from my own knowledge, so I have to be listening carefully to what they're saying. People say a lot that they don't know they're saying, and being able to reflect that back can, at times, just be tremendously powerful.

Ken: Along that line, Brian, in Christian coaching in particular, when people find out that I have a pastor's background, they want to move into, sometimes, pastoral counseling and will ask questions of me, and what do I think? I do my very best to, when I'm wearing my coach hat, I keep in my coaching mode as much as I possibly can, and one of the illustrations is when people feel spiritually lost, they have this question they can't answer, which direction should they go? I often say, it seems incongruous to me that God would go through the extraordinary measure to send his son, Jesus, to die on the cross in order that we might be in relationship with him, and then make following that plan that he has so difficult we can't figure it out. You can trust God's leading and direction. When he wants to be heard, he will be heard. That's very helpful. I don't have to tell people the direction that God put in their lives is because I don't know what the direction is, and to stay in that boat of discovery and listening critically, as earnestly as I can, to not only what is being said but what isn't being said.

Brian: What I heard you just do is a concise message which was true. I tell people all the time in training that you can use concise messages, direct messages, all day as long as it's true, but as soon as you start setting direction or solutions, then you are failing. So, you are saying there are some things you can speak into their life that are pithy, basic truths, and that's been effective for you.

Ken: Well, I hope so.

Brian: I'm sure it has.

Ken: Doctors, they have a hold on me, so yeah.

Brian: I'm sure it has. So, what are... Maintaining confidentiality, that's just got to be a given in all coaching enough docs at this point that I would think you might be able to tell us. What are three, four, five topics that come up a lot with docs?

Ken: Well, burnout right now is huge with doctors and trying to coach through what we would call life-balance issues. Some docs really want to work on the spiritual side of their lives, and they're not necessarily close to their pastors, most of them, for the exact reasons that you've already outlined. So, I think the healthcare system and what it's like is pretty chaotic, but it's all over the page. It literally is all over the page. I have one doc, I have permission to share this story, who his practice was in Joplin, MO. He and his wife were both physicians. They've written about this experience and shared it, and I've used it in teaching. Several years ago, when that tornado came through Joplin...

Brian: Oh yeah. I remember.

Ken: We were supposed to have a coaching call that evening, and I heard that this tornado had gone through Joplin, and he didn't call at his appointed time. I was very nervous, and I kept telling my wife I hope he's alright. Finally, 45 minutes late, he called, and I could hear the chaos in the background. He said, "We just got the last patients out of the hospital, and the hospital is not usable. It's gone. Total

loss. My practice is gone. The building where my practice was is gone, and my wife and I own a separate building that is a medical building. It's a concrete pad. There's nothing there." I was just overwhelmed with the responsibility in saying, "What will you do?" He said, "I don't have any idea." There are so many times when the docs that I'm trying to coach, not quite that dramatic, but many times, they've had horrendous transitions, other things. There are great needs within the medical community, and institutions like Harvard Medical School are sponsoring now huge conferences in the fall with McLean Hospital. I was there last year. I think they had 1,200 people there, coaches and clinicians who were learning about coaching, cutting edge programs that have been set up that are teaching coaching to doctors because coaching now, as a skill, is producing huge dividends for the doctors as they work with their patients.

Brian: Doctors are learning coaching?

Ken: Correct. In fact, at the Christian Medical and Dental Association, where I serve as the director of coach training, we have our engagement with CAM. It's been a wonderful thing to have the long-term relationship with coach approach ministries that we have to develop programs that are doctor-specific for coaching and teaching basic coaching skills to physicians who will then take it back into their practice and work with patients and coaching patients on life change issues. It's been very, very effective.

Brian: And I've experienced this enough to know. Docs are not trained to be coaches. They're trained to be tellers. Diagnostic, and here's the prescription. Those are their major tools. What have you seen also to be some of the obstacles for doctors becoming coaches?

Ken: Well, that is the huge one because as you know, if you're coaching someone, you're not the expert in the room. The person you're coaching is the expert. Every doctor in the country is the expert on the appointment. So, they're used to being the expert. That's an interesting dynamic, Brian, because as clients, doctors are perfect. They are perfect clients when it comes to coaching because they get to be the expert. I don't know anything about medicine, and I let them be the expert on their life. Since they're used to being the expert, it works. The other side of that teeter-totter is whenever they come in to a coach training program, it's hysterical sometimes. Two doctors, one is going to be coached, and they're doing a practice in front of their colleagues. One is trying to coach, and one is being coached, and the juxtaposition there of what's happening, it's really wonderful. I love teaching doctors coaching.

Brian: I remember listening to a doctor doing a practice, and every question she asked was, "Have you ever thought about trying..." Well, all kinds of problems with those kinds of questions. They're not coaching questions. They're doctor questions. You're just trying to encapsulate it in a question, me telling you what I think you ought to do.

Ken: Well, for a doc, the outcome is to diagnose what the problem is, and make a diagnosis, and produce some sort of treatment. So, the goal in coaching is not to make a diagnosis on the part of the coach.

Brian: I would think one of the problems they would have is that because of the healthcare system in its current state, they have even less time with the patient.

Ken: Time constraints are huge. My heart just goes out to them. They are wonderful people. I love working with doctors, and having a place where a doctor can be assured of confidentiality. The docs I coach, no one knows I'm coaching with them, as you might guess, Brian, unless they decide that they want to disclose that. I think they feel safe, and they can be somewhat vulnerable because in the medical field, it is not fashionable to say, "I don't know." They're supposed to know because somebody thinks they need to know. So, when they come face to face with whether it's working with trying to help move a practice... One of the docs I'm working with right now is leaving private practice and going into a large, medical system. What's the difference between those two is huge. So, there's a lot out there.

Brian: How did you get involved with CMDA, and maybe even tell us some of the good things they're doing.

Ken: Well, the doc that told me I was a life coach was a CMDA member, and he met with a group of physicians every month for prayer and just encouragement one time a month, and he asked me if I would come to their morning meeting. So, I did that for three or four months, and they finally came to me one morning, and sat me down, and said, "We think you would be a really good Bay Area director for CMDA," and I didn't know what CMDA was. I'd never even heard of it.

Brian: Yeah. I don't think most people have ever heard of that. Christian Medical and Dental Association.

Ken: That's correct, and they have a presence pretty much on every medical school campus in the country. It's targeted for Christian medical students and doctors. They are extremely active and busy in bioethics. They have a full-time guy in Washington DC who is an effective lobbyist and listens carefully to what's happening on the hill, in terms of laws that are affecting, especially, the bioethics and ethics of medicine from a Christian perspective. They're very active in medical missions around the world and global health outreach. It does some incredible stuff with medical missions around the world and many, many, many other parts of ministry, but those are the big ones.

Brian: If anybody wants to get ahold of you, what would be the best way for them to do that?

Ken: Really the best way to get ahold of me is with my personal email, and I give it out without any problem. My email is kjspens@gmail.com.

Brian: Ken, I appreciate you joining me today.

Ken: Pleasure has been mine, Brian. I love CAM and all you guys who work there. Bill Copper's been a dear friend for a long time, and this is my first chance to get better acquainted with you, but you guys are doing a great job.

Brian: We appreciate it, and thanks to all of you listening today. I hope you enjoyed today's podcast. 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, speaking of Bill Copper, I will be talking to Bill Copper about improving client accountability. 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 the first of the year, so

if you're interested, go to our website at www.coachapproachministries.org/coachnow. We'll see you next week.

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