



Coach Approach Ministries Podcast

Episode 72: Building Better Accountability

Published: November 2, 2017

[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. I'm Brian Miller, Strategic Director for Coach Approach Ministries, CAM for short, and I'm joined here today by my good friend, and the president of Coach Approach Ministries, Mr. Chad Hall. How you doing today, Chad?

Chad Hall: Brian, I am having a very good day, and Brian, I have to say, I am loving November. November is maybe my favorite month.

Brian: Wow. November just got a big star on it. Chad Hall's favorite month.

Chad: I think November probably feels like it just won an Oscar.

Brian: That's impressive. Today, because it's the first Thursday in November, it's our coaching challenge, and our challenge today is to improve your ability to create accountability in your client. Chad, this idea of creating accountability in a client, I think, really sets coaches apart.

Chad: I think so, and I think it's good we have this as a challenge this month because it's challenging. It's challenging because it's easy to underdo accountability. It's easy to overdo accountability or just kind of get it off, but when we do it just right, man, it makes all the difference in the world in coaching. It really adds a ton of value for our clients.

Brian: Well let's get right to it. What is the importance of accountability?

Chad: Well, accountability is important because lots of people come up with lots of good ideas that they never actually take action on. Accountability's important because without accountability, most of the ideas we come up with as clients, most of the things we hear our clients say when we're coaches, they just don't get translated into actual actions that translate into results. They stay at that idea level, and that's not good enough. Ideas don't lead to change or things being different, actions do. Accountability just helps ensure that commitments and actions actually take place.

Brian: I think accountability's got a bad name because it's like, "Who's going to keep you accountable?" Maybe we just get this picture in our head that there's some guy who's just on us, he's a drill sergeant,

[Transcribed by Alyssa Miller](#)

and we're going to be in real trouble if we don't do what we said what we were going to do. Maybe we just try to avoid accountability, or maybe we just try to avoid it because it's now serious. It's one more thing we have to do. It nails us down.

Chad: I think you're right about that. Accountability gets this bad rep because we have this drill sergeant teacher, "Oh, I forgot my homework." That whole idea. The reason it shouldn't show up in coaching is because, as coaches, we really don't care. We don't care if the client does it or doesn't do it, whether they follow through or fall down, really. We're not the ones holding them accountable. The client wants accountability in coaching because whatever it is they say they're going to do is getting them some kind of result that's important to them. They're the ones who really have ownership of the whole process. Accountability is something they want from us, in some way, it's not something we're doing to them. Even in our own minds as coaches, we've got to reorient ourselves with accountability from this bad, nagging drill sergeant math teacher idea into more of a support for our clients, support for them and what they really want out of life, what they want from coaching. Boy, that translates it into something really positive.

Brian: I know as a client, it's my least favorite part of the conversation. I have to stop dreaming, thinking big thoughts, imagining what could be, and I have to write down on paper what I'm going to do and when I'm going to do it. On the other hand, I know in my heart that if I'm going to pay a coach, building accountability has to be one of their strongest skills. Because I'm such a big thinker, I'd rather think than execute.

Chad: Yeah, and accountability really is about turning those ideas into execution so that those ideas get the results that the client wants, and you're right, for some of us, it's a real challenge. The accountability reminds us, oh yeah, I have to do something different than what I'm doing now, and yeah, that's a challenge. It's a struggle, but boy, is it necessary.

Brian: So, what is the basic accountability in coaching?

Chad: I tend to think that there is a basic, built-in accountability in a coaching relationship, and the built-in aspect is that if I tell you, as my coach, that I'm going to do something in order to move forward on whatever the topic is and then we talk again in two weeks. Even if you don't bring it up, there's a built-in accountability for myself because it kind of reminds me, "Oh yeah. This is something that's important to me." If you're going to the doctor, and you get a physical, and they say, "You know, we need to get your cholesterol down, so come back in three months." Knowing you're going to have that check-in in three months, there's an accountability to it even if you're doctor doesn't say, "I'm going to hold you accountable," or anything like that. There's just a natural check-in that's happening in a coaching relationship. Honestly, that's good. It's a good aspect of coaching. It's really not enough. Really good accountability goes way beyond that basic check-in, built-in default kind of accountability.

Brian: Just by the nature of coaching there are, I'm hearing, two layers. One is, they say it out loud to another human being, "Here's what I'm going to do." That is somewhat powerful to announce to anybody. "This is what I'm going to do," and then there is a second piece, I know I'm going to talk to that person again, and he may just ask me about it, which leads me to another question, Chad. As a coach, should you ask if they did what they said they were going to do? Because I know I'm not the person they're accountable to.

Chad: You could be the person who's a part of their accountability, but they're certainly not accountable to you as the coach. They're not accountable in a supervisory kind of way. There are varying opinions of should you ask about actions they've committed to do. One school of thought is, no, it's their stuff. If they want to bring it up, they'll bring it up, and that's good enough. The other school of thought is, yeah, you should bring it up. That's actually a way to demonstrate follow through is by asking the client about the actions they said they were going to do in the previous session. If you want to be a by-the-book person, the International Coaching Federation has this competency called, "Managing Progress and Accountability," and like bullet number two in the description of that particular competency says, "Yeah, you ask about it."

I think what most of us resist is that we're going to ask about it with that drill sergeant math teacher... By the way, I'm just giving all drill sergeants and math teachers a bad name, but they deserve it, so it's okay. We want to avoid being the person who nags them or whatever. So, when we ask about it, when we follow through by asking, we need to be careful we're not doing it in a nagging, you-disappointed-me, any kind of judgmental way, but we're doing it as a servant. You said this was important to you, so I'm asking because you're important to me. A friend would ask you about something you said you were going to do because they're truly curious, not because they want to beat you up because you didn't do it.

Brian: I know I also ask at the beginning how they did since last time because I want to see if the accountability we built last time had worked or not. I want to see if it worked, how well it worked. If it didn't work, we need to address that, maybe up front, but we certainly need to address it at the end of this conversation to see how to build better accountability because not all accountability's equal, and it certainly depends on the client how the accountability's built.

Chad: That's right because if the accountability from last time didn't work, we need to do something different this time, and that's not judgement of the client. It's actually a judgment of the accountability structure that we designed. So, we're going to want to design a better one, and I've noticed that that really kind of takes the pressure off of the client to think something's wrong with them if they didn't follow through. It's, "Oh. Well, we need to design some kind of better accountability for next time so that you do what you really want to do." Finding those obstacles, finding what was the challenge, and addressing it is really crucial. Ignoring things is not good coaching. Hoping things will get better, that's not good coaching. It's not good living. So, accountability is really about intentionality, and that's typically why we're coaching people. They want to move forward with greater intentionality, and we're here to help. So, of course the accountability's a natural aspect of that.

Brian: Could the idea of accountability become a topic?

Chad: That's a neat idea. I think you've got an idea there, so keep going with it.

Brian: You know, if multiple times, a client does not do what they said they were going to do, I don't want to drill down on it just because, but obviously this is an area that needs explored. How do you create something that creates follow-through for you?

Chad: Imagine a person who never followed through on anything.

Brian: I've got them. They're pictured.

Chad: Did you have to go outside your household to find this person? I don't know your family well enough to know whether that would hit home or not, but you can kind of imagine someone who would never follow through on their ideas or commitments. What a terribly painful life that would be, not just from the outsider's perspective, but from the insider's perspective of a person living that life. Gosh, that would just be terrible. So, the idea that accountability itself could be a topic, absolutely, because if you've got someone who is having real challenges following through, even on things that they say are important to them, wouldn't it be a high leverage change in their life to go from someone who has low follow-through to even someone who just has medium follow-through, forget high follow-through. Boy, I just think their quality of life could improve dramatically, and it's a pattern, it's a habit. It's almost like a habit when it comes to follow-through, so I think accountability would be a great topic if someone's struggling with that.

Brian: So, I've heard you say that accountability doesn't have to be a who, and in fact, a better accountability is usually a what. So, give us some understanding of what a what accountability might look like.

Chad: I think what we're looking for with accountability is there's some kind of framework or system that's going to help a person do what they said they want to do. So, of course it could be a who. Who is usually this idea of someone is going to ask me about it, or I'm going to feel this sense of disappointing someone, or a check-in, or something, but a what is some other way of helping ensure that a person follows through. So, a what could be something as simple as a reminder. What would help you follow through on this? Oh, a reminder because we humans are forgetful. For some people, it's as simple as, if I put in my calendar, I'm going to do it. That's accountability. That's a what kind of accountability structure. Reminders don't have to be calendar-based. They can also be physical reminders that you put around. You and I have both talked about this before, things that we want to constantly be reminded of to help ourselves with accountability. Sometimes we use physical objects or pictures. I've got a community group that I'm a part of, a peer learning group. Several months ago, one of the accountability structures that I created to be a better steward of my day, is I changed the screensaver on my computer to really emphasize a couple aspects of stewardship. That's an accountability structure for me, and there's no who involved, it's just a what.

Brian: So, a reminder could be a structure that you could build for accountability. I know we've talked more about punishment/reward. Punishment/reward could be a structure, and I don't know what it says about you, but I know you like punishment better than reward. I like reward better than punishment.

Chad: Let's be clear. The verb "like" is problematic there. I think punishment might be more effective. I'm not saying I like it. That would take it out of the punishment realm.

Brian: I see. I see. I see. So, that would be another structure, punishment or reward.

Chad: There's this basic carrot stick stuff, so Brian, what's a reward that you've used as part of an accountability structure?

Brian: One that just works so well is a couple years ago, I was running during the summer, and I wanted to continue to run through the winter, but I live in the Midwest, and it gets cold, and I knew it would be very difficult to continue running as it got colder. So, I set up an accountability that said I could buy audible.com and listen to books, not on tape, but recorded books, audio books, I could listen to audio

books, but I could only listen to them when I was running. So, when I ran, I was immediately rewarded with something I really wanted, and there's no way to just enforce this, but I told myself I can't listen to it if I don't. I get one a month, so they're going to pile up on me. I guess there's a penalty involved there, but that worked. I got rewarded every time I did what I was wanting to do. Although, I needed encouragement.

Chad: Well, if you wanted the result of it, and you wanted to have done it...

Brian: I did.

Chad: But it wasn't inherently rewarding to run, but you added a reward element.

Brian: It wasn't rewarding enough to run.

Chad: Being out of breath and clutching my chest while going uphill wasn't rewarding enough, so I thought I'd listen to a book while doing it.

Brian: Most things that we do that even are rewarding, it's hard to take the first step. The hardest part of running is putting your shoes on, if you ask me. Maybe the first quarter mile because that's when you want to die. You're a writer, you write books, and I've heard other writers say, "The hardest part's getting my rear in the seat." The hardest part is to sit down and write, to make time for it. That's where I'd want to put my heaviest reward to make me take the first step.

Chad: Rewards can be a part of accountability structure. The kind of opposite is, I hate to call it a punishment mechanism, but there's some kind of risk. There's something to lose. I was listening to something about marketing the other day, and they say that it's much more easy to sell a pill to relieve a headache than to sell a vitamin to promote health because pain, the avoidance of pain, is so motivating, and that's really what we're talking about with accountability. We're trying to create some motivational follow-through systems. The idea of pain if I don't do what I want to do can be really motivating and can spur that follow-through.

Brian: So, reward, penalty, reminder. Are there some other categories we can think of to build a structure?

Chad: Yeah. We're using the word structure to describe accountability. Sometimes the structure just is that we create structure to support it. You think about that change model from things like the book, *Switch*. It talks about the path. You create a path where things are easier to do that you say you're going to do. For instance, I was coaching a guy a couple months ago. One of the things we talked about was he wanted to start walking every morning, and we talked about what are the things that are going to help you do that, and as you just mentioned, Brian, the hardest part's just putting my shoes on and getting out the door. While he was on the call, because he was at home, he went and got his shoes, he put them at the foot of the bed, he put his socks... It's funny how little things are important. He got his shoes and his socks ready. Just the fact that the structure was already in place. It felt a little more downhill for him. The shoes weren't there as a reminder. It wasn't like he was going to wake up the next morning and, "Oh, my shoes. I've got to do it." It was that things were already in place. He felt like he'd already started the action by getting his shoes and his socks out, just a little bit of a structure that was in place to really help with that. That's a subtle form of accountability that we designed right there during the

coaching conversation.

Brian: I like that. Are there any others that come to mind? That's several, but now I'm pressing you.

Chad: The best ones always come from the clients. Simple questions like what will help you follow through on this? Helping them envision what's going to happen if they don't follow through, if they don't take the action they said they were going to, and maybe just exploring with them what kinds of things in other areas of life help them follow through. You'd be surprised how many things people come up with outside of the categories that we've already talked about.

Brian: So, your client's not going to have all the knowledge on multiple ways to build an accountability structure. They're not going to be an expert at that. They can come up with a lot of things, but if they're having trouble building accountability, how would you share with them some other alternatives without making yourself the expert?

Chad: You know, I'm reminded of one that came up for me. Maybe this is another example of the risk or punishment. Sometimes, I'll ask them how much it's worth. If they could just pay somebody to do this for them. If you're talking about running. "I want to run every three mornings a week for the next three weeks." If I said, "How much would you be willing to pay..."

Brian: Someone to run for me.

Chad: Someone to run for you. If you could pay and have already ran the last three weeks, what would it be worth to you? Just put a dollar figure to it. First of all, that's really tangible. Money is really tangible. So, I've asked clients to do that. "Oh, it'd be worth \$50." Okay, good. I want you to mail me \$50 tomorrow, and when we talk in three weeks, if you've ran the way you want to, I'm going to mail that \$50 back to you, and if you don't, I want you to tell me where else I can mail it. That's kind of a challenge. By the way, challenges can be part of accountability. Now, of course the client can say, "No. I'm not doing that. I already pay you enough for this coaching. I'm not going to pay you \$50." Say, "Okay. What are you willing to do? What's it worth to make sure you do that thing you say you're going to do?" Sometimes just helping it get that start, that feel right in front of them, it's just really powerful. Even just doing that can help spur them to come up with an even better idea for helping them follow through on it.

Brian: So, certainly, as everything in coaching, accountability, everything you bring to the accountability should come from the listening. As you get to know the client, you're going to start to get a feel for what would work well for them and what won't work well for them. Go ahead.

Chad: One of the most memorable accountability structures that I've ever come across, it was actually part of a *7 Habits of Highly Effective People* workshop that I was leading. Anyway, we did this workshop, long story short, this guy created this vision for himself of what life should be like, his values, all that kind of stuff, and I don't know if he knew an actuary or what, but he calculated how many weeks of life he had left, statistically speaking of course. He didn't have some kind of suicide pact. He had years, years and years, probably 20 years left. He got a string and out a bead on the string for each week of his life, and he put two jars... This was in his bedroom, and every Sunday night, he would reflect back on the week and the bead had to go in one of the two jars. It had to go in did I live this week, with my vision, and values, and all that, or did I not? I'm trying to remember. The other one might have even been a

trash can. There was a jar and a trash can. That's an accountability structure. How will I live this week? Will I live in a way that I can put the bead in the jar of did I live well, or will I have to throw it away? That's kind of the function of any kind of... That's very big picture, very at the heart kind of thing, but man, how motivating that was to do the right thing, and really, with accountability, that's what we're trying to do. We're trying to instill fortitude in that person. They do the right thing, even when it's hard. That's what accountability is about.

Brian: And that was customized for him because as I hear that, I love that idea. I also know for sure, it wouldn't work for me.

Chad: That's exactly right. It probably wouldn't work for 95% of the people that we know, but man, did it work for him.

Brian: That's neat. Yeah, when you get the one... The best one for me was I listened to audible.com. That just was so effective, personally. There's so many people who might say, "I won't run if I have to listen to audible.com. That's a deal breaker."

Chad: A book? What?

Brian: One more question. How does accountability change depending on the client?

Chad: One way it changes is how we just talked. Different forms of accountability are going to really resonate and not with others. The big thing I try to remember is the different personality types need accountability differently. So, years ago, I had this particular set of clients. They were all engineers. I learned very quickly that they don't need a ton of accountability. I remember the first one I coached, and I said, "What's going to really help you follow through on this and make sure you do it," and you could kind of hear him staring a hole through me through the phone, and he said, "Well, I said I was going to do it. I'm going to do it."

Brian: I wrote it in my calendar. You saw me.

Chad: "What part of that do you not understand, dummy?" That's kind of what I got from him. Some people, I say engineer types, if we're thinking Myer-Briggs, they'd be the heavy J people. Once they make a decision, it's firm. They're not going to reconsider it. So for them, I think it's very simple accountability. It's more of a reminder, but it's not that they're going to get off the call and decide, "Eh. I didn't like that idea. I'm not going to do it." For others of us, we're susceptible, if we're heavy perceivers especially, we're susceptible to sound like we're committed during the coaching call, but it's always squishy. I'm teaching a class on assessments right now, and what I told them a couple weeks ago with perceivers is that not only are things not written in cement, perceivers don't have cement. We don't have permanent markers, we only have dry erase markers. We need accountability that probably feels like some kind of torture, just so detailed, or so descriptive, so airtight. Houdini couldn't get out of this accountability structure because perceivers, especially really strong perceivers, man, we find ways to wiggle out of the best accountability. That's just a simple distinction right there, in terms of adapting your accountability to really fit the client, in terms of how much they need, what type they need, what's going to resonate with them.

Brian: That's good. I'm a fairly strong J and yet, I often ask my coach to spend at least a third of our

conversation on accountability. I do. One is because I'm a thinker, and I've never had an idea I didn't like or I didn't want to execute, so something new and shiny's going to come along in five minutes that will have my attention, but two, my life is fairly regimented, a lot's in place. Part of accountability is... One question I ask is what are you willing to stop doing in order to do this? Depending on the client, but you definitely need to know the client and what they're looking for.

Chad: I think that's a great point. If a client is like you, and they have a pretty structured life already, changing that structure is hard. Whether it's stopping something, starting something, or tweaking something, that's hard. Things are set. The accountability to follow through and actually change the structured life, that's why the accountability would be really important.

Brian: Chad, thanks so much for joining me today, and thanks so much to all the listeners for joining us as well. If you don't want to miss any of our podcasts, and why wouldn't you. I wouldn't want to miss one. I invite you to subscribe to our podcast at iTunes or at Google Play. 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, as well, Chad, as building strong accountability. 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.

[Outro Music]