



Coach Approach Ministries Podcast

Episode 82: The Surprising Place Kim Found Determination

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[Intro Music]

Brian: I’m Brian Miller, strategic director for Coach Approach Ministries, CAM for short, and I’m joined here today by my good friend, Kim Izaguerre Merlos, Merlos I should say, and she is a coach. She is a coach trainer. I think, Kim, you are an ACC coach.

Kim Izaguerre Merlos: Yes sir.

Brian: And you do some CAM training, but you have your own training organization.

Kim: Yeah. It’s called Women in the Church.

Brian: Women in the Church, and who is your target audience, Kim? I’m not... Is it pet owners?

Kim: Well, it’s the idea that in our churches we have a lot of women, super talented, and usually they have one of three challenges, time, money, other resources, confidence. So, we just want to put them through a process, similar process that I went through, where they just get on the fast track and either finish their leadership, or training, or certification for coaching. So, we’re out there to basically find the best coaches, the best talent, leadership-wise so we can send them back out and keep on with the mission where Jesus says, “Hey, go make disciples among the nations.” We like to think that we do that as leaders, as trainers, as coaches, and we’re just really passionate about it, so yeah. Women. It doesn’t mean we don’t have men. It just means their all on board with the mission. You’re part of the team.

Brian: Yeah. I’ve been a man in your group, did some co-training with you, and I’ve seen it. These are

dynamic women, and as I think through some faces, there are ones who have some skills that just need to be honed. They're ready to go. There's some that just need encouragement or a little confidence, and there's some that need a mindset of what's possible, and you just feed that to them in tremendous ways. Maybe we'll get to that point of talking about how you got there, but I want to approach this podcast a little different than I do a lot of them. I want to talk about your pre-coaching history, I guess. How you got here. I just think there are some interesting stories in your life, Kim, that, honestly, I want to dig into. I've known you for quite some time now, and I don't know, maybe I'm just being nosy. I hope not, but I think there's some things that have shaped you to be a great coach and coach trainer that I'm just curious about the intangible pieces here. Not just the skills, but what you brought with into life. So, the first one is, I know that there was an injury at one point.

Kim: Yeah. You know, it's funny because leading into that, you said, "Ready to go." We're looking for women who are ready to go, and I think this would be really surprising to people if they saw me five years ago. Right now, if I were to describe myself, I am high initiate, high action. I don't wait much. I don't reflect much, and that's a new discovery to me. I hear people describe me that way, and that's actually not how I see myself. When I see myself, I see myself as a 24-year-old kid, sitting on the edge of my bed, in my parent's house, where I grew up, and I'm staring at a TV. I can't walk. I'm bedridden, in a wheelchair most of the time. I really couldn't take care of myself. People had to do things for me, feed me, clean me, bathe me, simple, everyday things.

Brian: Wow. Oh my.

Kim: I'm staring at this TV screen, and on the screen, there's this lady. Do you remember that show that's like... It was like Extreme Weight-loss Makeover. So, I'm feeling a little funny for stuff because I'm watching this show that I'm like, "Why am I watching this?" If somebody walked in my room, I might be kind of embarrassed because it's kind of one of those guilty American pleasures probably. On the screen, she starts talking about... This is a woman who is on the scale of health, kind of that category of deathly-obese, and she's saying these things, at the time I didn't really see I'm a high-feeling, emotional person, even though, if you're talking to me, you probably won't see that from me on the surface in a lot of ways, unless it's energy.

Brian: I lost you just for a second. Go back to, she's on the screen, and she began to talk about...

Kim: Yeah, she starts saying things that I am thinking but I've never put words to, that I'm feeling, but I don't know how to put words to. So, I think it was just a deep, emotional, I still just don't even have words for it. I just remember thinking to myself, "There's this black, deathly-obese woman on the screen, and I am on the other end of that." I was super underweight because I had a lot of atrophy. I think I probably weighed 100 pounds, but for some reason, it was like she was in my head. I was like how is that possible? So, through the rest of the episode, she was working with a coach, albeit, different from the coaching we do. In a lot of ways not because I start to see that he's working with her, and the big thing at the end of that show is always the reveal. They've lost a ton of weight, and they're doing awesome, and they check in with them, and they're still doing awesome.

That whole thing, and I kind of knew at that point, that's what missing where I'm at. I'm not rehabbing well. I'm stuck, and I don't think this is the life that God designed for me, and I need to figure out a way to get unstuck. So, at the time, I was super poor. The only reason I was getting some kind of help was

because there were doctors and health practitioners who were also believers, so they basically were helping me pro bono. So, I kind of prayed and was like, “Lord, that’s what I need. I can’t afford that. So, I’m going to make you my coach,” and I started doing this really weird thing. I think my family probably thought I was crazy because at this point, we were six months in. I just wasn’t making progress the way I hoped. I started taking these index cards, and playing back these episodes, and writing down all of these questions that her coach would ask her because I was trying to figure out how do I get better, and for some reason, that really drew me. Questions. It seems like the questions that he’s asking are helping her to move forward.

I think my plan was I’ll write down all these questions that I’m capturing. I started taping them up on the wall, and over the next weeks, months, any time that I would feel something but didn’t quite know what it was, I would go to the wall, and there were literally hundreds of cards on my walls. You look at those movies where they’re like a crazy person who’s like obsessed and has all these things on the wall. That was me. Every time I needed to put words to what I was feeling, I would go to the wall and try to find the card with the right question, and then I would start answering it. I did that over a period of time, and I think that’s what got me started, really using the talents that were already present, but it was this injury that was drawing it out of me.

Brian: You started answering the questions out loud, or writing them down, or...

Kim: Writing them down on the index cards. There would be a question on each index card, and I would just start searching, and one of those questions would resonate, and I would feel like I had an answer, or I felt like it was helping me put words to what I was feeling in the moment but couldn’t quite say out loud, or even didn’t even really understand in a lot of ways. Then I would just write it on the index card, and then I would always put a date and a time because I also wanted to, I guess, in my head... And this was the beginning of my process. I didn’t realize it at the time. I still do all these things, just not as intensely crazy, a little more refined now. So, I look back at those sometimes, and I’m just like, “Wow, man. Look at where you were at in your mental state,” and yeah. I think that’s a key thing that influenced the path that got us here.

Brian: Well, there’s a sense that it would have been crazy not to have done that. Well, because you were injured. You were rehabbing. The problems, if you think of coaching, is that you’re not rehabbing well. What could you do? What actions could you take? The screen really struck you on an emotional, not even an emotional, a soul level of some sort where she was saying, and you still today can’t put into words what was going on inside you, but it touched you, and then you immersed yourself in that, you surrounded yourself with these questions, and you’ve really got a heart for it. You didn’t surround yourself with answers, you surrounded yourself with questions. I find that just fascinating.

Kim: It’s funny to think of it that way because at the time, I was looking for an answer. I was looking at, “How do I get better? How do I move forward? How do I push play again,” but you’re right. It was the questions that were more the focus than the answer itself which makes sense. I’m a high learner, so it’s more about the process than the outcome necessarily.

Brian: Well, what needed to be expressed was your words, your thoughts, not just prescribed to you so you could take somebody else’s art. You had a mindset change somewhere, and mindset changes don’t come easy. They don’t, and I find, especially when people are stuck, I start asking, well, the words that

were used lately for my kinds of questions were “outlandish.” I start asking outlandish questions, and sometimes, depending on the client, they’ll think, “That’s a pretty outlandish question,” and I’ll just say, “You don’t change your mindset with regular old questions, and you need to respect that.” I’ll just tell them, and usually they’ll say, “Yeah, that’s true.” You just immersed yourself in that.

Kim: Talking about outlandish questions. If there was one more thing I could add, it would be, probably the scariest question that I had to ask myself as I was going through that process was, “Okay, if you never got better,” because that’s really contrary to what I believed from my worth as a believer, “If you never got better, and this was the life that God did have for you, when are you going to hit play again?” That, I think, was that really big question that finally got me unstuck and kept me unstuck. I still wake up and ask myself that every day. Dealing with chronic pain, you’ve just got to keep moving forward.

Brian: I find that surprising, yet the same thing happened to me when I was making a transition. I felt a little stuck, and I felt like Jesus asked me, and I’d heard this question from somebody else, “If this is it, you going to be okay?” I said yes. Yes, if this is it, I’m okay. If this is where you want me to be, I’m okay. That’s when I got unstuck. It sounds odd, but I think there’s a truth there. It’s a contentment, but not...

Kim: A complacency.

Brian: But not complacency. Yeah, “I can only fail. I can’t get out of this,” goes away. That’s interesting.

Kim: I’m laughing. I’m laughing because you just said the word, “contentment,” and I know one of these other themes, I think you’re going to weave into that, was baseball, and one of the biggest questions I went into my reporting career with was that idea of contentment. I remember, and I didn’t really know why, but now I think it’s making sense for me, is because the idea of contentment versus complacency, I think, is a running theme, and has been a running theme in my life. I’m always trying to figure out...I had one manager that I met in pro-ball, and he would just always use the word contentment, and it almost was like math to me, just something foreign, that I didn’t quite understand. How can you be content? I guess, at the time, I was interpreting it as complacency. Now, I understand the idea of contentment now. It’s just kind of funny that you use that word.

Brian: Yeah, my brain is just busting with thoughts here too, but I won’t go into that. So, let’s go into that. You became an interviewer, and I don’t know what the timeline is, and even today, you do some radio interviews for NPR?

Kim: Yeah. So, after I got injured, I was trying to figure out, how do I get better? At the time, what led into that was I had a mentor. I had a design background at my university. She asked me to come back and to do a show, show some of my work, and for some reason, baseball had caught my attention. It was the summer of this guy named Yasiel Puig, and there was a lot of noise around him, and his style, and being Latino, being Hispanic, having been raised as an immigrant, in an immigrant family, and that whole thing. It just kind of caught my attention. I had no idea why. The funny thing is, that’s not where I ended up, obviously, in terms of my focus, but it did lead me into, with no credentials, which this is typically my process, just kind of showing up... I’m high in significance, so I’m good at, “Hi. I want to do this thing. I’ll just figure it out.”

When I was rehabbing, that deciding day, when I said, “Hey. When are you going to push play,” I said, “Okay. In a year I want to hear one of my stories...” The question was like if this is what you’re going to

be doing, what is one thing you could still do, even if your body doesn't work? I could do that. I was listening to a lot of public radio, and that's what's on public radio is storytelling. So, I said I could tell people stories, or I could tell stories. Then, I gave myself a deadline. I said, "In a year, I want to hear one of my stories hit the national airwaves. Basically, I taught myself how to do that and did something that is pretty much unheard of. It's really quite impossible to do because I train people to do this now, and it's really hard. So, I sometimes look back, "How did you do that," but when the year deadline came around, I still hadn't done it, and so that day, I submitted a pitch, and I didn't hear anything, but the end of the week came, and I got this call, and it was the producer from this show that I'd pitched at. He said, "Hey, Kim. We read your pitch. I really like it. Give me a call so we can talk more about it."

Then, a year later, my story hit the airwaves, and I got into longform documentary kind of stuff. That's what I still do now. It took me to pro-ball. Basically, embedding with major league baseball teams in their minor league system, and from there, I had a connection to my personal family history, which was immigrants, and Latinos, and things like that. They sent me in, and said, "What's the experience like for Latin American ball players when they sign to play on these teams in the United States," and I was looking at that. Along the way, there was still something underneath, and I think I was still always drawn by the question, "How do I get better?" Even at that time, I was still pretty... I had just recently learned how to walk again. I'm young, so it looked like I was healthy, but I still had a hard time even managing my own body.

So, I think the real draw into there was I was trying to find an answer with people I could relate to, people who were young and who the physical aspect, and the kind of hey, how is this going to fit through my mind. One key thing that I learned as a result of rehabbing was that my body follows my mind, so whatever I'm thinking, my body responds to that, and the reason why I was stuck in rehab was because I was essentially paralyzed by a fear of pain, so I needed to learn how to rethink pain, and how to move forward, and things like that. I felt like the best place to do that was where that was really common, especially common with people my age, and that's in pro-sports.

Brian: Because their themes too. You said it seemed crazy that you put questions all over your room. I think this sounds crazier. I'm going to go tell stories with NPR about minor league baseball players, and the connections you're making. I love it, absolutely love it, but you know, that's wow. That's crazy.

Kim: Yeah. So, I think I didn't realize that at the time, and I think it's because I was so in my own little world, but also, I think it had to do a lot with how I was raised. When we look at immigration is a huge part of my family's story, and I think that because my parents were immigrants, and they were immigrants from a country where civil war was what made them leave their country, basically. I grew up hearing stories that you're like, "I only see that in movies." So, in my head, I've always kind of thought in terms of movies, and stories, and things like that. So, it just seemed like this would make a great story because I grew up around the dinner table, hearing stories about things like my mom running around trying to stay alive in the middle of a lot of death, and destruction, and things like that. It is. I look back now, and I'm like that is crazy.

Brian: You didn't know any different. You may have grown up thinking everyone had stories like this, when you were little. How old were you when you immigrated?

Kim: I was a baby. I've never been back, when I was about six months old, and I was raised in

Washington state, and I still live here. So, I didn't know anything else really. I did know it through story. My mom, that's everything that she raised us with was the stories, of her life of growing up in a third world country, in the middle of a civil war.

Brian: And how did she tell those stories? Were they just stories without, I mean, or were they, I doubt this was... Were they sob stories of poor me, or were they unbelievable stories? "You're not going to believe this story."

Kim: You know, my mom is one of the greatest story tellers, but she was never a victim. The way that she tells stories, she does this to this day, is she's so like... She never hid details from us that she probably she probably should have hid from us as kids. Things that you probably shouldn't hear as kids in a lot of ways, but she would tell it in a way that you would laugh. Like her frankness would make you laugh. So, she might be talking about how they grew up with no bathroom, just think your typical, third world story, where no bathroom, living in a hut, that whole thing, cooking stuff around a fireplace, washing stuff in a river, but she would always just say something funny. It's like you would think... One story she told me that's coming to mind right now is that her mom was a merchant in the marketplace, and this lady she could hustle. So, my mom learned how to hustle, in the sense that they had to find a way to eat every day. So, they had to go out, and they had to make sure that the things they needed to sell, got sold.

Then, there's this one story where the house that they lived in, it was actually close to an uncle, or something like that, who actually had a lot of money, but they lived in basically the shack. Something about candles and flowers, or something, one night, and they caught fire, and essentially, the shack burned down. You would think that in a moment like that, you'd just be in tears, but we would just be rolling because the way that my mom would tell stories. She might drop a line in the middle of the house burning down, how my grandma would probably have just kind of been yelling at her at the top of her lungs and maybe even spanking her a little bit because she was such a strong... Every woman in my family line, I think, is described as strong, and they weren't victims. They didn't feel sorry for themselves, so it was just funny. I'm not even describing it well, but I just remember such good stories.

Brian: No, you're doing well. I love it, and the strength of it. Everyone can feel like a victim. I don't care how you're raised, or how your circumstances... You can have the best circumstances and still feel like a victim, and this is insightful for me with you because we've been in situations where maybe someone got their feelings slightly hurt, and I'm thinking, "Oh shoot," and you're like, "Oh, get over it." You have a place to go to the bathroom. You don't have to fish in the river for your dinner. Your mindset is just a great presence to be around because it picks you up and moves you on before you even stop to think about it. I love that. We've only got a few minutes left, and what are... I don't know if you can just do this, but from these three stories of injury, interviewer, and immigrant, and by the way, can I say? You became an American citizen.

Kim: I did.

Brian: In 2017.

Kim: I'm 2 weeks old.

Brian: And this is not going to come out until later in 2018, but I was so excited for you. It just caught

me, and I was like, “That’s what it’s about.” All of this political stuff, there’s so much thinking, negative, positive. Kim is what it’s about. The American dream. I love it. Let me just get to where... So, we can bring some closure to this. How do those stories affect... You’re working with women in the church, equipping them, really in a sense, to do discipleship with coaching skills. How do your experiences incarnate in that ministry?

Kim: I think I heard you say, “How do my experiences influence in that ministry?”

Brian: Absolutely.

Kim: I think, to tie into what you said there, the thought that’s coming to mind is, I show up as who I am, right?

Brian: You do.

Kim: You see me do lots of things, and maybe we don’t always know the reason behind why our leaders, or why our managers, or whoever is at the helm, whoever is on the team with us is doing something. If we stop for one moment, and we ask them, “Hey, what’s your story,” I think things might make more sense. I think that that’s what you see. What we’re seeing is that my stories, the past 30 years of my life, they influence every day that we show up together. So, they influence how I see the world, and then how I go, and I train people. I think the key thing for me is always keeping an eye, maybe the most recent lesson, the one that keeps turning over, is simply this. When I was rehabbing, I said to myself, I just want to walk, and I want it to be pain free one day, and that’s still the mission, my personal mission. I think that is what we go in and try to do in every session is to help our people to walk, to keep moving forward, and to have that be as pain free as that can be every day that they’re on that journey, that they’re on that path. So, I just try to keep it simple that way, in my head. It can be simple for them too, and we’re still working on it. There’s still a lot of room for improvement there.

Brian: Kim, I so appreciate you sharing this story. I thought it would be good, but it was beyond my expectations of listening to this and you sharing. I so much appreciate it.

Kim: Thank you. Thank you, my friend.

Brian: So, if you want to connect with Kim, she does so mainly by Facebook, and if you search groups for “Women in the Church.” You could also just go to www.facebook.com/groups/womeninthechurch, and you can connect with Kim and join her in her training program. It’s a delight. I get to participate in it some, and I can only say wonderful things about it, well worth the time and effort. I also want to thank everyone for joining us today. Don’t miss any of our podcasts. Subscribe to our podcast at iTunes, or at Overcast, Stitcher, or Google Play by searching for Coach Approach Ministries Podcast. We’ll see you next week.

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[Outro Music]