



Coach Approach Ministries Podcast

Episode 70: Starting a Coaching Culture in Your Church

Published: October 19, 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. 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 Chuck Gohn. He's a pastor in the north side of Pittsburgh, he's been a pastor for about thirteen years in a small independent, non-denominational church. Although, Chuck, you said on a good Sunday you have 200 to 250, so that sounds like a midsized church to me.

Chuck Gohn: Yeah, probably small to mid-sized.

Brian: That's awesome, and what else do we need to know about your church there in Pittsburgh Chuck?

Chuck: Well, like you said it's an independent, non-denominational church. The church has actually been there since 1896, and I'm only the third pastor in the past sixty years which is good, but it also kind of reflects the community. The community in general is a little bit resistant to change, but there's a lot of longevity when it comes to pastors so I guess that's good for me to an extent.

Brian: I thought you were going to say third since 1896, and that was pretty impressive.

Chuck: They had a whole slew of them when I looked back in those first years. There was about a half dozen or so. I don't know what happened back then. Actually, I've been here thirteen years and the pastor before me was twenty three years and the pastor before him was thirty three years. Pretty amazing.

Brian: Wow. So our topic today is creating a coaching culture in your church, which is something you are not only really interested in, it's something you're attempting to do even now. I think a major thing is to [Transcribed by Cayden Miller](#)

understand the context of your church and this idea that they've had a lot of longevity with pastors and you've been there for thirteen years. It does certainly reflect a specific context.

Chuck: Yeah, it's in Pittsburgh, outside of Pittsburgh, we're on the north side of Pittsburgh between really the city and the suburbs. It's difficult to explain when there's 9,000 within a square mile yet it's a walking community. A lot of the people have never even got their driver license. It's kind of referred to as an urban Mayberry since you can walk down the street and run into people you know. At the same time, it's probably ten minutes from downtown Pittsburgh. It's a very unique environment, so it has the challenges associated with living in an urban area, but at the same time again, it has almost a rural feel to it. We're a unique little community; it's a great community for outreach. We have quite an ethnic population. In fact, we have a Bhutanese service that meets on Sunday nights with about a hundred in attendance. An area that's got a lot of people with some behavioral health issues going on, but also a community that seems to be getting younger; we have younger people coming in because they can still purchase a house for under a \$100,000. Fixer uppers, and they can live closer to the city of Pittsburgh or outside in the suburbs if they work out that way. An interesting little community, and the church right in the epicenter of the town there.

Brian: It sounds like it. So, what was your initial exposure to coaching? How did you find out about coaching?

Chuck: Probably about four years ago, I started my doctorate out at Fuller. I think I was one of the first classes where they were experimenting with having the students being assigned their own coach, and at that point in time, I was taking a leadership course from a gentleman named Terry Walling who's written some coaching material. I was assigned him as my first coach, so for two years I had him as a coach, and I began to get exposed to coaching. I think I was exposed to keep God's book the coach model. From what I read, I felt like I had a pretty good understanding; I thought I could understand the coaching, and I began to try to implement it in the local church when I saw the benefits of it.

Brian: And how did that go? Your initial attempt?

Chuck: It went as good as can be expected. I didn't have a lot of experience other than what I had at the seminary. I think a lot of my initial training was based mostly on the content found in a variety of different coaching books. Without a lot of experience, I was teaching a lot of content. It was good material, but since I hadn't experienced a lot of it myself, I hadn't been able to get a lot of people interested early on. But being the senior pastor, I was able to keep pushing, and fortunately I had a couple people that began to see the potential of coaching. The last couple of years it really began to take off.

Brian: What were some of the early challenges?

Chuck: Part of it was that people didn't really understand coaching. They confuse it with mentoring. They see it sometimes as trendy or faddish. Just the word "coach" was a relatively new term especially in the church. A lot of people are more familiar with it in the business world. It didn't seem to fit. In the church, we purposely refer to it as discipleship coaching, and I know that some people don't like to

confuse discipleship with coaching but for us it works. People understand discipleship, and because our emphasis has been on discipleship for the last few years, it just seems to fit. Even though it follows pretty much the idea of coaching full of competencies, we kind of use the term to tag or describe coaching just to make it easier for people to get.

Brian: For sure, it's amazing what a modifier before coaching can do just to help people get a better grip on what you're trying to do. Discipleship coaching, that's good. You said too much content in the workshop; you were trying too hard to make it a coach approach? As you brought the content down, what did you replace it with?

Chuck: More practice. I'm still trying to keep the workshops to more of an intro level. I think about three hours. Just to give people exposure to it, and at the same time, adding a little bit of roleplaying. I think the best thing, the biggest revelation I got a year or so ago, before when I gave the content out, I expected people to just do it. I'm the coach, I'd found somebody to coach, and they would be excited and want to go do it. But then I realized, I don't know where I picked it up, from one of my coaches probably a year or two ago, coached for Coach Approach Ministries, that the way you learn to be a coach is to be coached. Out of the workshops, if somebody wanted to be a coach, the first requirement was that they would be coached by one of our existing coaches and that seems to really help because people then have immediately a contact to begin practicing. It builds up their confidence, builds up confidence in the people they're already coaching, and then it continues to multiply and produce confidence in people. Again, they're not experts but they just get their confidence up and they're able to practice coaching immediately on someone without getting assigned someone for them to coach. I think early on the content was really heavy. I was going into Spiritual Gifts and different assessments, explaining those and how they work. It was just too much content before they just understood the basics of coaching. I toned down the content dramatically and added some more experience to it. That seems to really have helped.

Brian: Even just getting the weeds for a second. How long does one of your workshops typically last now?

Chuck: About three hours, three and a half. I thought about doing it a day and a half or so, but there's people that, it's so new to them, I think they just need an initial exposure. I find a three -hour, Saturday works for them. It's efficient that I follow it up immediately with a survey to find their interest level. If they're interested, I attach them to an existing coach, and then I continue to follow up with them and find out when they're ready to receive somebody. Probably initially three hours, but then what I do too is I try to take the packet for core competencies and, once a quarter, I take the existing coaches to bring them in for an hour and a half workshop usually held at my house. We basically go through one of the core competencies. Last month it was on powerful questions, and then I've done the effect of listening and awareness and those things. I find that doing those once a quarter is very helpful. Starting with the intro, giving some hands-on experience, and then going deeper with these core competencies every quarter.

Brian: That sounds great. Those were some of the challenges of implementation. What were some of

the joys of implementation?

Chuck: Just seeming some of the congregants that got it and really actually have seen major changes. We have this one woman who has stuck with me for the last three years in my process of trying to implement coaching. Through all my mistakes, I look back and she stuck with me. She made a transition from the public-school system fourteen years to identify her calling to open up a preschool in our church, and just being with her during that transition and seeing how she was able to move forward from where she was at to where God wanted her to be in a very real way. She was almost my poster child for coaching. She just loves it, she can communicate it, she's probably my strongest coach. Just seeing that positive movement and seeing her replicate that with other people, it really seems to me that positive movement forward. I think people are going to begin to see it as a very high impact, low time investment ministry.

It's for people who are really struggling where they can find a church to volunteer, coaching is the perfect ministry because once they learn the basics, they're able to come in and meet with somebody maybe once or twice a month or so, and just listen and ask questions. If they do it even half well, they begin to see some real fruit and see people move forward. It's very rewarding to see that happening almost at a ground level way. Just moving by word of mouth. I haven't done a lot of promotion so far or advertised coaching because of my fear of not having enough coaches ready. It's spread pretty much through word of mouth. Seeing it grow that way has been exciting. We just produced a video to promote coaching in the church which we will show probably here in the next month or so. At that point, we're going to open it up to the church. At that point, I should have anywhere from about 8 to 10 coaches that are pretty competent. It's taken time, but it's been really good to see the fruit of it just these last few years, especially the last year.

Again, very, very rewarding when somebody actually moves forward. I'm convinced that this is something that, at first, I was thinking that coaching was fad for the church, but I really think it's the future of the church. Especially when you consider the younger people coming in, the millennials, who are not used to or don't like, a canned approach to discipleship. That was more popular in the '90s or so where it's just putting people through some kind of small group program; those are things that are out there that will probably never go away, but what I've liked about coaching is it adapts to the uniqueness of the individual and it just seems to work. When you do well it really works, especially people when they have a limited amount of time and they can't attend to these small groups formats. When you can get them in a one on one relationship with a coach, you can not only help them better find a way to grow in the context of the church that fits their schedule, but definitely just a way to move them forward in their faith.

Brian: I love the way it, I don't think you used the term, but a grassroots movement in the terms that you started with one lady really getting it. She became the poster child, then you trained a few more. Then, rather than just immediately going and looking for somebody to get coached, you built it upon itself. So that coaches would coach coaches, get experience, and start spreading the word. Right now, you've got about a dozen people coaching and being coached?

Chuck: Some have either recently attended a recent workshop, or coaching, or being coached or both, and then what I'm trying to do as a senior pastor, and the one behind it, is I'm trying to coach all the coaches. It leaves me with them once a month to check in, and I even allow them to practice on me too. It keeps my skills fresh; it keeps their skills fresh. Probably about close to a dozen people that are in various stages of coaching. I think a mistake I made early on is I would think a workshop was doing well as far as getting people there. I could have 15, 20 people in a room, but I think it was too much, too fast basically. I just was not ready to handle that amount of people. Even if they were interested in coaching, I didn't have people lined up to be coached. What happens is you get people excited about something, and if you don't implement it right away, they lose interest. I would just caution on, "I'm just trying to get a lot of people to attend a workshop." I like the grassroots approach: the one on one that just starts to grow naturally, and then at some point you begin to promote it more to the larger audience. I think when I'm looking back again, I went a little bit too fast too soon. Definitely slow down on that.

Brian: I hear you saying don't go too slow, don't go too fast. If you don't give them enough opportunities, it's too slow, but if you just pile it on, then it's too fast.

Chuck: There's a balance there.

Brian: Finding that right rate of growth is probably a real key in growing any kind of ministry in a church.

Chuck: Exactly, exactly.

Brian: That's a great point. Now that you're at a point where you're hoping, you're starting to think about rolling out this to the congregation, which will be in many ways a whole new way of rolling it out. You're not bringing people in to learn how to coach; you're really looking at the next step of advertising for clients. What do you think some of your best steps forward are from here?

Chuck: We just produced a three-minute video that has some testimonies in it, has a little bit of introduction from me, and the plan is to have an orientation session. It's not that I want to filter out people, but in our environment, in our context, I think a lot of people like the idea of being coached but they probably are not sure whether they really want to do the work. I often quote Jesus on his question to a crippled man I believe. He says, "Do you want to get well?" I think a lot people like the idea of getting well, but they do not really want to do the work to get well and so having an orientation class is kind of the first filter for what coaching is and what it's not. We're not your counselor, we're not your mentor, we're not your therapist, and this is a commitment. Thinking about you again, I think it was in my Mike Breen's book in discipleship talked about Jesus' approach was to invite and then immediately challenge. He would invite the disciples in and say, "Come follow me," and then say, "Ok, now go sell all your stuff," or whatever.

It's the same way, inviting people in the crowd into an orientation and then saying, "Ok, here's the expectation." With our people, sometimes just asking them to fill out a profile form with where they might want to be coached, name and address, phone number, that kind of thing. I would suspect we'd filter out a few people right there because all of a sudden, they can begin to see the commitment, or we can begin to talk about when you meet with somebody, and somebody is giving up their time, an hour a

month or a couple of hours a month and you're expected to be on time and to show up and that sort of thing. I think it'll probably filter out some people by adding that stuff, and then the people that want to be coached, the forms will be looked at by me and another coach or two, and we will assign people to the various coaches based on personality, gender, that sort of thing. That's the short-term plan right now is to just kind of kick it around, see how it goes. We have no idea what kind of response. I've been talking about coaching. As I've preached in my sermons, I've referred to it here and there. There's enough interest in it, enough exposure that people have an interest in it, but I really don't know what to expect as far as a turn out for the orientation class; that'll be my next little experiment, but I feel it's time to do it.

Brian: We're excited to see. Success or failure, you're out there in front of us, and you're going to be learning all kinds of things that are going to be helpful to us as we try to figure out how to develop a coaching culture in our church. Something I was just thinking about that I don't think we've mentioned yet is that I know that you reached out to some other coaches who have done a little bit work in creating a culture in their own church.

Chuck: I think when I was first pursuing coaching or when I was getting out of seminary and I was began to look into it, I wanted to see what churches were doing it well. I forgot where I came across an article or something that was written by somebody at Brentwood Baptist, I can't remember. Or maybe it was Tim Holcomb that wrote the actual article, but there was a gentleman there named Tim Holcomb from Brentwood Baptist, a large church just outside of Nashville. I've never been there but I understand it's pretty large, about 10,000 people. I reached out to him and he was an amazing guy, gave me all sorts of information. At that point I didn't have a coach; I asked him if he could recommend me one, and he said he would be willing to coach me, was great about it. I said, "Well, how much do you charge?" He said, "I really just see this as an opportunity to invest back into the pastors out there, and if you want to send me a Starbucks card every couple of months or so, that's fine. That's all I really expect back." We had this relationship going for several months, and he was just basically coaching me as I tried to put a coaching culture in our church. He had already been doing it very well. Unfortunately, Tim passed away last year. It was really sad, but he was a guy that just wanted the best in the next generation, the generation behind him. I was working with him, and over the last six months, I've been working with Jerry Essary from Coach Approach Ministries that I believe you recommended. We've had a great relationship, so he's basically coaching me as I coach others. He's coaching me as I seek to put this coaching culture inside of our church, and that's going very well.

Brian: You've done a lot of things right. That's for sure, Chuck. What advice would you give to someone like me who would like to create a coaching culture in their local church. What would be some first steps?

Chuck: I would say if you're not the senior pastor, get the senior pastor behind it because I think that's really important. Fortunately, I'm the senior pastor. It's hard enough being a senior pastor behind coaching, but I definitely have that advantage. If you're not the senior pastor, get the senior pastor behind it. I would also say if you have a success, somebody that has been through it and you've taken through, you've begun to coach, and they can testify that they are a success, use them as your

champion. Give them opportunities to give that testimony, to be able to talk about it in different contexts, and again, the idea to start at the grassroots level; don't try too fast. Coaching is something that just takes a while to get. You try too fast, you're setting yourself up for failure. Take it slowly, don't just simply advertise the coaching workshops, and pick a few people and begin coaching them. Ideally, people that are forgiving when you mess up because you will mess up. Start slow. Think about the people that you're inviting into a coaching session because you'll find that some people are teachers, and they really struggle with coaching because they struggle with the listening aspect. You should know who those people are. Not that they can't be coaches, but people that always have the need to talk, they probably aren't going to be your best candidates.

Don't stop learning yourself. I think that was the most beneficial for me; I realized it was difficult for me to put it into the church unless I was being coached and I was learning about coaching. That's when I did the homework and I looked at various credentialed organizations out there and came across Coach Approach Ministries. I believe I sent an email out to Chad, and he introduced me to you. I think the first class I took the evangelism class a couple years ago, and from that point, I just decided to go on for the credentialing, for the certification, and finish that up last year. Never stop learning yourself. Learn as much as you can about it. Read as many books as you can and get yourself really involved in the culture. Get to the point where you understand it. Join groups, go online, ask questions, whatever you can do to continue to grow yourself.

Brian: Chuck, if people want to contact you, what would be the best way for them to do that?

Chuck: Probably either go to our church website which is www.bellvuechristian.com. It's in Pittsburgh. Or they can reach me by email just at chuckpgohn@gmail.com. And also LinkedIn. If anybody is on there, I'd be more than happy. I'm trying to work with other coaches out there. I've even put my most recent video out there, my promotional video. Just so people get an idea of what we're doing out there. Those are the ways they can get in touch with me. I'd love to talk, and if anyone is looking for advice in that area, I'd love to share again my joys and frustrations with it.

Brian: Fantastic, we'll put your contact information on the website on the podcast. Thanks so much Chuck for your information, and thanks so much all of you for joining us today. If you don't want to miss any of our podcasts, I'd invite you to subscribe to our podcast at iTunes or at Google Play. Next week, I'll be talking to Ken Jones with the Christian Medical and Dental Association and how they bring coaching and training to physicians and dentists. 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.

[Outro Music]