



Coach Approach Ministries Podcast

Episode 97: Bivocational Opportunity From Coach Training

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[Intro Music]

Brian Miller: I'm Brian Miller, strategic director for Coach Approach Ministries, CAM for short, and I'm joined here today by Pira Tritasivit. He has a Master's of Divinity, and he took some coaching classes he thought were interesting but he would not really do anything with it, but his story is one that I think is the future of ministry, that ministry doesn't always go where we think it's going to go. Coaching has actually given him several in-roads into being around unchurched people, to create interesting conversations, and also ways to find employment, ways to make money while he's doing ministry, a bivocational situation. Pira, so glad to have you on the podcast today.

Pira Tritasivit: Thanks for having me, Brian.

Brian: Yeah, tell us a little about yourself. Married? Kids? Dog?

Pira: Definitely married. Definitely kids. No dog.

Brian: No dog.

Pira: I'm here in San Francisco, born and raised in San Francisco. I've been here for decades, and that's a rare thing nowadays. It's expensive to live in San Francisco, but I had the privilege of parents who moved here and had the foresight to raise their kids in this city, and I love San Francisco. My wife and I, we got married in 2007 which is when I started at Western Seminary, going after that MDiv program, and when I heard about these coaching classes, I kind of scoffed, I'll be honest. I was a little cynical. Like what's a seminary doing with all these motivational speaking classes. That's what I thought coaching was. Later on, I actually came on staff at Western as a recruitment specialist, and don't knock it 'til you try it. I ended up enrolling in that class with my wife. We didn't have kids yet, and it was an intro to coaching class, led by Linda Miller. It was great. It was at Mount Herman, a two-day class. We went in just kind of open-hearted, open-minded, but still a little bit cynical. If it was terrible, at least we got a weekend at Mount Herman, just enjoy that.

It ended up being life-changing in the way we interacted with each other, listened to each other, asked each other questions. I said, "I've got to take more of these classes." Again, I still didn't know what I was going to do with it. I was on track to graduate with a Master of Divinity, thinking I'm going to be a pastor. After I graduated, I did go into a pastoral role, part-time pastoring at a church here in San Francisco, but it was that coaching piece that gave ministry a real practical, tangible in-road in how I

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preached, and how I taught, and how I led bible studies, and how I interacted with people. So, I'm really grateful for the training that I got.

Brian: Let me slow you down a little bit. I'm a curious guy, and I think our audience is too here. Let's go back to what made you think about getting an MDiv in the first place?

Pira: Yeah, that's a great question. I was a teacher for five years and taught junior high and high school.

Brian: And so you were brain damaged at that point?

Pira: Kind of. Kind of. I loved teaching. I just hated correcting papers. I hated administrivia. The teaching, that's what I loved. I taught at a private, Christian school here in San Francisco. It was having all the avenues to share the gospel with these students who were coming for the education, but I loved planning lessons, teaching five classes of kids who may or may not have been open to the gospel, but I was going to give it to them. It felt like, boy, can I do this, and I was working in youth ministry and just felt a call I had placed on the backburner for a long time. So, when I enrolled in seminary, it was about a year of soul-searching. After I finished my teaching career, my mom had passed away, I got engaged to my wife, and I was taking time to ask God what's next. Should I be going after my teaching credential? Because if I was going to teach, I was going to do it right.

I didn't have my credential at the time, but I had taught five years, loved it, but then I knew seminary was also an option. So I said, you know, let's go for broke. Let's go for it. I signed up at Western Seminary, which is about an hour drive from San Francisco, by the South Bay, and loved it. It's very practical, Bay Area focused, gospel-centered program. It's not one of those huge campuses you'll find in Southern California or down in the South. It was a simple, little office space, and we're just learning to do ministry. That's what drew me to Western. They weren't putting on airs. They're just, "This is what you need and how to minister in the Bay Area." Most of the students there were part-timers as well, commuters, balancing other jobs. That was very real to me.

Brian: It felt like a fit, and then you took this first class, and you took it mainly so you could go out to Mount Herman.

Pira: Yeah, exactly. It was a good, tangible byproduct. I don't know if they still offer it there, but I knew we were trying it out, and it was a great opportunity. I loved it. I just loved the practice of helping people move forward.

Brian: There's a sense about that class... Coach Approach has the same class, and Western has a very similar line-up. There's something about that class that surprises you that you feel so connected to the other students by the end that it's shocking, and you think, "What just happened?" And these skills that are taught, it's not just about asking questions or listening. It's about creating partnerships, and I don't know. I remember the same feeling. The first class I went to, I thought this'll probably be a waste of time because this is what denominations do, they create things to waste my time, and it wasn't. It was so wonderful, and educational, and useful, and all those things. You really grasped on to that.

Pira: I think the big surprise for me was that it wasn't just hitting me in my head. It really got to my heart, and it was a very practical thing I can do with my hands, hands symbolically. I can actually do something with it. That connection between theory and practice and even incorporating faith into that.

It was a huge aha for me. The assumption oftentimes with pastors is they're the ones with all the answers, so just ask pastors and let them fix you, which no one ever says, but I think that's kind of a prevalent belief. With coaching, you can totally flip that around. Teach a little bit, preach a little bit, but then ask them and find out what's God doing beneath the layers there. When they feel heard, when they feel listened to, and when they feel empowered, they feel loved, and they feel like they can do something because the pastor believed in me.

Brian: Yeah, they feel loved, and they feel respected, and they feel like they want to take action as opposed to, "Yeah, I'm just not as smart as the pastor. I'm not as pure as the pastor," or whatever words people might put to that.

Pira: It's very freeing. It's actually very freeing because a lot of expectations that I've had of other pastors, and to realize people might have those same assumptions of me. I don't want to diminish the authority there because I think there's this huge responsibility, but I want to elevate the way we lead and shepherd people, really empowering them with trust, empowering them with the idea that God has already placed on their hearts.

Brian: So, you took the foundations class, and then you were interested. Did you have the opportunity to take another class?

Pira: I did. I ended up taking a bunch, probably about four electives before I was done, and they were one-unit classes. They were very practical. I think the benefit of doing it at Western was I got credit for it, and it actually helped me move towards my MDiv completion but also towards certification. At the time, I didn't know what I was going to do with certification, but I ended up starting a coaching practice. I just put it out there, made a couple of business cards, threw in a pretty simple website, started teaching a few workshops, and finding a couple of clients who didn't know anything about coaching, but they were willing to be guinea pigs for me, and they were paying clients. I started branching off from individuals who I coached. Some of them were medical.

Some of them were pastors in ministry. There were those who were working in tech. Then I branched off into couples coaching, and usually it's pre-marital counseling, which is the word attached to that, and I took an assessment class through Western of pre-marital preparation and ended up using an assessment tool that created these coaching conversations for the couples who were going to get married, and it was really neat to see the multiple applications just through starting a little business. It wasn't the main source of income, but it was additional to the work I was doing as a part-time pastor, doing some other stuff, administrative roles part-time to make ends meet. This was all bonus practice for me, staying sharp, and helping people where they figured out they needed some help around it.

Brian: Because a lot of our listeners are in this exact same boat, thinking how could I make a little extra money at this? Are you entrepreneurial? What struck you to think, "I could actually put my shingle out there, get a couple clients, and ask them to pay me."

Pira: That's a fantastic question. I guess I just get used to rejection. I don't know if I'm entrepreneurial naturally, but I am a risk taker, and something I may not have mentioned in our earlier conversation, this is a weird fact about Pira, I've been on two game shows. I've been on the Price is Right and Wheel of Fortune.

Brian: I thought you looked familiar. Not really.

Pira: It's totally weird, and I put that fact out there, but for some reason when people hear that, they're like, "How'd you get on there?" And the thing that I've identified, the thing my wife actually helped me identify, is I applied, I try. They, for some reason or another... I applied, and I auditioned. They asked me to come on the show, and I know for sure I never would have been on the shows had I never applied.

Brian: For sure.

Pira: There's thousands of other people who apply, and they don't get on. I know 100%, just take the risk. If they reject you, that's fine. That's normal, but I'm not going to count myself out. I think surrounding myself with people like that... Even when I'm coaching people and encouraging them, it's like, man, go for it. I love to just give them permission to do what they love. I have to examine my own heart. What do I love? It's not necessarily the business side of entrepreneurial things like this. I think it's just the risk-taking part of it.

Brian: Yeah. Something I teach people to do, and something I certainly have done, is look around and say, "Who would I love to coach?" Then ask them. Ask them. All they can do is say no, and sometimes they do, and sometimes they say yes, and it's a lot of fun. So, did you win?

Pira: Well, on the Price is Right, I got called up on the third round, and I won a year's supply of Hot Pockets and videos of Laurel and Hardy. This is VHS. This was back in 2000, back before DVDs were a big deal. It was my senior year of college, but then I played the dice game, and I was playing for a red, Ford Ranger pickup truck, and I missed out by one number.

Brian: That's funny. I own that Ford Ranger. I have a red, Ford Ranger that's probably just that time period.

Pira: And then I got to spin the big wheel, and I spun a 50, so I had to spin again, and I busted with a 55 on the second spin. It was with Bob Barker, so that was enough.

Brian: Yeah. How fun, how fun, and on Wheel of Fortune?

Pira: In Wheel of Fortune, I was leading the entire way until the very last speed round, and the lady who was in the red slot, I was in the middle, yellow, she got the one letter that had multiple letters, and they added \$1,000 to each one, so she just slipped passed me in the last... But I still walked away with about \$11,000, so that was fun.

Brian: Oh nice, nice, and the taxes were only \$13,000, so...

Pira: There you go. Exactly.

Brian: That's perfect. Let's go back to coaching. So, you took your foundations class, you took more electives, and you went ahead and got your credentials. You put your name out there and got a few paying clients, but you didn't think, this is what I'm going to do for a living. You just thought, "This is cool."

Pira: Yeah, you know, I actually ended up not getting my credential. I think you were referring to the ACC?

Brian: Yeah.

Pira: I didn't even get that until a couple years ago. I just coached without a certification.

Brian: Good, good.

Pira: Just because I felt like before I even drop the change and commitment on getting certified, I just want to find out if I love it. It took me a while. It took me about five or six years to convince myself, oh, I've got enough clients. I've got enough hours. So, I didn't start with a credential. I just started with a business card, and a website, and word of mouth. A little bit of Facebook. I just posted, "Hey, I want to coach a couple people. Who's available?" Sometimes people would private message me and ask what's coaching all about. I'd have a chance to educate them. One of the things I ended up finding was a conference. There's a convention here in the Bay Area. They invite hundreds of churches to come for a three-day leader's workshop, lay-leaders in the church, and it's called BASSC, Bay Area Sunday School Convention. It used to be called Sunday School. Now it's just called the BASS Convention. It's free to sign up if you wanted to lead a workshop on anything.

So, you'll have Sunday school teachers. You'll have audio-visual people. You'll have all these different things in the church, and I realized there was a lot of counseling. There was a lot of pastoring. There was a lot of other things, but there wasn't any coaching. I saw that there was a huge opportunity to jump into there. I said, hey, I coach people, I have a Master's of Divinity, here's my business, and here are a couple topics I could teach, and I ended up doing that for about five years, teaching three to four workshops in that weekend. I would get 20 to 50 people in each workshop, and it was more of an education and intro to coaching for them, but it was, for me, a way to rekindle that love of why I enjoyed it in the first place. So, I ended up getting a couple clients out of those speaking engagements, those workshops. They would invite me to speak at their church or lead a coaching workshop for their leaders, or even just have a one-on-one coaching session, or series of sessions with some clients.

Brian: Yeah. Fantastic. So, again, you just saw an opening and went out and did it?

Pira: Yeah. I mean, they're out there. Sometimes you've just got to look around and dig. That one, actually, was something I used to go to as a youth leader. This switch flipped in my mind, like, how do I get to teach one of these? I mean, I've paid to come. How do I get to be one of them? I just looked on the website, and they're like call for workshop leaders. Okay, maybe I'll just put it out there.

Brian: When we talk about that, I think a struggle a lot of people have is they just don't think, "Oh, that's me." You said I do have an MDiv. I do have a coaching practice. I do have a business card. I have done some of this, and there's no one else doing this, so I'll be the best one.

Pira: Yeah, I think my wife identified that in me, especially in relationship to game shows, not to bring that back, but she, "You're weird because you don't ask, 'Why me?' You ask, 'Why not me?'" I think that's a really good way to frame risk taking. Why not me? I'm not afraid to try something and fail as long as you learn from it. In some senses, that's what we get to do as coaches. Why not you? Why can't you? Who's holding you back? It's not anybody else. Nobody else is really saying you can't. It's just nobody else is really looking out for my interests other than the people who are closest to me, myself included. I want to be able to say why not me.

Brian: I remember seeing when the Seattle Seahawks won the Superbowl.

Pira: Ouch, ouch.

Brian: I'm sorry, my friend. Did I just hurt you there? I didn't mean to hurt you.

Pira: We just got Richard Sherman, so...

Brian: I know. Right, right, right. He was there for sure, but I remember Russel Wilson who, I'm not just a huge football guy, but he's small. Everybody said, "Well, you're just too small to be an NFL quarterback. Him and his dad just kept saying, "Why not me?" That was his mantra, and today, he's one of the premier quarterbacks in the NFL because his mindset is what set him apart. I definitely think you need to have a mindset that says, "Why not me?" If I'm going to fail, maybe that'll happen, but it's less likely than you think. Yeah, that's great. Let's move it on forward. You did some workshops. You got a few clients. You kept building your business up a bit. Now you've got the MDiv. You're thinking about pastoring at this point, I'm assuming.

Pira: Yeah, and I ended up pastoring after I graduated. I did that for about two and a half years. Again, at this small little church in San Francisco, and it was a great experience to test out my gifts, and to make disciples, and really build some great relationships there, but I knew in the small context, that there was really no room to move into a full-time role. There was a budget, and having an associate pastor was actually impinging on that budget, and I just didn't feel good about that. I said to my wife we should probably make a change soon because we don't want to be a burden on the church's finances, but also, we had this itch that we'd been wanting to scratch for a while about exploring what church planting looked like. So, we had to make a decision. Were we going to go and find another traditional church role where I could get a full-time ministry role? That would be choice A. Choice B, go and plant a church.

What ended up happening was we found an existing church plant, a network of house churches, where all the house churches are volunteer pastors. We came in at an early stage, maybe around the second multiplication of this. It's called We Are Church, and so we just loved the ethos of that. What we realized is, well, I'm going to have to pay the bills somehow, and well, coaching isn't going to pay the bills directly, but how could I leverage some of the skills as a pastor and as a coach? I just started looking online, on Craigslist, on other job sites. I applied to a company, a startup that was training web-developers. They were doing what we called immersive bootcamps, where they're coming in for three months at a time from another career, learning skills in coding.

I'm an Asian-American guy, so the stereotype would say maybe I know how to code, and I was very clear with them when they answered my call and looked at my resume. I was very clear, making sure you're not looking for that guy who can code because that's not me, and what the job really entailed was working with people on a human level. One of the tasks was to lead small groups, and when I saw that, I thought wait a second. Am I reading correctly because I know what small groups means, and these are not believers. These are people who are in an intense and naturally frustrating program. These students are put through the ringer. They call it a bootcamp for a reason.

They just needed some empathy to keep motivating the students. I said, I can do that. We negotiated a salary, and I was like, wow, that's more than I've ever been paid before. Let's do it. So, I ended up being with this company for about seven months and then pivoted over to another company in the same kind

of tech space. They also ran bootcamps, and I ended up, moving from that company to the next one, giving myself a raise because they really valued that kind of empathy that comes with the educational experience, and they were trying to reform education in a new way. Think of it like it's technical training for the 21st century. Students are not leaving with a degree, per se. They're not looking for grades. They're looking for skills so they can get a job as a developer or a data scientist. So, when I fell into this, literally, I had no idea it existed four years ago, and now that I've pivoted in, working with the students, and now I get to work as an instructional coach here at Galvanized, working training instructors how to teach.

Again, I'm not a subject matter expert in data science or web development, but I don't have to be because it was very clearly communicated to me that you're supporting them, and helping them, and training them on how to teach but also giving them the coaching skills to come in how we manage a classroom and things. I am an instructional coach, and part of my role is actually doing some of the coaching. There are additional tasks, running other groups and other kind of things that are not necessarily coaching, but I feel really, really privileged to have a role like this.

Brian: People throw the word coach around in different ways, so when you say instructional coach, I start thinking, how close is that to what we call coaching, or has it got some context to it?

Pira: Absolutely. That's my skepticism as well. When I hear coaching... Are you sales? Is that another word for another kind of account managing? Here, because it's a world that's created for me, they already knew my skillset which is why I feel so privileged, because I knew what I was doing with students, and they wanted more of that for the instructors. So, it's kind of a promotion into this, and I got to define the job. I wanted a lot of it to include the coaching piece as I defined it, and what I discovered, even across our circle of campuses and staff, is there are other people who are coach-minded who have been training or have experiences learning about the ICF approach. Part of it is an education. I actually run workshops where, we'll have our hangouts across these campuses, I get to teach some of these principles and also invite other instructors to teach on what they're interested in. I've discovered that there are a lot of other coach-minded staff people, and that excites me that there are people out there who understand that. I do find that it's an uphill climb for a lot of people because they still hear coaching, and they think counseling. Something must be wrong.

Brian: Yeah, it's remedial.

Pira: Nothing's going on here, and they get defensive. I just want to always make sure that I'm setting that stage for them, saying I'm here to support you. I'm here to talk about things that are important to you and help you go where you want to go.

Brian: I hear a lot of things. One, coaching has allowed you to pastor in a role that you enjoy without having to be overly concerned about that paying all your bills. It has created an opportunity to do something in the workplace, not putting down waiting tables, but you really enjoy your job because it's coach-related, and it's very human in a sense of relational, so I assume that gives you the chance to have a lot of contact with non-Christians as well.

Pira: Yeah, absolutely. In some sense, I feel like I can explicitly be a coach, and I can be the undercover pastor. When people find out, "What did you do this weekend," or when I ask them, "Why did you enroll in this program? How'd you find this company?" Because people are coming to San Francisco for all kind

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of opportunities. That exchange of stories is such a huge moment for people because they're looking for people who they can trust, and when you can just introduce yourself all over again, you build a relationship, and you might not always lead out with gospel, but I think it comes out in the attitude with which you work, and I try to be as positive as I can. Our company goes through ups and downs like any company does, and I try to help hold everything with an open hand and say if the Lord gives, he can also take away, but at the same time, it's neat to intersect lives with people who would never ever show up in a typical church context. So, even our own house church movement, we call it We Are Church. We want to embody that throughout the week. That's us being the church in the field. Wherever, at school, or at work, or even recreation.

Brian: I've got a challenge for you Pira, and I want 10%. Undercover Pastor is the next big reality show.

Pira: Oh wow.

Brian: You need to go pitch it. You've already been on TV. You already know you can do it. I tell you what, that's something right there.

Pira: Very cool.

Brian: Hey, what's you're describing, I think, is a glimpse into the future of how churches are changing, how ministry is changing, maybe even a look back into the ancient ways of when there weren't full-time positions. Paul was a tent maker and found ways to make money and make connections all on the side. So, I think you've demonstrated for us the future, and I sure appreciate your willingness to put yourself out there, and I appreciate you spending a few minutes with us, talking to us at the podcast.

Pira: Thank you for letting me share my story. It's been awesome.

Brian: How can people get ahold of you, Pira, if they're interested?

Pira: Yeah, thanks. I have a website, www.kingdompros.com. Kingdom Professionals is the name of my coaching practice. If they also search on www.themuse.com, it's a career coaching website, and I'm one of their vetted coaches on there, and you can search for Pira on www.themuse.com. Yeah, those would be two of the best ways to get in touch with me if you're interested in finding out more.

Brian: Fantastic. Pira is P-I-R-A if you're looking for that.

Pira: Yeah, first four letters of pirate.

Brian: Nice. Thanks everybody else for joining us on this podcast. We hope you've enjoyed it as much as we have, and if you don't want to miss any of our podcasts, and I hope you don't, subscribe to our podcast at iTunes, Overcast, Stitcher, or Google Play by searching Coach Approach Ministries podcast. We'll see you next week.

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