



Coach Approach Ministries Podcast

Episode 90: Ken is Building a Coaching Culture in a Denominational District

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Brian Miller: Want to know more about how coaching enhances discipleship? My partners, Bill Copper and Chad Hall, literally wrote the book on the subject with *Faith Coaching: A Conversational Approach to Helping Others Move Forward in Faith*. We are hosting a free webinar on Thursday, April 12, 2018, and even if you can't attend the live event, register now and we'll send you a link to the recording afterward. To register for this free webinar, go to coachapproachministries.org/freewebinar.

[Intro Music]

Brian: I'm Brian Miller, strategic director for Coach Approach Ministries, CAM for short, and I'm joined here today by Ken Kessler. Ken, you're going to have to fill me in on some of the details, but I know that you are a regional leader with the Virginia Baptist. What else can you tell us about your position in life here?

Ken Kessler: Well, our specific organization is called the General Baptist Association of Virginia, and it's a denominational body of churches in Virginia, and now even beyond Virginia.

Brian: What?

Ken: West Virginia and even into other states.

Brian: You guys are invading other states again?

Ken: Invading other states, or, let me say this, they're coming to us is kind of the way the relationship is established, and not only that, new churches are being started through our organization in other parts of the country, and we even have one church in South Korea that's connected with us. So, it's even becoming an international piece, but we have about 1,500 churches that are a part of our organization. I have been commissioned to create a network of coaching. Specifically, my title is Coaching Network Director for us. So, I am trying to do the best I can to help our organization have a coaching culture as a part of its DNA.

Brian: That's wonderful. That's really wonderful. Is that being done anywhere on a national level with your organization?

Ken: No, this one is strictly a regional kind of base to it as this point, and I don't know of anywhere else

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that it's being connected nationally. We're trying as some of these networks grow nationally to kind of help the culture of coaching grow, even as it's invested with us, but we're strictly a regional denomination at this point that is maybe seeing some of its relationships grow outside of it.

Brian: That's fascinating in itself. You guys are doing this at a regional level. It's not being done on the national level. You didn't wait for it to be done on the national level. You decided to just imbue your organization right where they're at. What was the beginning story of this region deciding to create a coaching culture?

Ken: Well, I do think it started with the executive director, in the sense that he knew that as I came from North Carolina, the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina. Back in the last decade, we had some visions and versions of this, in terms of trying to build a culture into the system. When I came, one of the conversations we had was bringing conversation into Virginia Baptist about how we could develop a coaching mindset and a coaching culture into our setting. Now, in all reality, John, who is our executive director, did not know a lot about coaching. He just knew that's something that we did. So, for the first eight years of my... I've been here now 10 years. So, for the first eight years of my ministry, my investment in coaching was as much trying to encourage the organization to think about it, and I did some training of pastors and leaders in coaching. That was the investment that the organization was willing to make at that point. I took that little bit of energy and little bit of time to somehow try to invest it in a larger focus.

Brian: So, did you have this coaching background 10 years ago, or did that develop after the executive director brought this idea?

Ken: No. I brought it with me when I came to the organization from my connection with the North Carolina convention. So, by having that and having that relationship, that's not why he brought me on board I was really brought on board to lead a different team. It was called the Empowering Leaders team, but he knew I had that connection in my life and, you might call it, expertise that I brought with me that he wanted us to expand and develop from there.

Brian: So, I'm guessing your original title 10 years ago was not Director of the Coaching Network as it is today.

Ken: No. That's correct. It's just two years ago that we invested time and the energy for me to be the Coaching Network Director. John was doing some restructuring, and as he was looking at restructuring some of the things in our denomination, he came to me and gave me the opportunity to do one of two things. One was to really be a team leader of a particular group that he was establishing or creating a new network of coaches and a network for coaching in the organization, and my love and energy for coaching allowed me to say, "John, how long do you need me to decide? I can tell you right now which one I'll do," and that was to invest my energy in coaching. So, that's what I've done for the last two years, invested in providing internal coaching for the people in our organization. By people in the organization, I mean staff in the organization. Then also, provide the opportunity of coaching for pastors and leaders in the churches that are connected in our organization as well. Then I was also able to expand the training in the network also.

Brian: Let's go back to those first painful years 10 years ago when John's got the idea. That is a beautiful piece that your top leader is supportive of this effort. What were some of the things you did to kind of

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help people understand what coaching was or break down misconceptions?

Ken: One of the first things I tried to do was just do some coaching demonstrations for people in the context of staff meetings, in the context of different opportunities we had. We had some groups that were interested in some learning opportunities that I was able to connect with that also, I guess I don't know any other way to say it, that it gave us the opportunity to see what the investment of coaching could do with it. One of the groups was called Uptake which was a group of young leaders that we were investing in each year. We were investing in 12 leaders a year. The young leaders were under the age of 35, and they were handpicked for that opportunity, and through that, they had had some coaching relationships with some outside coaches, but this gave me the opportunity to connect and show them what coaching was and then also have the opportunity of training some of those people where they could coach each other. That helped expand some ideas, and I was leading a team, Brian, so that gave me the chance to also use some coaching skills with those that I was leading during that time period.

Brian: I love the way you started. You started by just demonstrating coaching. It's been my experience, as well as yours, that we can talk about coaching all the live-long day, and people kind of nod their head or that's interesting, and then you show them coaching, and the lightbulb goes on of, "Oh." Sometimes they're not even sure what just happened.

Ken: You're exactly right.

Brian: But they know something happened.

Ken: I found it really interesting that there were some that even, when they heard about coaching, wanted to invest a little bit, and the idea is they could coach under people and wanted to be involved in the training to learn how to be a coach. One of the things that I invested a lot of energy in is, folks, you've got to be willing to be coached before you're going to be a real good coach. That kind of shook up some of the atmosphere because they were so used to being helpers, they were just looking at coaching as being another way to help. So, that demonstration really made a difference for that as well.

Brian: How hard was that for them? Did everybody get on board with that?

Ken: No. Everybody didn't. Especially from a denominational standpoint, many of us had been brought up in a denominational culture that says we can go in and give people the answers, not ask the questions that investing in to help people find their own answers. So, that was a culture shift, a paradigm, if we might use those old words, a paradigm shift for a lot of them. A lot of them could not overcome the need to be in control of a process of saying that I need to help people. A lot of them were hoping more for a mentor process, where they could mentor someone, than to really be a coach where they would just listen and respond from there.

So, there was good experiences with it, but it's taken some time. Here we are, 10 years later when I first introduced the idea, and we're still learning what that means. I have lots of stories I could tell. I think we're still working on the culture of the organization of probably 30 to 35 people that we have here on our staff. I've invested in coaching relationships with probably five or six of them. The other 25 or 30 are still trying to figure out whether they can... There's a couple of issues. One is probably they're worried what a coach would be one more person in their life to come in and tell them what to do. Second is can they trust the process enough where I won't be running to the executive director to tell them, "You

know what they said?" That trust is such a big thing to develop and work from. One of the big things that I have tried to do as well is invest myself in having a coach too, and tell people that. So, they know even the person who's the coaching network director has a coach.

Brian: I love it. You're working over 10 years, so there's a lot of learning here.

Ken: Oh, there is.

Brian: For our listeners as well. You're not going to introduce coaching into an organizational culture overnight. It's going to take a lot of time. The first thing you did was demonstrated it and got those opportunities. Then, you pressed, from the top all the way to the bottom, people to say the first thing you need to do is get a coach and not become a coach, but then at some point, you began to train coaches. What did that look like?

Ken: Yeah, we invested with the resources you guys have, which has been a significant part of my life and my journey in the CAM resources, and just asking people to invest two days of their life in training, especially with 501 and 502. I tried to take the model that CAM uses as far as even the cost and some of the others because I wanted people to see that there was an investment there. I would scholarship them, not completely, but scholarship some of it, try to help with the cost and the investment of it. Like I said, in fact, last week, I had a training of class 501, which is the foundations class. It had 14 pastors and staff members that were in that training, which is probably the second most I've had in one of the trainings we've had.

But I'm always keeping this in front of the people with the training because I have four or five classes a year. Basically, my plan these last couple of years has been to provide two 501 and two 502 each year and then a couple advance classes for other people to kind of keep working. This year's been the first year I've also developed a mentor coaching group where we are taking some of these coaches and actually walking them through the process. They're coaching each other, almost like a peer coaching group, but I'm also involved in it as well, and we're giving some insights and helps to each other in terms of that. That's been a very helpful thing as well.

Brian: That's a great addition. That's a great addition, Ken. You're just doing a fantastic job over there, and I think you're a model for... You're way ahead of most people, and we're glad to get a chance to take a look at what you're doing.

Ken: It's been fun, and it's not always been the easiest. There have been times and days I've wondered, "Is this really working?" That kind of thing. I'm really just trying to allow the Lord to use it in whatever way he can to make a difference. What I'm able to invest in now that the most exciting thing this year that I told you about, the mentor coaching group. The other thing I've offered to churches this year, for churches with new pastors, I said here's an opportunity. If you will invest three months, it depends on what the church wants to do, 6 to 10 sessions, for your new pastor to have a coach as they come in getting started. I think that's also an excellent transition time for somebody to have a coach as well. My dream of that, and I've told the leaders and churches as well, is that we have a network of coaches that whenever a new pastor comes into a church in our regional body, he and the church have an opportunity to invest in a coach to help them during those first hundred days, and some of those kind of things that are really good. So, we're trying to expand some things like that as well to encourage the coaching mindset to kind of go all the way through the system.

Brian: What are some opportunities that people you have trained have had to do some coaching? That's the next cog I see as you're developing. You've coached them. You've demoed it. You've coached them. You've started to train them, and then how do you get them clients in that organization?

Ken: One of the things we've done with some of these leadership groups we have, I mentioned the Uptake group, or, I may not have mentioned, but we also have a group called the Kairos Leadership Initiative which is an investment with college students who are involved in ministry. For example, this year there's about 10 of them. I do one. The other nine are all done by some of the people we've coached. So, we've done that now. The other thing I encourage them to do is to even spend time thinking about their own communities and people they can develop relationships with and provide some coaching connections with also. I'm hoping that this idea of the new pastor relationships, as well as, we have some conferences that are held throughout our system. We have one coming up soon called Fresh Expressions, which is a relatively new emphasis, and one of the things I'm trying to work with leaders on is even provide coaches to people who participate in those conferences so they can think about their learning.

We've got a church planting network. The church planting network has kind of its own coaching system right now. That would be one of the challenges we have sometimes is getting everybody into the same world of coaching as far as language, and philosophy, and that type of thing because they kind of have a different mindset for it that we do sometimes, and I'm trying to work with that. That's one of those challenges, but that's another place where we could have some great potential for some of those relationships. The other thing that we're seriously considering expanding is also the idea of doing more peer coaching groups like pastors in small towns or pastors in certain kinds of affinities. With each of those groups, besides just meeting, that they have somebody who's a coach that can invest time with them and helping them with their opportunities, so those are some of the things that we're looking at, as far as expanding some of these challenges and opportunities.

Brian: A lot of it's just education. I hear you talking to make sure there's a trust. That's a huge piece that what's said here, stays here. I'm not going anywhere with it. Something I heard early there, that certainly has come up with me, I remember somebody, a very high denominational level, finally said to me, "So, you're wanting to help me achieve my dreams. You're not being just one more person I have to report to."

Ken: Right. I think the biggest challenge I have with pastors, Brian, I am convinced that most of the pastors don't understand coaching. They think of it as one more voice in their life that's going to tell them what to do, and they have 100 to 150 people already doing that, and the last thing they want is one more voice. When I can help them understand that a coach is not somebody to really direct them, like an athletic coach would, but a coach who's there to help them process and think about what am going to actually do rather than tell me what to do. There's this sense of, "Oh, that might be helpful," that kind of shows up, but it's one bite at a time, and it takes a while. My dreams were that by the end of the first year, I'd have so many coaching clients that I'd need all these coaches, and we wouldn't have any problem. It didn't quite work out that way, but we're working at it. That's the big thing.

Brian: What's a success story, somebody you've trained that they've picked it up and started using it in some pretty positive ways?

Ken: Well, I'll give you an example of one person on our staff who has gone through the coach training process and now has even earned his ACC accreditation with ICF. He is working with pastors all of the time. So, what it's been for him is it's been an opportunity for him to build a relationship with him and really help them be heard as a person, rather than just hearing someone who's coming in, "Here's what you ought to do, or here's a program you ought to do," and he will tell you several times how that has created new opportunities for relationships with people that look beyond theological differences or philosophical differences. It's just the relationship and how that relationship helps them blossom and that type of thing. So, that's one. There's others that I can tell you about who have so much enjoyed learning how not to be the expert in somebody's life and just feeling like they can relax and be a part of conversations with people to help them blossom in their life rather than having to tell them what to do. He really did come with a teaching background, and that was quite a change for him, but he's learned how to relax now and let people take responsibility for their own learning, and it's some great opportunities for him.

Brian: That's a great picture. It was kind of an aha the other day when I was teaching a coaching class. People don't bring you the easy problems in a coaching situation, and then we're kind of like, "Oh gosh, that is hard." I don't know how to solve it either. It's such a relief to say, "Well, I do have some skills. You don't need a consultant. You don't need a mentor." A coach is able to help you go where you haven't gone before, and maybe, anybody else has ever gone before.

Ken: I think that's the challenge for all of us is just helping people... Or at least it is for me, and especially in an organizational setting, is changing the culture mindset. That mindset is such a big thing, and people feel fearful and lonely lots of times in terms of making some of these decisions, and when they can learn that a coach is someone who could help them stop, and think, and take ownership of their own life's journey, and their business journey, whatever it might be, they go, "Yes." Even some connections with people I've had on staff with some different relationships, without dishonoring the confidentiality of that. There's just watching the ahas and them all of a sudden take some accountability for things they want to do is just a tremendous thing.

The other interesting ingredient, Brian, is I am finding people under the age of 40 or 45 have an easier time dealing with coaching in our organization than some of the people who have been around a long time. I think once people learn to relax, people my age, 55, 60, somewhere in that, when they learn to relax, it's a whole different thing. It's such a different cultural mindset that younger ones... Because one of the things our millennials and others are dealing with, they know a lot more than I know, and they're a little frustrated sometimes in the environment where they think these people who are 55 or 60 are making all of these decisions, and knowing that this coaching opportunity gives them a way to kind of process because they get tired of being directed all the time. They want somebody to let them loose.

Brian: I wondered too if it wasn't part of the post-modern mindset. People under 45 say, "You know what? I don't know everything, and neither do you." People over 45 think they know everything, but if you just listen to me. Then we get into leadership and people still don't do what we say either. We thought we'd be telling people good ideas as opposed to the people before us who told them bad ideas. Coaching brings, and I love the way it rolled in with this because in a coaching culture, when you bring that culture to your organization, it helps people take responsibility. I think there's a feeling of, if we're going to have conversations, it's all ethereal, we just talk, it's just a conversation, but really there's a real

hard sense of I need to own my stuff, and I need to do something about it.

Ken: That's exactly right, and that's one of the big things that I think coaching provides for us. We're just learning how significant that can be for us, I think.

Brian: Ken, if people want to get ahold of you, what would be the best way to find you?

Ken: There's always email which is just ken.kessler@bgav.org, or they're welcome to call me. We have an 800 number here at our office, and it's 1-800-255-2428, and just ask for me, or just ask for extension 5295, and you'll find me.

Brian: Ken, I appreciate your time today. I really do.

Ken: Brian, it's been a joy. Thank you for the privilege of talking about things, and again, the thing I'm excited about most is just watching the culture grow, and I think our culture will continue to do that with our leadership because the one thing I love about our executive director is how open he is to continue to encourage, and we'll continue to see things continue to grow.

Brian: Thanks everybody else for joining me today. Don't miss any of our podcasts. Subscribe to our podcast at iTunes, Overcast, Stitcher, or at Google Play by searching for Coach Approach Ministries Podcast. We'll see you next week.

[Outro Music]

Brian: Coach Approach Ministries is like that roast beef sandwich shop, "We have the meat!" In April of 2018, we're offering three high-level coaching classes for coaches who are ready for what's next. *Coaching and the Brain* introduces you to the neurological dynamics involved in learning. You'll learn about the five brains and how to take advantage of all those good chemicals floating around in our brains. *A Coach Approach to Evangelism and Discipleship* gives attention to how a dialogical approach can be effective in evangelism and discipleship. My partners, Chad Hall and Bill Copper, literally wrote the book on this subject with *Faith Coaching*, and if you love assessments, you'll want to take *Using Assessments in Coaching*. You'll learn the when, who, and how of using assessments to promote effective client engagement. These are all online classes which start in April of 2018. So, go to coachapproachministries.org/coachadvance to sign up now and keep your coaching skills sharp.