



Coach Approach Ministries Podcast

Episode 138: 3 Lenses for Success and Failure

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Brian Miller: I'm Brian Miller, Executive Director of Coach Approach Ministries, CAM for short. And I'm joined here today, ladies and gentlemen, by the President of Coach Approach Ministries, Mr. Chad Hall, everybody.

Chad Hall: Brian, if the coaching thing doesn't work out for you, you should be one of those ring announcers in the UFC.

Brian Miller: UFC. Well, you're a big North Carolina Tar Heels fan. I think that's the worst kept secret of all time. You have to imagine that you are starting for the North Carolina Tar Heels.

Chad Hall: Let's hope they never get that bad.

Brian Miller: Home of Michael Jordan, yeah. Well, man alive, I do have the right guy because I want to talk about optimism versus pessimism, and Michael Jordan probably is not the guy to talk to. I think you are the fellow to talk to about this.

Chad Hall: I am the Michael Jordan of optimism and pessimism.

Brian Miller: You're the Michael Jordan. Are you the GOAT, the greatest of all time? That's-

Chad Hall: I don't think so.

Brian Miller: ... a discussion, don't even get into it, for another time, another place in coaching. And you usually don't have that conversation until you're done playing. So we'll hang on to that until you retire. But optimism, why was this a topic of interest to you?

Chad Hall: I came across this topic when I started getting into the whole world of positive psychology. And it's a part of the class that we do, Coaching and Positive Psychology. And one of the things we do as coaches is we help people move forward in life, set goals, reach goals, become the kind of person who can reach goals, and we help people with internal shifts. And one of the internal shifts that is super-duper, high leverage is this shift from a pessimistic approach to an optimistic approach, optimism. If it's optimism versus pessimism, I'm putting my money on optimism.

Brian Miller: Because why?

Chad Hall: Well, optimists, put simply they stay in the game longer. They are fueled by this sort of hopeful outlook that if this didn't work, next thing will. And sometimes I think we sort of caricature optimists as the sort of goofy, banging their head against the wall thinking a door's going to appear-

Brian Miller: Pie in the sky-

Chad Hall: ... and that's not ... Yeah, pie in the sky. That's not what we're talking about. We're talking about the sort of optimist who just stays in the game. They recover more quickly from setbacks. They go after the next thing, even if the last thing didn't work out so well. What is the old saying? Ninety percent of life's just showing up. Optimists show up over and over and over. They just stay at it longer and more consistently, and that's why they are more likely to succeed in life, in business and relationships, all of those things.

Brian Miller: So in a couple of weeks a podcast is coming out on resilience, and our expert on resilience talked about positivity being one of the keys to resilience. Is resilience and optimism similar veins?

Chad Hall: Yeah, very much. And this comes from the research ... Martin Seligman was one of the big early guys, and it's interesting because his initial research was on learned helplessness, kind of how people learn to give up. Thank you for that contribution, right? And then I think-

Brian Miller: I've been trying to figure that out, how to give up easier.

Chad Hall: I won't go into all the research, but let's just say it involves shocking dogs. But people learn to be helpless. They learn to give up-

Brian Miller: Yes.

Chad Hall: ... and then he got convicted I guess and thought well, why study that? Why not study how people learn to not give up. How do they learn to stick with it? How do they learn to take themselves to the next level? And so that became learned optimism, that becomes kind of a sibling to positivity which is a cousin to resilience, and so all that's kind of in the same package.

Brian Miller: So we all know people who ... I mean, it's about lenses, right? People either look at it optimistically or pessimistically, and I think we all know people who, as soon as something's brought up, they have five reasons this isn't going to work.

Chad Hall: Yeah, and most of those people are deacons on a church board. And so I think somewhere in Paul's letters to Timothy, he said, "And here are the qualifications for being a deacon on a church board, and it's always looking at the glass half empty." No, I'm just kidding. [crosstalk 00:05:40]

Brian Miller: If you look up the dictionary Paul's thorn in his side, you'll see a picture of a specific deacon I'm thinking of.

Chad Hall: I think his name's Arthur, and ... No, I'm just ... I have never known a deacon named Arthur, that's why I chose that name.

Brian Miller: Well done. So there's some research that you've looked at about three distinct ways to interpret success and failure, and they're going to end up being the lenses of either optimism or pessimism.

Chad Hall: Yeah. So if you want a simple understanding of optimism or pessimism, it's not just hey, you look on the bright side. It's really you look at life through these three lenses in a particular way. And so the kind of long lasting ... The story that gets most often told to kind of exemplify these three lenses is imagine a young man is in a bar, and he's going to ask a girl out on a date. This is going to be immediate success or a failure, right? And so whatever her response is, there are going to be these three lenses, and they all sort of the letter P. I think this is not a function of me being a recovering Baptist preacher. This is what the research is. And so the lenses are he's going to interpret the response through a personal lens, through a precedence lens, and through a permanence lens. So again, personal, prevalence, and permanence. And so if she says, yes ... Well, let's start with no, that's more fun. So he says, "Hey, can I get your digits?" Or whatever the kids are saying these-

Brian Miller: I think that's exactly what they're saying today.

Chad Hall: By the way, if you were ever in a bar, that is not a request for your fingers. That's the request for your phone number, I believe.

Brian Miller: These dad jokes are brought to you by CAM-

Chad Hall: That's right.

Brian Miller: ... Coach Approach Ministries, you're welcome.

Chad Hall: We've got a side business on dad jokes. If she says no, the pessimist says, "Oh, it's me. Why did she say no? She said no to me-

Brian Miller: I knew she would.

Chad Hall: ... I'm the reason for no." It's personal. It's personal. He's also going to say, "It's not just me, it's everywhere." So it's prevalent. No is prevalent. It's everywhere. So tomorrow, should I ask my boss for a raise? No, because the fact that *she* just said no to me asking for her phone number indicates that my boss is going to say no tomorrow. And again, someone just totally objective would say, "Well, those are two totally different situations." Not to the pessimist, so to the pessimists why did she say no? Me personally? And by the way, me personally is not going to change, right? It's also a permanent condition. People say no to me everywhere I go.

Chad Hall: So it's this prevalence, and then he's also going to interpret that no as permanent. If I ask her and she says no, will she answer me no again tomorrow? Will the girl three bar stools down say no? And so it's this idea of no, it's no, it's no, it's always no. So it's a permanent no. The optimist on the other hand asks the girl for her digits and gets a no and he says, "Oh, that's about her, not

me." So the reason she said no is all about her. It has nothing to do with me. She's in a bad mood. She doesn't know a good thing when she sees it, whatever, but it's not personal. It's-

Brian Miller: Even if it's not what she's looking for?

Chad Hall: No. Yeah, that's-

Brian Miller: I'm a great catch, but I'm not what she's looking for and that's okay.

Chad Hall: Yeah, her loss. And notice that, her loss, not my loss, her loss. It's personal. It's still interpreted through the personal lens, but in the exact opposite way as the pessimist.

Brian Miller: Gotcha.

Chad Hall: And then the optimist also says, "Now, she said no. Does that have any bearing on whether I'm going to get a raise tomorrow when I ask for it? Nope." He says, "The no is not prevalent. It's just confined." It was confined to this one thing. It has no bearing on the next thing or any other things. So it's not prevalent, and it's also not permanent. So the optimist says, "Oh, a no is temporary." This particular girl might say yes tomorrow, or someone like her might say yes later. So you can see how that interpretive lens keeps an optimist in the game more.

Chad Hall: I mean, this is why companies love salespeople who are optimists because that whole thing of you've got to go through nine nos to get to the one yes. And they're like, "Oh, another step closer to yes." And again, you could caricature this and come up with kind of the Dumb and Dumber, "So you're saying I got a chance," or whatever. That's not it. It's really just the optimist doesn't carry the no along with them. And so they're able to just kind of get back into the game and ask and try things. But the funny thing is if the girl says yes, now their perspectives switch. So if the girl says yes, the pessimist says, "Well that's her, not me. She must be desperate."

Chad Hall: The pessimist says, "Well, she said yes, but that's not going to carry over to me getting a raise tomorrow. Well she said yes, she's probably the only one. Nobody else here in the bar would say yes." And so now the pessimist keeps it from being personal, keeps it from being permanent, keeps it from being prevalent. Whereas the optimist, if he gets a yes he says, "Of course, she said yes, because it's me. And hey, she said yes, I'm on a roll. I'm going to ask my boss for a raise tomorrow. She said yes. And she is ..." By the way, this is going to sound very sexist, so we apologize. We are caricaturing people who ask-

Brian Miller: We don't apologize.

Chad Hall: ... for pickups in bars. So-

Brian Miller: You apologize because you're the one about to say it. I don't even know what it's going to be.

Chad Hall: That's right you have a note, don't hold Brian Miller responsible-

Brian Miller: I'm sure I'm against it.

Chad Hall: But the optimist says, "She said yes, and she's about a seven. I'll bet the nine across the bar ... Now, I'm going to go ask her because it's a permanent condition that people say yes to me."

Brian Miller: Wow.

Chad Hall: And you can see how that fuels an optimist, so the optimist is always interpreting things in a way that's favorable for continuing to try. The pessimist is always interpreting things in the way the least favorable for trying. And which one's right? Neither one of them is right, that's the thing, but the optimist is more successful because they stay with it longer.

Brian Miller: Yeah, it's interesting. I don't want to talk about athletics, although we opened with an athletic joke, right? But there's a phrase that I hear in the ... I watch a lot of NBA basketball and shooters shoot. And they can miss 20 shots in a row, and they're going to shoot again next time they get the ball. And you even see this in football when a quarterback throws an interception or fumbles or whatever, and the next play he's thinking I'm going to score a touchdown. And I think we've got this right in athletic coaching, finally, where we really train people to say forget the last time. This time is a new time, and it's all on its own. And it's very likely with your training that this is going to be successful because you get down on yourself, you're never gonna make another shot or you're not going to take another shot.

Chad Hall: Yeah, why would you even take one? And if you did take one, you've got that little lingering doubt this probably won't go in either, and you self-sabotage that next shot. It doesn't go in. Now it's a self-fulfilling prophecy. You could see ... Think about athletics. I've seen this through the years since I came across this research. Both of my boys play baseball, and one of the things that keeps my youngest son being, I think, just a great pitcher for his age is he has like total short-term memory loss. He's an optimist. And by the way, optimists will kind of drive you a little crazy because they're going to keep asking, and they're going to ... But he'll be on the mound, he'll walk a kid. And in his mind that's not him, that was the ump. There was some other reason. There's some other factor. He's not going to blame himself, but he also has this kind of short-term memory loss where he just sort of forgets it and moves on.

Chad Hall: And I will never forget, there was this kid on the team a few years ago. He was in the outfield and the ball was hit to him, and as sixth graders want to do, he'd let the ball go between his legs. It rolled all the way to the fence. And this kid, not literally, but practically melted into the ground. He didn't go after the ball. He just sort of just collapsed in on himself, and he was done the rest of the game. He was a pessimist, "I miss that one. There's no reason for me to even go get the ball. It's over." And you can just see the permanence of that negative experience. He carried it with him the rest of the day. Whereas an optimist would say, "Oh, that happened," quickly hit the reset button and go get the ball, recover, "Oh, I made a great throw from the fence. Did you see that throw from the fence?" That would be sort of the optimist. And so athletics is a great place to see optimism versus pessimism. You don't see many pessimists get very far in athletics because they give up.

Brian Miller: Yeah. Rarely would I even talk about a video that somebody saw on Facebook because no, I don't want to see another video on Facebook. But Danelle was telling me she just saw a video where a guy took a last second shot, missed it, went into overtime, his head went down, he was walking

slowly off the court, and a teammate came up behind him, high fived him with his hanging-low hand, and then took his hand and just lifted this chin. It changed everything-

Chad Hall: Wow.

Brian Miller: ... right, because he thought it was permanent. It's storybook, but then they came back and just demolished the team. But that has a huge factor, and we all have that. And we all have times when I think, I don't know, if you get out there enough, you're going to have some stupid things about you, that you did something dumb. My brother-in-law is a carpenter, and he was working for a guy. And the guy said, "Oh, I know your brother-in-law, Brian. I remember seeing him play basketball in high school. My son just took the ball right out of his hands and threw it in the basket." It's like, you remember me from 30 years ago, and that's the one thing you remember? Fantastic.

Brian Miller: But it's funny, in that case, I don't care. He was really good. It wasn't a permanent thing. It isn't going to happen to me every time. But those kinds of things ... And that's an example of something that didn't get to me. But there are those things that just ... You like to talk about Will Ferrell liking to play these over-optimistic characters. And we laugh at him because we think it's ridiculous, and we don't want to be ridiculous.

Chad Hall: But that's also what always makes him the hero in the story is he just stays with it because he's ... I'm not saying go watch all the Will Ferrell movies but *Step Brothers*, he comes around. It's because he's so stupidly goofy optimistic or whatever. But the thing with the optimist and the pessimist, we're all somewhere on the spectrum. And what happens is we have these interpretive lenses and the degree to which you consistently interpret things pessimistically. So nobody is an optimist or is a pessimist. So we're really describing how consistent are you in using the same interpretive lenses to interpret success and failure?

Brian Miller: Well, these are great-

Chad Hall: And so I like that because you can become less consistent interpreting things pessimistically. You can catch yourself doing it. You can remember oh yeah, this is one way to interpret reality. By the way, this is where coaching really gets into kind of a neat relationship with cognitive behavioral therapy. You're noticing your thought patterns and choosing different ones and that's a learned ... You can learn optimism, and I think that's really good news.

Brian Miller: Oh, it's great news. And as a coach, and I think this is a coach's podcast, right, one thing you can do for your client as you're hearing this, as you're hearing a story, you're starting to sense some pessimism over optimism, these three distinctions, I mean just as I heard them today, they're amazingly helpful. And I go, "Oh yes, that's where I made this decision that this is over for me, that this is going to happen every time for me, that this isn't going to change tomorrow." And putting them in those three distinctions, that's something a coach can certainly lay out is these three distinctions. It just creates a framework then for the client to start thinking about their process-

Chad Hall: That's right this is a form of-

Brian Miller: ... and which part of this is [crosstalk 00:20:44]

Chad Hall: ... active listening. That's what you're describing. It's active listening, and some coaches, especially if you're a beginner coach you're thinking well I'm not supposed to say, "Hey, that sounds optimistic or that sounds pessimistic." And that's really not what we're saying. But we are saying, you can reflect back and say, "I'm hearing you say that that failure is permanent. And that's an interpretation. What's a different interpretation?" By the way, we don't care how they interpret it. They can choose to interpret it negatively or positively, it's up to them. We're here to help them notice that, and that's really good active listening, helping them notice the consistency with which they're interpreting events. I think that's super helpful.

Brian Miller: I don't want to put words in your mouth. And you can tell me if it's just not right, but I think I've heard you ask the question, "How true is that?" How true is that, because I make a statement ... And I suppose that could be somewhat leading, but you want to hold it really lightly, and you're just doing some exploration. How true is that? That's a good question.

Chad Hall: And I like not "Is that true?"-

Brian Miller: I think that that's not true.

Chad Hall: Yeah, that's a way of us saying, "I heard you say that, but that's not true." How true is that? It lets somebody step back and notice they're doing some interpreting, and then they can choose how to interpret. They can choose to keep interpreting things that way. They can choose to interpret things a different way, but it really is good news that you can learn to be optimistic. By the way, there's good news. You can learn optimism, but you probably won't. I'm kidding folks. I'm kidding. I thought that would be funny.

Brian Miller: That's fantastic, and another thing you can do as a coach is you can remain optimistic yourself.

Chad Hall: That's right.

Brian Miller: I was talking about this the other day. I don't think this means that if somebody is saying, "I'm thinking about going on a mission trip, and I want to think that through." I think a mistake to make is to be optimistic as a coach and say, "You ought to," because you don't know if they should or shouldn't. They're asking it on ... I mean, we don't know if there's legitimate reasons why they shouldn't or if it's just an internal identity issue. We don't even know what that is, but we're optimistic that there's a good answer.

Chad Hall: Yeah, and we're not optimistic that just because someone applies for a job they're going to get it, just because they asked the girl to marry that she's going to say yes, that just because they pitched this idea to their deacon board it's gonna work out fantastic. We don't know any of that, nor are we trying tell people they should always try to do something. That's not it. I think what you're saying, Brian, is as a coach, we remain optimistic, we stay in the game, we keep trying. And let's face it, as coaches, we have successes and failures, and if your client doesn't work out so great, we make that permanent, prevalent, and make it about our person, we're not going to be a very good coach next time. We're not going to shoot the ball next time, so to speak.

Brian Miller: Coaches coach.

Chad Hall: That's right, shooters shoot and coaches coach. Hey, one more thing before we leave this. Someone could misinterpret this and say, "Oh, the optimist just keeps shooting and never tries to improve. It could be they just have a terrible shot, and they should never shoot again. Please stop shooting." That would be a form of optimism gone amok. That's sort of a cancerous optimism. Where we see a realistic kind of more real-world optimism is the shooter who says, "I'm a great shooter. That's why I practice." So they are developing, they are working, they are trying to improve. They're not just sort of riding the winds of hope and optimism without ever do anything to back it up. So it's not just they keep shooting the ball in the game, they also keep shooting the ball in practice. So they're hopeful optimistic. They're good, and they're going to get better.

Brian Miller: I love the layers of this, too. My shot may not be going in, but there are other ways I can show up well today. It's not a permanence, it's not prevalent.

Chad Hall: That's right.

Brian Miller: My shot's not going in today. It could be a lot of things, and I may want to try it again here soon, but it's not going to affect everything else I do. I love the layers of this. I just think that's fantastic. And Chad, you made mention, and I'm just going to mention it very much on purpose here. We have a class called Coaching and Positive Psychology, which you've developed in your teaching. That's going to start a February 18th, 2019 online. If anybody's interested in furthering some information on this, furthering their study on this, that is a fantastic class just full of the distinctions such as this, and I would encourage anyone to take advantage of that. Chad-

Chad Hall: It's a class that's really practical for coaches.

Brian Miller: Chad, thanks for spending some time with us talking through this, and thanks to the listeners for listening to this week's podcast. Coach Approach Ministries is a nonprofit coach training school with over 15 years of experience training more than 2,000 coaches. Let us know how we can help you start or further your coaching career by visiting us at coachapproachministries.org or email me at bmiller@ca-ministries.com. I'd love to hear from you. We'll see you next week.