

Biblical Approach to Coaching Leaders

Erika M. Laos

Bold Alliance Consulting Group, Inc.

Joshua J. Torres, PCC

Torres Coaching Group

Robert L. Wilson Jr.

Wilson Global Outreach Solutions, LLC

This article aims to highlight the advantages of integrating biblical perspectives and professional practices of the leader through coaching. The three basic biblical principles this article explores are faith, truth, and perseverance anchored in the biblical accounts of James. The integration of these three practical teachings adds value to the coaching profession while it fosters the establishment of deep-rooted and trusting relationships. These biblical concepts provide insight, understanding, and solutions for coaching practitioners in order to develop the leader to enhance relationships within the organization providing foundational competencies which improve the leader's performance in all areas of life. Trusting relationships are an innate necessity for leaders to partake in any endeavor throughout their personal or professional life.

This article aims to highlight the advantages of integrating biblical perspectives and professional practices of the leader through coaching. The three basic biblical principles this article explores are faith, truth, and perseverance anchored in the biblical accounts of James. The integration of these three practical teachings adds value to the coaching profession while it fosters the establishment of deep-rooted and trusting relationships. These biblical concepts provide insight, understanding, and solutions for coaching practitioners in order to develop the leader to enhance relationships within the organization providing foundational competencies which improve the leader's performance in all areas of life. Trusting relationships are an innate necessity for leaders to partake in any endeavor throughout their personal or professional life.

Coaching practitioners must effectively integrate these biblical principles to maximize the leader's impact on others' performance in an organization to generate positive organizational results. Faith, truth, and perseverance drive the relationship building process leading to optimal performance and

high return on investment in coaching. This analysis is an attempt to identify the core pillars of coaching a leader that connect the current coaching practice to the timeless lessons found in the biblical accounts of James. The overarching premise in this paper becomes the need to assess the leader-follower relationship to effectively apply coaching. These Scriptural tenets along with biblical characters facilitate the learning and creation of an open and honest coach-leader conversation that results in increased commitment, trust, productivity, and self-identity. Coaches impact the world through their effort to develop or transform the individual leader who influences others and ultimately the organization itself. Coaches who integrate Christian beliefs to their practice make better people concurrently benefiting the individual's organizations. This paper proposes that the integration of these three biblical concepts result in a powerful coach-leader partnership with a valuable return on investment. This integration allows the coach to challenge the leader to examine the various approaches to ethical decision making available and their impacts and outcomes on organizations and their stakeholders. It is through the application of these three biblical truths that coaches become instruments and drivers of change in society.

Faith

Today, faith is a foundational aspect of human life. Colwell (1991) defines faith as “an integrated set of human responses to the proclamation of the Gospel” (p. 64). Faith drives one’s thinking, trust, and action. Christian must live faith actively to know it and proclaim it. Faith requires an active relationship with Jesus Christ and living out His teachings as evidence of Christian faith in the world. Faith is the foundation that maintains one’s together during trials through the deep-rooted belief in God’s salvation (James 1:2-4 ESV). Jesus Christ is the coach for Christians leaders with Scripture as the roadmap for Christian coaching.

The popularity of coaching has evolved from sports coaching to most areas of life such as fitness, nutrition, business, career, or financial coaches. According to Collins (2001), coaching exists everywhere except in church (p. 15). Coaching is said to be “the art and practice of guiding a person or group from where they are toward the greater competence and fulfillment that they desire” (Collins, 2001, p. 16).

Christian coaching approaches the practice of coaching from a biblical worldview bringing Christian insights into the coach-client relationship (Collins, 2001). Christian coaches center their coaching on God as the guide for all their work. Collins (2001) claims the Christian coach epitomizes Jesus’ work leading to the coach’s higher quality of life and impacting the world through the making of Christian disciples (p. 22).

Faith surfaces when the Christian coach-client relationship begin. The client takes a leap of faith seeking Christian coaching because something beyond the evident must change. Integrating biblical perspectives and professional practices of the leader through Christian coaching brings faith alive for a client to make conscious decisions to change their present reality (Collins, 2001; Stoltzfus, 2005).

Faith is an active ingredient in the coaching-client relationship. It is indispensable to foster trust before the client takes action towards the desired change. Faith itself acknowledges God’s

existence. James 2:14-26 describes the relationship between the inner and outer dimensions of faith as follows: "Faith by itself, if not accompanied by action is dead" (Colwell, 1991, p. 64).

In other words, faith leads to action (Hartin, 2015). In the coaching practice, faith calls the coach to integrate biblical principles into its practice because that is God's calling. Coaching becomes a vocation to impact leaders. When coaches take a client, there is faith that the client will make committed efforts to work on what they want to change. Clients expect their coaches will steer them in the best direction and provide them perspective. Faith drives the coach-client relationship from the start.

One of the most positive aspects of biblical view of faith in leadership coaching practice is the return on investment (Bower, 2012). Christian coaching offers an approach to inward change, increased trust in God more than the people or organization the client belongs. Northouse (2016) asserts coaches inspire confidence and trust needed to create high-performance teams and high-performance cultures. (p. 322). Christian coaching contributes to leadership practice. Christian coaching falls in the leadership style Northouse (2016) qualified as high-directive and high-supportive style (p. 94). In leadership, Christian coaching becomes the medium necessary to turn faith into trust in leadership practice (Winston & Patterson, 2006).

Coaches can use faith as a mechanism to drive the client's transformation to their full potential. The coach identifies what the client considers most sacred. Christian clients are expected to be passionate about their relationship with God. Christian coach-Christian client may prompt a faster connection through their shared faith. When a Christian coach works with a client distant from God or non-believer, it is necessary to still identify what the client holds most sacred. It will be the Christian coach who will lead that relationship and work to initially establish a common understanding of faith to structure a successful coaching path for the client. In the absence of faith, coaches can still choose to work with the client on secular objectives. Christian coaches can effectively use faith as a motivating principle to achieve the client's objectives.

Truth

There is a great difference between what is true and what is the truth. True aligns itself with the facts. The truth is established when the quality of what is true (honesty, sincerity, veracity) is center stage. For Christians, truth takes on a deeper meaning. The truth is established when there is a connection to the person of Jesus (James 3: 17; John 14:6). The truth is powerful. Truth calls people to look past what is "correct" and focus on what is right (James 1:22-23; Proverb 16:13). Truth frees the individual from what has held them captive (James 4:7; John 8:32). Truth empowers the individual to conquer their fears (James 5:10-11; John 16:3). The acceptance of truth fuses the individual to the person of Christ (James 2:20-24; 2 John 1:2). Such truth must be a focal point in coaching.

Coaching clients are in need of truth. For there to be truth present in the coaching relationship, the coach must first be true to who they are as a coach (O'Neill, 2007). Clients are looking for authenticity in the coach; without the coach being authentic, the client will not be able to embrace truth through the coaching relationship. When coaches run their practice with their client's best in mind, while being true to who they are, potential clients take notice (Grodzki, Allen, 2005).

Grodzki and Allen (2005) make the argument; Masterful coaches coach out of a level of excellence that comes from a dedication to “being” rather than “doing” (p. 40). To be a masterful coach, one must embrace their style and personality, bringing only himself or herself to the coaching relationship, no one else. Donahue and Bowman (2012) say it this way, to build a healthy coaching relationship the truth of who the coach is cannot be masked by the personality of another coach. They must be themselves for a healthy and real relationship to exist between the coach and the client (Donahue & Bowman, 2012, p. 42-44). Truth creates space for honesty which creates space for trust; trust sets the stage for transformation. In healthy relationships between client and coach, the energy to continue coaching comes from both the coach and the client (Grodzki and Allen, 2005, p. 148). If coaches are not careful, their negative energy can affect the positive and important works done by the client causing them to lose focus and momentum (Grodzki and Allen, 2005, p. 148).

On the path from change, transition to transformation, truth makes the difference for the client (Stoltzfus, 2005). Creswell (2009) says it this way; truth ignites clarity and focuses on the client. When clients see, acknowledge and embrace truth, they can move forward on who they are rather than what they do. Clients who are coached to truth can see past the temporal and become focused on what is eternal (Stoltzfus, 2009). The truth of their story propels them into transformation (Hall, Copper, and McElveen, 2009). Clients are in need of coaches who can see into who they truly are and encourage that person to come to the surface (Donahue and Bowman, 2012). Encouragement comes and looks different to every client, however, what is true is that their encouragement must be built out of the truth of their story (Grodzki and Allen, 2005, p. 193). Once the truth is revealed to the client, and encouragement not centered in it will cause the client to feel that the coach is inauthentic causing strain on the coaching relationship. This will inevitably end the client’s growth and coaching relationship.

Perseverance

There are many traits and characteristics that may be helpful to leaders and coaches in the coaching field. Perseverance is a very critical characteristic of effective leadership and coaching practices. Perseverance is a key component when implementing many of the core competencies established by the International Coaching Federation. Two core competencies that are reflective of coaching that use and benefit from a coach using perseverance are active listening and powerful questioning. According to the International Coaching Federation website, “active listening is defined as the ability to focus completely on what the client is saying and is not saying, to understand the meaning of what is said in the context of the client's desires, and to support client self-expression and powerful questioning is the ability to ask questions that reveal the information needed for maximum benefit to the coaching relationship and the client”. This is important to the profession because it informs coaching practitioners and leadership on how to effectively implement core competencies when providing coaching practices (Northouse, 2013, p. 2). This is helpful to coaches because it allows a deeper understanding of the role and function of coaching and its impact on those they coach (Hackman and Johnson, 2009, p. 373). Harper (2012) stated that “the leader coach is the most effective model of the multi-styled leader, as he or she exercises a myriad of theoretically proven techniques by the practice and craft of his or her profession” (p. 22). This allows for coaches to meet clients where they are and use different techniques and approaches to provide greater support to clients by delivering competencies more efficiently and effectively.

Coaching practitioners that integrate the biblical principle of perseverance can positively influence coaching outcomes with clients more holistically. Tangen (2010) stated that coaching is a practice to use empowerment through purposeful inquiry aimed at providing a freedom and focus for the client to achieve their goals (p. 16). According to the Christian Coaches Network International website, Christian coaching “employs the skills of professional coaching to enable clients to effect change, create new awareness, and move into action, while keeping in mind the bigger picture of humanity as taught by a biblical worldview”.

How is the principle of perseverance used biblically? Perseverance is a biblical principle used to develop people. This is a biblical principle that was demonstrated in the book of James effectively. James in 1:4 amplified version used the terms endurance, steadfastness, and patience to demonstrate and discuss how perseverance is used biblically to provide insight into development and coaching of people for growth and maturity (Siewert, 1987, p. 1868-1869).

Faith, truth, and perseverance work together in the person to accomplish maturity, growth, and development. Schaller (2011) discussed the importance of the biblical basis for coaching which provides significant insight and understanding of the coach’s relationship with the client using listening skills and asking questions to effectively facilitate change, transformation, and growth which is rooted in the trait of perseverance of both the coach and the client (p. 113). This aids in fostering trust necessary to build a solid relationship and establishing the presence of the coach which are other competencies as stated on the International Coaching Federation website.

Coaches that use biblical principles such as perseverance will more effectively implement core competencies to maximize their impact and utilize their skills in their coaching practices. The Christian Coaches Network International stated that “the primary distinction in Christian coaching is based in the precept that God seeks active involvement in the lives of human.” This can be done effectively by using biblical principles such as demonstrated in the book of James. James demonstrated that perseverance is helpful to implement core competencies effectively.

Application

The integration of biblical perspectives into the practice of coaching creates a higher return on investment. Christian coaching is becoming a field essential to leadership practice. This information can be used in future research on Christian coaching and leadership which may help establish it as an effective leadership style and a significant contributor to organizational success. Secular coaching finds it difficult to measure the effectiveness of its coaching (Leonard-Cross, 2010; Tyler, 2014). Christian coaching adds value and effectiveness to the coach, the client, and their circles of influence beyond the coach-client relationship. James adds value by demonstrating how effectiveness is achieved by integrating biblical principles for the development of others as referenced in 1:4. Biblical principles such as faith, truth, and perseverance act as motivators because those principles hold coaches and clients to God’s standards which are higher than organizational standards. Coaching with biblical insights offers the coach and client a self-discovery method. They are challenged to understand Scripture, their present and desired realities aligned with God’s teaching. Integrating biblical principles will enhance the ethical practices of coaches which provides better insight and understanding of how the competencies should be implemented for the best outcomes. Christian coaching drives change in the client, organizations,

and their communities. A final byproduct of Christian coaching becomes a strengthened and renewed relationship with God through Jesus Christ to serve their organizations in a Christ-like manner. Coaches can use what we learned to enhance practice, increase effectiveness, and promote the professions and its impact on leadership.

Conclusion

There are many advantages of integrating biblical perspectives and professional practices of the leader through coaching. Biblical concepts provide insight, understanding, and solutions for coaching practitioners that provide a solid foundation for the development of leaders. This will enhance relationships within the organization to effectively implement coaching competencies which improve the leader's performance and success. Faith, truth, and perseverance anchored in the biblical accounts of James demonstrated effective integration of biblical principles and coaching profession.

About the Authors

Erika Laos possesses over 20 years of experience across the public, private, and non-profit sectors. Her combined work experience with cross-functional diverse teams has led her to research the global dexterities of individuals and organizations that generate sustainable leadership in a global context. Erika is the President of Bold Alliance Consulting Group, Inc. She believes in empowering clients—individuals or organizations—to seek transformational approaches to achieve their full potential. She holds a B.A. in Government and International Politics from George Mason University, and a M.A. in International Affairs from the Catholic University of America. She is currently pursuing her Doctor of Strategic Leadership with a concentration on Global Consulting from Regent University. Erika resides in the Washington, DC, metropolitan area.

Joshua Torres is the Managing Partner of Torres Coaching Group, a coaching firm, located in the Tristate Area. He is a respected advisor and recognized expert in the field, with a passion for identifying the tools and skills executives need to take action. He is committed to helping individuals, corporations and non-profit organizations achieve results by capitalizing on their leadership potential. Utilizing a systems approach, he employs a series of assessment tools to pinpoint critical behavioral goals, provides direct, targeted feedback and coaches with a specific development plan. His approach creates a cycle of action and learning, leading to sustained improvements in performance. Joshua hold multiple certifications. He holds a Proficient Certified Coach (International Coach Federation), Certified People Management Coach (Workplace Coach Instituted), and Conflict Management Coach (The Center for Conflict Dynamics).

Robert L. Wilson Jr. is a consultant, speaker, coach, and trainer. He is currently pursuing his Doctor of Strategic Leadership degree with a concentration of global consulting from Regent University. He received his master's degree in Sociology from Fayetteville State University and bachelor's degree in Psychology from Rowan University. He is also a Certified Professional Life Coach and Certified Wellness Coach. Robert is the owner and principal consultant of Robert Wilson Consulting and Wilson Global Outreach Solutions, LLC. He has worked in the field of mental health, leadership, and organizational development for 20 + years. He has vast experience

with facilitating and implementing practice, process, policy, systemic change, and transformation for various groups. Robert is a highly sought-after consultant, coach, speaker, and trainer. Questions or comments regarding this article may be directed to the authors at: Erika.laos@boldallianceconsulting.com.

References

- Bower, K. M. (2012). Leadership Coaching: Does It Really Provide Value?. *Journal of Practical Consulting*, 4(1), 1-5.
- Carter, A. (2009). Your best bet. *Coaching At Work*, 4(6), 44-47.
- Collins, G. R. (2001). *Christian coaching: helping others turn potential into reality*. Colorado Springs, Colo: Navpress.
- Colwell, G. (1991). What Is Christian Faith. *Religious Studies and Theology*, 11(2-3), 57-65.
- Creswell, J. (2006). *Christ-Centered Coaching: 7 Benefits for Ministry Leaders*. St. Louis MO. Chalice Press
- Donahue, B., Bowman, G. (2012). *Coaching Life-Changing Small Group Leaders*. Grand Rapids, MI, Zondervan.
- Grodzki, L., Allen, W. (2005). *The Business and Practice of Coaching: Finding your Niche, Making Money, and Attracting Ideal Clients*. New York, NY. W.W. Norton and Company.
- Hall, C., Copper, B., & McElveen, K. (2009). *Faith Coaching*. Hickory, NC. Coach Approach Ministry.
- Harper, S. (2012). The Leader Coach: A Model of Multi-Style Leadership. *Journal Of Practical Consulting*, 4(1), 22-31.
- Hartin, P. J. (2015). The letter of James: faith leads to action (the indicative leads to the imperative). *Word & World*, 35(3), 222-230.
- Leonard-Cross, E. (2010). Developmental coaching: Business benefit -- fact or fad? An evaluative study to explore the impact of coaching in the workplace. *International Coaching Psychology Review*, 5(1), 36-47.
- Northouse, P.G. (2013). *Leadership Theory and Practice*. Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage.
- Northouse, P.G. (2016). *Leadership Theory and Practice*. Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage.

O'Neill, M.B. (2007). *Executive Coaching with Backbone and Heart*. San Francisco, CA. Jossey-Bass.

Schaller, G. (2011). Transformissional coaching: empowering leaders in a changing ministry world. *The Journal of Applied Christian Leadership*, 5(2), 113-114.

Siewert, F. (1987). *Amplified Bible*. Grand Rapids, MI. Zondervan.

Stoltzfus, T. (2005). Leadership Coaching: The Disciplines, Skills, and Heart of a Christian Coach. Virginia Beach, VA. Coach 22.

Stoltzfus, T. (2012). Christian Life Coaching: Calling and Destiny Discovery Tools for Christian Life Coaching. Virginia Beach, VA. Coach 22.

Tangen, K.I. (2010). Integrating Life Coaching and Practical Theology Without Losing Our Theological Integrity. *Journal of Biblical Perspectives in Leadership*. 3(1), pp.13-32.

Tyler, K. (2014). Calling in a Coach. *HR Magazine*, 59(9), 54.

Winston, B., & Patterson, K. (2006). An integrative definition of leadership. *International Journal of Leadership Studies*, 1(2), 6-66.

<http://christiancoaches.com>

<https://coachfederation.org>

.