



Flourish Leadership Coaching Philosophy

Flourish's founders (Pastors Paul Hahn, Ted Strawbridge, and Matt Bohling) upon meeting and beginning to work together discovered that they thought of leadership coaching in a similar way. It turns out that we were all influenced by the helpful work of Professor John Frame. Following Frame's line of thinking, Flourish views leadership coaching tri-perspectively encompassing the normative, situational, and existential perspectives (more on those below).

If you're unfamiliar with Mr. Frame's work, you can find an introduction to tri-perspectivalism at <http://www.frame-poythress.org/a-primer-on-perspectivalism/>. For simplicity we don't talk to potential clients about "tri-perspectival coaching" but rather refer to what we do as 3-facet coaching. What are those 3 facets?

Normative

A portion of coaching is figuring out how the Bible and particularly the gospel of the Kingdom, which calls forth from us evangelism and provides missionary impetus, applies to a particular phase in leader's personal life and ministry calling. Flourish desires to help leaders raise their eyes above the typical fray that is ministry to see the coming of the Kingdom and the beauty of the gospel as that which informs and influences their ministry.

Too much of an emphasis on this perspective alone can lead to a leader thinking, "Well the Bible says this is what leaders do and so I'll just keep doing that and not worry about anything else." Meanwhile the leader's own soul can become dry. As well, there can be blind spots leading to not thinking carefully about the particular phase of ministry the leader is in and thus how to lead thoughtfully in the midst of it.

Too little of an emphasis on this perspective can lead to a crass pragmatism that doesn't see that the Bible has a lot to say about our philosophies of ministry, God's desired evangelistic missionary impulses for His church, and approaches to doing ministry in the 21st century.

Existential

Another portion of coaching is figuring out who the coachee is as a person. We believe it is essential to know a coachee's story so as to ascertain where God has taken a leader *from* and where He's taking a leader *to* moving forward in ministry. Because we take ourselves everywhere we go in ministry, it is essential that coaching is directed towards the unique needs of the coachee. This means that coaching is very personal in that we are seeking the development of a leader. We are not simply trying to help someone get particular tasks checked off of a list. Certainly things will get done! But they'll get done because we've played a part in helping the leader become who God wants the leader to become.

A good coach is an enabling factor in personal growth in grace (a discipler). This is a non-negotiable goal of all Flourish coaching. That involves at least encouraging:

- Personal use of the means of grace including Bible reading, meditation, silence, solitude, and prayer including long-form prayer.
- A growing marriage and progress as a parent or grandparent (as applicable).
- An active knowledge of and resistance to besetting sins including repentance when indulged. This is part and parcel of a daily repentance and faith lifestyle.
- An attacking of idols with the far greater satisfaction found in Christ.
- Actively denying the typical “go to” means of salving stress including: immoderate intake of food or alcohol (in those traditions that don’t fully abstain from alcohol but refrain from drunkenness), use of pornography or selfish sex within marriage, excessive leisure (i.e. news sites, sports sites, Facebook or other social media, binge-watching Netflix, etc.), excessive work (if driven), excessive exercise, or excessive sleep (if the depressive sort).
- Genuine sabbath consisting of at least 1 full day off per week with no agenda.
- A zeal for growth in bearing the fruit of the indwelling Holy Spirit such that the leader’s progress in understanding and applying the gospel to himself is observable (1 Tim 4:15).

Too much of an emphasis on this perspective can lead to a pietism that assumes that if the leader is holy, nothing else needs to be thought about for the ministry to be considered “successful”.

Too little of an emphasis on this perspective leads to coaching that can draw leaders forward based on their gifts that quickly outpace their Christian character and maturity. This leads in the end to leaders crashing and burning.

Situational

Each of the letters in the NT was written to congregations with particular situations that were transpiring. Paul’s letters to Timothy and Titus reveal that particular situations required situational leadership. Coaching from this perspective attempts to take into account that God is bringing forth His Kingdom through the leader who is ministering in a particular setting which is at a particular phase in its lifecycle of existence. Coaching objectives should focus in part on the coachee thoughtfully addressing the current situation in the congregation or leadership context.

This is the area where most leaders desire coaching. And we are happy to provide it. However, focusing solely on this area has distinct dangers that can tend towards pragmatism or “what works” without sufficient reference to Jesus’ perspective on the situation and the state of the leader’s heart. Sometimes there can be an urgency to deal with a situational issue that actually flows from another perspective. An example will be provided below for clarity.

Too much of an emphasis on this perspective can cause depression in the leader because frequently ministry is tough and we need the refreshing that comes from hearing that the gates of hell will not prevail against Christ’s Kingdom. As well, a coach who is strong in the situational perspective can forget that the coachee may not be. The danger then is that the coach can neglect to tune the coaching to the capacities and gifts of the coachee as he needs to

approach the situation. Further, if the existential is forgotten, the coach may not realize the coachee is not feeling close to the Lord as challenging situations are approached.

Too little of an emphasis on this perspective in the leader's ministry frustrates those he serves with and primarily serves. Those around the leader can see the painful reality of the situation but the leader either refuses to lead thoughtfully and decisively or leads haphazardly.

Ideally the coach helps the coachee to walk in the power of the Holy Spirit thoughtfully and courageously towards that which needs to be addressed in the leader's context.

An Example: Why 3-Facet Coaching is Critical

A pastor (Flourish coaches other kinds of leaders besides pastors but this an example drawn from our pastoral coaching practice) approached a coach asking for help in starting a small group ministry in the congregation. The coach proceeded to ask some questions of the pastor. The coach's questions with the pastors answers in **bolded green** are listed below.

- Why do you want to start a small group ministry in your church? **"Every church should have small groups. That's what all my buddies say."**
- What would be the purpose of your small groups? **"You know the typical stuff: fellowship, teaching, building community, and becoming better friends."**
- Why haven't you had small groups in the past? **"Now you're going to make me feel guilty... we just haven't prioritized them. We've had Sunday School and Men's and Women's Bible Studies but didn't see a need to move towards them until now."**
- Why is there an urgency now? **"Well... I have an Elder who had a really great experience with a small group in a previous church. They would watch DVD's of their favorite teacher and talk through discussion questions together. He says he really grew through the experience and wants people in our church to have that same experience."**
- I see... You know how we've talked about keeping the outward missionary push of the church in dynamic tension with the inward pull towards fellowship and discipleship? **"Yeah."** I don't see any outward push in what you are envisioning? **"That's right, it would only be something for members and regular attenders. It's important for the groups to form and then close so people can trust each other and grow together."**
- Okay... I think I see what you are thinking. We have a lot to talk about...

What did you observe in this dialogue? A wise coach would have picked up on a few things.

First, the coachee was not internally motivated, drawn by the Lord's coming Kingdom to start small groups. Instead, this was pushed on him by an enthusiastic, well-meaning Elder. The pastor was reacting situationally to something happening relationally that had produced a certain emotional state in the pastor. He had become anxious. This emphasis on small groups was the result of the pastor disquieted existence (existential perspective). In point of fact, it

may be a horrible time for small groups to start at this church. But the pastor feels pushed into it and doesn't know how to handle that in his heart.

Second, the vision the pastor has for small groups doesn't reflect best practice for churches which desperately need to think like missionary teams. Given the other inward programs the pastor listed, there are likely very few if any outward pushing things in the church's ministry. Small groups can be that if they are done in a distinctive way. But that is not what is being envisioned by the pastor or the pushy Elder. Missional small groups can be wonderful experiences but they tend to be messier than the neat, clean, closed, inward facing groups people prefer.

This dialogue is meant to give a bit of an illustration of why 3-facet coaching is so important. Sometimes (perhaps many times) a desire for "situational" coaching should not be taken at face value. Instead the "presenting need" should be evaluated. Just as in counseling a good counselor does not stop at the surface and take the client's evaluation of the situation at face value, a good coach does not either.

While the above illustration is perhaps trite, the real issues leaders bring to us in a coaching relationship are not. Leaders often don't know how to handle what they are facing and they need a coach to come alongside and en-courage (i.e. inject courage into) them to walk towards hard things for God's glory, in the power of the Holy Spirit. Flourish Coaches long to be used in this way as wise instruments in the redeemer's hands in the lives of leaders.

If you have more questions or wish to interact about the Flourish Leadership Coaching Philosophy, you can contact Flourish's Executive Director Matt Bohling using the information in the footer of this document.