

**Phil:** Welcome to the show, really fantastic to have you here. I will start this show by asking If you have a sense of your niche or the people that you are in service of working with?

**Christopher:** I think there's really three primary areas. The first one that I do the most work is in executive coaching and working with leaders in organizations and or leaders in small businesses, midsize businesses, but I love working with leaders.

So that's right at the top of the list. The second one is I do a lot of work around creating spaces that are inclusive. So helping leaders and their teams learn how to lean into and continue having the conversations that will help underrepresented groups feel like they can step into the conversation and have an impact as well.

And then the last one that I love is coaching other coaches, particularly newer coaches that are just finding their way into this thing called coaching and sorting through it. And so I love that I get to blend a little bit of coaching and mentoring in those conversations. So that's where I really do most of my work.

**Phil:** That's really succinct, I love it.

**Phil:** How long have you been coaching?

**Christopher:** It'll be 11 years in, let's see, I started my training in February of 20 or 2013, so it'll be 11 years soon.

**Phil:** It's a good solid chunk of time, eh?

**Christopher:** Absolutely, and I've loved it. And once I got my initial training, I've been using coaching in some capacity throughout all that I do.

**Phil:** Yeah It's like the doors of perception are open on there once you start training. I remember someone was telling me about one of the original coach training people back in the early days, she was saying like to the first group who walked in the room, you realize you've opened those doors of perception now and there's no going back.

**Christopher:** And I wouldn't change that I really love that it's had me look at the way I show up in a lot of different relationships, personal and professional, and show up in a different way in how I listen and how I ask questions, whether I'm coaching the person or not.

**Phil:** I'm really curious about how coaching permeates or the skills of coaching permeates interpersonal relationships as well, because of course, it does like, wherever you go, there you are. I'm always throwing that one around. But I think people don't necessarily bear that in mind, if they're not a coach or they're not experienced coaching, I think sometimes they think, Oh, it's just cordoned off into work, just in that management place and for that hour, bit of homework, and then, it's done and dusted but actually, you just walk with it, don't you? It goes everywhere with you.

**Christopher:** It really, becomes a new way of being. And it's like I say, once you've learned it, you can't unlearn it. And I don't know that anybody would want to, in all honesty.

**Phil:** Yeah. Yeah. It's, there was a course I created a while ago. I was likening it to if you try and explain the taste of a mango to someone and they've never experienced it, you say, it's sweet, it's juicy, it's something. But if you hand them a mango and say, Try that, then they've got it. Yeah.

**Christopher:** The analogy I use, similar to that sometimes, is it's like trying to explain being in love to someone who's never been in love.

**Phil:** Oh yeah, I like your one.

**Christopher:** Can't quite find the words, but you know that feeling. and for me, when I'm trying to explain coaching to someone, I usually just say, you know what, instead of me trying to explain it, why don't you just experience it and then you can give your own words to it.

**Phil:** Oh, I

**Christopher:** Feel free to steal that one. Feel free to steal that one. It's not even stealing.

**Phil:** Unless people say, but I've never been in love. It's like what?

**Christopher:** In which case, wow, that's a great way to open things up with coaching questions, right? What might it be like? Okay, anyhow, I'm going down the rabbit hole.

**Phil:** No it's cool though, isn't it? Yeah, the metaphor rabbit hole. I love it. Yeah.

**Phil:** Okay and so starting off like early on in life, it's always really nice to hear a little bit about the person I'm talking to that your upbringing and what early life was like, because I think in those formative years, of course, whether it's conscious or subconscious, there's always some something that permeates and something that kind of gives us an awareness of the world and I was just wondering if you'd mind sharing some of your early days and what that was like growing up?

**Christopher:** Tell me about your parents, right? We'll go down that road. No, but I agree. I think our upbringing has an impact on us. So probably what's relevant for this conversation. I was raised by a single mother, so my parents divorced when I was 4. She and I were very close. My mother has been, always was a good friend of mine.

I took a lot of inspiration from her. She was a nurse for many years and I think that's part of what had me really start to lean into being in some kind of service related role. Because I always saw her working to help take care of others and make their lives better. She was also, I believe, a coach, even though she didn't know it.

Because to hear people talk about the way she had conversations with them, she usually wasn't telling them, here's what you should do. She would really listen in powerful ways and sometimes just ask questions or even not. I didn't know the language then, but just hold space. And I think that if she had discovered coaching, she would have been an amazing coach.

One of the reasons I love coaching is I like to listen a lot as well. There are times where I can talk, but most of the time I really enjoy listening because you learn interesting things about people.

A lot of my family growing up, especially my mums side of family, there were a lot of talkers. And if you didn't jump in all the time, you would often just get lost in the noise. And for me, I didn't mind, I didn't mind being that observer and that listener. And so that's part of what just shaped the way that I showed up.

When I got to college, a lot of people would tell me, Christopher, I feel like I could tell you anything in a very short period of time. They felt safe, I was able to build trust really easily. And I think that's also another factor that really led me to start to lean into coaching, even though I didn't know that was something I was going to be doing.

So I was always a very independent kid growing up, mother working two and three jobs sometimes to make sure we had a roof over our head and so I learned to be very self-sufficient and also be willing to take risks. And I think those are important factors for the work that I do now because sometimes you've got to be willing to just take that risk and say that thing to the person you're having that conversation with or chase after that client because you never know how it's going to end.

So I think those are some of the big factors and sense of humor was always a big thing. my family was big huggers. So no, anybody who knows me knows that if you get within arm's reach, you're probably getting a hug. If you're okay with it, I always check for consent. And I realized that you have to have a little bit of a sense of humor because life is life.

And so that's also one of the things that I bring in a lot of what I do.

**Phil:** That's amazing.

**Phil:** I'm really curious about, the masculine energy or the, because you're a male coach, obviously, and there are a lot of female coaches in our world. And I'm wondering how you sit amongst that. Because, of course, just to be clear as well, you're also a leader, aren't you, for ACT Leadership, your faculty front of room leader. And so being up there at the front, you must observe a lot of groups, a lot of people being trained. how do you perceive yourself being set up there? And how do you dance between the masculine and the feminine energy?

**Christopher:** I have learned to do the dance. I think early on, I wasn't quite sure. And I won't say because I was raised by a single mother. I think it's part of my nature. I connect with the feminine energy within me. And I don't necessarily see it as a bad thing. What's interesting though, is when I got out of college, I went into the Marine Corps and spent nine years in the United States Marine Corps.

I went into construction after that because it was a job that I say fit my skills, but didn't feed my soul. And those aren't exactly fields where men are encouraged to embrace the feminine. I'll put it lightly that way. And so it was interesting because it was almost like I could let parts of myself show up, even though I knew there was more to me than that.

To your question more specifically though, I've learned to be comfortable in my own skin, and what I'm less attached to now is how somebody receives it. Than I am maybe 10, 15 years ago, where I was worried about, Ooh, what are people

gonna think about it? And now what I believe in, and it's also part of my work in the world, I must stand for bringing more vulnerability for men, if I demonstrate it and somebody goes, here's a man who's been in the Marine Corps, been in combat and he can be vulnerable and show emotions and show up as a human,

**Phil:** what excuse do I have? And so I use it as an inspiration. So I think specifically your question is, how do I dance between it? It's a conscious choice and I'm going to live my life for me. I'm not living it for someone else. And I think those are the places that really anchor me. Wow, that is amazing. Yeah. So it feels like it's always been easy for you to step into the feminine energy. It sounds like it was modeled a great deal, I make an assumption early on and you sounds like you were very comfortable with it. And I know a lot of male coaches, myself included, very similar in terms of, I haven't done the Marines bit, but, but I certainly know that my work personally has been around giving myself permission to express the masculine, the man, and to be okay with big as well, because I'm tall, to take up space, whereas with the feminine, I was always celebrated for holding space and listening well and he's so sensitive and, able to pick up in the emotions and in the space and the field and whatever.

And it feels like the stretch or the work for me has always been about stepping into the masculine or whatever that looks like. Clean masculine or, without it being seen as aggressive or not welcome in the space.

**Christopher:** I was always comfortable doing it, but I didn't always express it. I know that I have both that masculine and feminine energy in me but when I was younger, probably in high school, I resisted it a little bit more.

I would show it in certain spaces or with certain people. And part of what's happened with my evolution is I'm now at a place where I'm comfortable being that way in all spaces, but it's taken time. For me, because of my career in the military and construction, it was easy to really step into that masculine energy, because that was often what was, I don't want to say needed, but often prevalent there in those spaces and it was a more of a challenge to figure out where can I start to bring in some of the feminine energy and also knowing that there were times where it just didn't feel safe to do it, unfortunately, there's still a lot of that old school outdated masculinity in the well, I'll say in particular in construction.

It's been almost 20 years since I got out of the Marine Corps and it's how do you find that balance? So that you can, I don't want to say fit in because I was never really big on fitting in, but also knowing, how do I find acceptance in this peer group, but also remain pure and true to myself.

**Phil:** Yeah, because it takes a lot of bravery doesn't it to step into the non-default position,

**Christopher:** and I'll say it goes even beyond just talking about masculine and feminine energies. I think it takes bravery to really own and claim who we are, especially when we might have family or friends or culture telling us we should be a certain way. So I know we're talking in this lens, but it really applies into a larger part of our lives.

**Phil:** Yeah, for sure. I was always very compliant with, whatever the system's up to whatever the system's doing. I would sometimes feel reluctant, but I feel like I would have to comply. I didn't want to stand out and be

the nail that sticks out from the rest of everyone else, and then I think we get to a point sometimes where we just feel like, hold on, what am I doing? I'm suppressing everything of who I am. and then I think it takes a sort of self exploration to go off and do that inner work to find what it is that we're looking for.

I'm not sure all of us are seekers, because some people seem completely fine with what they're up to and, just going to a bar or, chatting with a friend from an old industry. I used to be in the web design industry and he's quite happy talking about sitting at work and moaning about the boss and moaning about the state of web design.

And I'm like, I can't do these conversations anymore.

**Christopher:** Yeah, I have people say to me sometimes, Christopher, I just have different conversations with you and that's with friends where I'm not being a coach, but you're right I've even noticed in the last few years, there's some people that we talk less and I'm okay with that because I don't feel as fulfilled coming out of those conversations.

So I can relate to what you're saying.

**Phil:** Some people are energy vampires, that's what I call them.

Oh, my God. yeah, completely. I think people such as us, coaches have this fantastic ability innately, usually, where they're just able to listen well, listen attentively, without interruption,

and I think like you're saying, energy vampires can swarm around people such as ourselves and just download upon them because they take it on it's oh, yeah say more and it's oh my god

**Christopher:** Yeah.

**Phil:** I was just actually then curious to pull on that string a little bit just to find out because you said you were in the military and the Marines and then you were doing construction.

And then I was really curious to know, how did you land upon coaching? was it that you got yourself a coach or was it that you came across the training and you were curious or?

**Christopher:** Yes. When I was in the construction job, I will say it's the only time I've been actively disengaged toward the end of my time in that. I just realized it was work that wasn't right for me. And a mentor of mine. I had reached out to her and she suggested, you've loved learning, go back to school.

And she had dropped a bug in my ear probably 10 or maybe 15 years earlier about HR. She said, you'd probably be good in organizational development. I didn't really know what it was back then. So I went back to school and actually ended up getting my Master's in Organizational Leadership. But where I found my way to coaching is two of my professors introduced themselves as coaches.

And I said, Coach, what's that? And when they told me, I was like, wait a minute. I think I've been doing that most of my life. I could do that and get paid? And that was it. And so I started doing some research and found my way and got my training and got certified back in, started my training in 2013, got certified in 2014.

And I knew I was home. And so what I loved is I got to keep doing the things that I was already doing, but I could also be of service in a different way too. And so was fortunate enough that I was working in organizations for several years and got to use my coaching there, whether it was in support of leadership programs we had, I was able to help build an internal coaching program in one organization.

And so I got to use my skills, even just in my conversations with senior leadership as we went along, that really created more powerful conversations and helped us get to solutions a lot quicker. And once I found it, I was like, this

is it, I'm never going back, I love this work. And so that's what got me on the path to coaching.

**Phil:** It's an interesting term, coaching isn't it? Especially in this country, because of course, coaching started, and the terminology was obviously very foundational in the States. And yeah, sports, absolutely, yeah. Whereas over here, when I said, so I did my training in 2009, I think, originally, and I remember saying that I'm a coach, and they're like, oh, yeah, what sort of coach?

Tennis? Football? What is that?

**Christopher:** that, that was it.

**Phil:** I don't really look particularly athletic and they were looking at me with disbelief. Really?

**Christopher:** Really?

**Phil:** What is that and so and then often times the actual role of coach back then had to be justified you had to say it's this it's what do you know about my life that I don't know about my life and it's it's not really that and so I think nowadays we're in such a good position and that I think everybody I speak to, like if they're millennial or Gen Z, for instance, or, they'd be like, Hi, I'm a coach.

They'd be like, Oh, brilliant. Who do you work with? they default to that place rather than football coach or whatever.

**Christopher:** I think one of the things that helps too is it's gaining a little more popularity. I even think back to 10, 15 years ago, it was typically reserved for senior leaders and things like that. It was a very small group of people that would have a lot of knowledge about it and it's become more prevalent.

And I also think that as the industry continues to grow, more people are getting exposed to it. So it's not just, I've maybe worked with a coach, but, Oh, my cousin, my friend, my brother is a coach. And so they become a little more aware of it too. And I think it's a both and type of thing.

**Phil:** I love that. And it felt like over here in the UK, I'm in London, coaching became, completely household name starting at work. Oh, my manager's got a coach and now he's thinking of putting the team through and it was coming



down the levels, Yeah, so it took a long time though, but this actually leads me on to ACT actually

and what I love about ACT is that, one of our core motivations feels like we're trying to take away from the sort of elitist mentality, like only the elite have coaches. And that's not so much the case across the board anymore. But my sense is that good quality coaching should be available to everybody,

**Christopher:** imagine the world we would be living in if everybody had access to a good coach,

**Phil:** yeah.

**Christopher:** especially some leaders, but we won't talk about that. Yeah, but it is and I love that you point to that because it's becoming more accessible to people I think as well, again, 15, 20 years ago, when I heard coach, I would have been similar.

I would have thought sports. But now that I know what it is, people can recognize the impact that coaching can have. And I think that's the beautiful thing. So it's, It doesn't have to be this big aspirational, I'll never get there type of thing, but oh, I can work with somebody and they can help me learn about myself in ways that I didn't know, so that I have greater awareness.

I love that's the first letter of ACT, Awareness, because if you don't know, you can't do anything from there.

**Phil:** Yeah, exactly. And I think so many people are running on autopilot and not just because it's not a problem or their problem it's just a learned behavior, isn't it? And it's like when these things aren't pointed out to us, no, if you look here, then you will see this and you can recognize whether it's reactive or creative, your decision making or what have you and I often think it's no one's fault necessarily, it's just whether they have the curiosity about learning a different way of being as a leader or not.

**Christopher:** And if they do, fantastic. Yeah, it requires vulnerability, which you know all about, but it's, yeah, it's not necessarily an easy decision, because it means it's uprooting and changing from the default position, which they've maybe got really comfortable with. And you must see some of that in working with the executives and leaders. Absolutely and for me, the other piece is choice is a central part of that. We always have choice. But what often happens is we think we don't. We feel we're subject to our circumstances. And I remind folks,

even then, you have choice, right? it sounds a little cheesy, but you got two choices. You can choose to accept it, or you can choose not to.

And then everything stems from there. And really being clear on where you do have choice can feel very empowering for people, even in situations that are just crummy situations.

**Phil:** Yeah and that's hard in the moment, isn't it? And you've got to really build the muscles on that.

**Christopher:** I do this work and there's still times I get triggered. Let me be clear there's times where I'm like, wow, my coach is Hey, Christopher, hold on, pump your brakes like slow down. I'm like, Oh, yeah, there's that inner critic jumping in on me. So that's the beautiful thing of this work too, is we are doing our own work as we go along.

And that's one of the reasons I will always have a coach. I've got the same coach I started with 10 years ago. Some people said are you gonna change? I'm like, I'm tempted to, but I'm not because she knows all the places I get in my own way. And so she sometimes helps me see it before I do. Yes, absolutely. and I'm a big believer in too, and I say this in the classroom when I'm training folks, it's important to get coached because we need to do our own work. And for us to say, "Hey, this coaching is great. You should do it, client, but I don't need it", that feels a little hypocritical to me.

**Phil:** Yeah. Yeah. There was a perception, I think, from a few people who came my way for sample sessions who were like, expecting me to be this big guru mentor guy who knew everything, had it all sorted, I had to really dispel that myth immediately because otherwise it's a whole projection thing and we feel a huge pressure to be the best coach possible don't we?

Yeah.

**Christopher:** I don't give advice, I tell people I never do. 'cause like you can make your own choices. But what I will do is help you figure out where are you getting in your own way. And I love that you talk about, we're sometimes holding the mirror and going, Hey, do you see how you're showing up here?

And not with judgment, but just to help them notice. And then again, they get to choose how they wanna move forward.

**Phil:** Yeah, and that's the best part of coaching, isn't it? It's like being a mirror and holding up that mirror to our clients so that they can see their own magnificence. And it's always such a fascinating thing when I think when people first start training to be a coach, in that we're so celebrated as children or growing up, having all the right answers and being first put your hand up, and then when it comes to coaching, actually, it's the inverse of that.

you're a brilliant coach if you say very little. Yeah.

**Christopher:** I often say I used to be a world class problem solver. If problem solving was an Olympic sport, I would gold medal every day of the week. Y'all wouldn't stand a chance. And that was one of my biggest hurdles to overcome as a new coach because I had a lot of people that would come to me in my life and just have a challenge and look to me for answers.

And so what I had to do was really just train myself. Okay, Christopher, that brilliant idea that you think you have is probably not what's needed and so I could just let it out of my head. And what I found is when I did that's when I really helped my clients have powerful shifts because I wasn't coming with answers.

Now, once in a blue moon, they might say, what's your opinion, Christopher? What's your thought? And I would say, I'll tell you at the end of the call, but let's find yours. And then we'd get to the end I'd say, so do you still want to hear mine? And they usually go, no, I like mine answer. I'm like, I figured you would. And so you do that once or twice. And they usually, I found my clients would just stop asking for my thoughts on things. And I think you're right. So many of our structures, schools, work, so many things encourage us to solve problems and fix things. I see that as one of the, one of the most significant stumbling blocks for a lot of new coaches is, Oh, how do I turn off my problem solving brain when so much of my world has been coming to me for it?

Especially when people are in leadership roles. And what I know is when they get to the point where they can look for the opportunities, because not every conversation will be one where you can step out of problem solving, but when you step into the places where you can have those coaching conversations, the possibilities are endless.

**Phil:** yeah, they have to really trust you, don't they, because often times in leadership, especially people who've reached a certain level, they've had to be, let's say tough, or they've had to put shields up to protect the vulnerabilities and all those things and, we have to really co-create with our clients so that they see

that we're not going to judge them and they can feel safe to let the guard down, then we can do the work.

And that particularly comes from the higher up you go, I've found with those people, because that's how they've thrived. Isn't it? It's like..

**Christopher:** Yeah. The other thing is, as a generality, I'm not speaking of all senior leaders, but they tend to feel like there's more pressure for them to have all the answers. And, I remind them sometimes, nobody has all the answers. The leaders that people respect the most, or I'll say the ones that I've respected the most, are the ones sometimes that say, you know what, I don't have the answer here, but let's figure it out together.

As opposed to the ones that say, oh no, I know the answer, and we all know, no you don't. But the first version where they say, I don't have the answer and we'll work together to find it, or I'll find it for you and let you know, that's what creates connection and trust. And I'll say, when you talked about trust a moment ago, it's also the leader trusting themselves to help the person find the answers as opposed to just giving the answers, right?

It's that give a fish versus teach a person to fish thing.

**Phil:** Beautiful.

So just moving into the maybe the last two components of our conversation. How did training to be a coach and taking on board those new skills and awareness and abilities, opening the door of awareness, like we were saying, how have those skills and abilities impacted and maybe changed your personal relationships as well?

So what's the flavor of them and the color of them? How have they changed what once was different?

**Christopher:** I'll say the one place that I often point to that it had the biggest impact is in my relationship with my daughter. So she is in high school now, 14 and when I first started my training as a coach, I didn't see where I could apply it in that role.

I think the, probably the two areas where it's been most impactful is I listen to her differently. Now there's times I'm dad. no ifs, ands, or buts about it. This is not a two way conversation. But more often than not, I'm willing to lean into, what is she really saying? I don't coach her.

Let me be clear about that. But I use some of these coaching skills. The other thing is, I've played with co-creating a relationship with her, as she gets to different ages, it's like, all right, kiddo so now let's talk about how we're going to be, you know, as a single father, let's design how we're going to run this household.

Here's the things I need of you, what do you need of me? And then let's talk about, where do we need to make some adjustments and we'll check in. And I think that's been a huge benefit for me and for her. I can't say we'll see maybe years from now, hopefully she's not a therapist couch because I messed her up, but I don't think that'll be the case, but what it did is it's really allowed me to show up and listen to her in different ways as opposed to not go into problem solving with her.

So there's times where she may come and say, here's this thing that happened at school today, Papa. And instead of me getting the Papa bear claws out, I do the self managing, right? So I'm using that skill for myself all the time, but then I just really get to tune in and listen more deeply to her. Maybe ask a question or two and often have her just really be connected to who she is in the moment too.

So I think that's the one that, on a daily basis, I know coaching has paid dividends far beyond whatever I paid for my training.

Yeah, fantastic. And it's so fascinating to me. I don't have children, but it's so fascinating to me to see those next generations coming up who where coaching is the norm, it's not something to be necessarily across questions and pushed away something, especially the good quality to coach training schools, of course, but those skills. I wonder where they'll end up, I wonder like your daughter, like fantastic at 14 to be able to take them on board and to have those skills demonstrated to her through the experiential learning of it. How magical is that? Ooh. Yeah, absolutely.

**Phil:** Wow. And so bringing this into land,

where do you see yourself as a coach in five years time?

**Christopher:** That's a really good question. Where do I see myself in five years? This is going to sound like I'm avoiding the question, but I honestly don't know. I do. And I don't, I know I will be continuing to do this work. It will be in my life in some way, shape, or form. One of the other things that I've really discovered though, is often the universe makes things happen in ways that I couldn't even have conceived of.

So part of me is excited because I don't know. And that doesn't mean I'm just going to sit idly by. So it will be definitely continue to do this work doing it. I think maybe on a bigger scale. I want to start doing more work internationally, like I want, I'm doing more speaking now too.

And so part of what I'm dreaming is, my daughter and I can look at a map and go, where do you want to go in the world? Cool. Let me go get a speaking gig there. And then I get paid to take her over there. So that's part of where I'm, I want to be well before five years. And the other thing I'll say to it is I want to continue to be able to be helping people learn these skills, teaching is a part of what I love doing,

and that's one of the reasons I love being on the faculty for ACT is, these folks are coming in hungry for a new way to be in relationship and to be of service. And that's what I love about the work that I get to do.

**Phil:** Yeah.

**Christopher:** So I'm not sure if I answered the question, but I think I did.

**Phil:** Oh, you did. Yeah. I'm trying to, I'm trying to not ask more questions. I'm getting

**Christopher:** hard because we do this all the time.

**Phil:** It's really hard. It's really hard. As I say, once that door is cracked open, the doors of perception. Yeah. But this has been a fantastic conversation. I've really enjoyed it.

**Phil:** and, I, I suppose just to close out, how can people find you?

Yeah. What would be the best way if people wanted to reach out to you?

**Christopher:** Sure, if people are looking to find me, simplest ways on LinkedIn, if you find me, you'll know you've got the right Christopher Veal.

It's V E A L like Veal Parmesan because I've got vulnerability vanguard in my title. my website for my business is Echelon Left, which is E C H E L O N hyphen left dot com. And then, for my book, 'The Whole Man - Evolving Masculinity'. It's wholemanjourney.com. So those are the best ways for people to find me.

And I should mention, I also have a podcast called 'The Vulnerable Man', but we'll have another conversation about you coming on that one, but that's down the road. Yes. So there, I just put you on the spot here in front of everybody, but we'll talk later about that.

**Phil:** definitely. Cause I am one of those. Yes. So the clues in the name. Amazing. So this has been a fantastic conversation. Thank you so much for coming on and yeah, more to come as they say.

**Christopher:** Yeah. Thank you, Phil.