

Kimberly Millington

By Megan Willome



Professional Problem-Solver

Kimberly Millington's business card reads "Professional Problem Solver." That's why she became a certified life coach — she enjoys coming alongside people to help them find solutions, even when the answers are difficult.

"What I bring to the world is to tell people the truth. I don't want people believing something that is not true," Millington said. "I won't tell you it's easy if it's not easy."

Millington obtained her life coaching certification from the American Association of Christian Counseling. She holds a Bachelor of Applied Arts and Sciences from Midwestern State University, a Master of Arts in Christian education from Dallas Baptist University and a Master of Arts in executive leadership and human services counseling from Liberty University. She has only four courses left in a Master of Arts in Christian ministry from George W. Truett Theological Seminary at Baylor University, has completed some coursework toward a doctorate in organizational leadership from Piedmont International University, and oh yeah, just for fun, she's working on an associate degree in business technology at Texas State Technical College. She's into learning, as is her husband, James Millington, who teaches networking and systems administration at TSTC. Millington's son is in the Air Force, studying to become an instructor, and her daughter is a senior at Texas Tech University through McLennan Community College and is interning at Waco Foundation.

Wacoan writer Megan Willome visited with Millington by phone to learn why young people find adulting so hard, why they like to talk about God and how parents can learn the fine art of letting go.

WACOAN: Your name is Kimberly, but your business is Solutions by Millie. How did that come about?

Millington: Millington is my last name. My first paid client, a friend, started calling me Millie. That's how Solutions by Millie got its name.

WACOAN: And your life coaching business began in 2013?

Millington: I did an official launch in 2018. I'd been coaching and did a whole bunch of other stuff in the middle. I decided last November, this is what I wanted to do all the time.

Most of my clients are in the 18-25 age group. I'm asking what do they need to know to transition from being in high school to being in college to being in the adult world.

WACOAN: I want to focus on that age group, even though I know you do coaching for adults and executive leaders too.

Millington: Last night I sat down, so I'd feel prepared for this interview, and jotted down some things. Talking with people I've worked with in education — them or their kids — I said, 'I need feedback. How have I helped you?' Then I looked back over this list.

I really am the person who comes alongside individuals, students and parents, to help them solve problems standing in the way of their success. Whether it's a [home-schooled] student falling behind or a college student about to graduate and not sure if they can find a job in their career field. From 13-year-olds to 23-year-olds, I want to find a way to help them solve what's standing in the way of their success.

WACOAN: I didn't know some of your clients were as young as 13. What sorts of issues are they having that you can help coach them through?

Millington: That's the youngest client, 12 or 13, early middle school. It's been everything from relationships in middle school, hormones, relationship stuff between parents and teens, and then academic stuff in their school.

Some schools will contact me and say, 'Can you just talk to our kids?' I can. I absolutely will. But this works way better one-on-one. If I do it in a big group setting, then it's tips, tools and tricks instead of that one-on-one conversation.

The average age [of my student clients] is 18 or 19.

WACOAN: So with those ages, that would be mostly seniors in high school or freshmen in college?

Millington: Both. They're doing Transition Into Adulthood.

WACOAN: Let's go through that. I know there are four sessions in that series.

Millington: Yes, and six specific areas: academics, career, finances, self-care, spirituality, relationships.

What parents have loved about this particular thing is the relationship aspect is mostly focused on the relationship with parents. My kids are 18 and 21. I've done these ages as a parent. I know how important it is for young adults to own their half of the relationship with their parent, and I'm teaching them how to do it. To be aware of when your parent has a need — for 18 years they've been fulfilling yours.

It's also the transition of parents learning to let go. I do coaching with parents and am also meeting with their kids, not in one group session, but so the whole family is on the same page. I get a release of information signed so I can communicate, 'Your kid feels like he's doing well in this area and could use a little freedom over here. How can we do that? What does that look like?'

WACOAN: I wasn't aware parents were involved in the process.

Millington: Yes, it's four sessions, plus I give them homework. I give the parent a report at the end, giving some basic feedback and suggestions as to areas where they could invest some more time or pull back and give some more freedom.

For example, I have one client who wanted me to meet with their son. [The son] didn't know how to cook or plan a budget. He's living at home, he's 19. That's an area where he needed some scaffolding, to plan a monthly budget. [I told him to] ask his mom, 'How much milk do I actually drink in a week?' But he needed parent support in that and parental intervention. But when it came to school, he was a rock star. That was an area they didn't have to manage for him because he was doing really well. We were looking at each area: Here's where he can use support and here's some ways where you can maybe let go.

WACOAN: Is there ever a time when a student will complete those four sessions, identify an area where they want to do more work, and then schedule additional meetings with you?

Millington: Absolutely. My current college student rate, after they complete the series, is \$50 for additional one-hour sessions. They can see me for areas if we need to continue.

One that has surprisingly been most requested is spirituality. They want to keep talking about God. I tell them, 'You can sit in my office for an hour a week, and we can talk about God.' If I think there's an area where they need a push or if they're struggling six months later, I'm always available and happy to see them.

I'm a big fan of James W. Fowler, who wrote 'Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian.' He's one of my favorite writers. He talks about stages of spiritual development. Alongside [stages described by] other developmental psychologists, he took a spiritual approach. There's a stage of faith development called Synthetic-Conventional. Between 18-25, you are synthesizing and combining everything anyone's ever told you into one big belief system ball. Then someone asks you a question that unravels everything. It's gonna deconstruct it all. A question like, 'Where was God when this happened?' I want to help them navigate the questions — what do they actually believe? — so they can feel like they've not completely lost their faith. College students, young adults, they're right smack dab in the middle of this stage. The one beyond that is Individuative-Reflective — that's what I want for them is to move to that next stage.

I did go to seminary at Truett, so I've done a lot of studying in this particular area.

WACOAN: What are some of the typical issues that come up in your Transition Into Adulthood sessions?

Millington: On the academic, they don't know if they want to be in their major. I'm helping them figure out if this is the right major, is there a major that's better suited, what are the consequences of changing majors? If they're not succeeding, then how to put structures in place like prioritization, scheduling and boundaries so they can succeed. It may be possible that if they have a diagnosed disability they need to get the support available through the university or high school to help them.

For career, I have a [client], a senior in high school, who wants to be a band director. We explored that career. I

gave him homework — how much do they make? What does it take to become a band director? What are the best schools? I also did the research, and we met back together. I found a band director he could shadow, ask questions. If they're in high school, they have the chance to talk to someone doing the job before they go to college.

When they're ready, they get a resume review. I don't create it; I provide templates. I modify and make changes and have it ready for their first big employment job.

For finance, they have no idea about financial aid. Parents are confused, and it's confusing, rightfully so. I'm training to be a [Federal Student Aid] coach so that I can help parents through that whole process.

WACOAN: Your services will be in demand.

Millington: Students have no idea when to apply for FAFSA [Free Application for Federal Student Aid], which tax returns they need. I break it down. For the 2020 school year, [enrollment] opened in October 2019, but the most recent tax return available is 2018. It confuses people. They think they have to wait until after they file their [2019] taxes to file their FAFSA, and that's not true. Funding is first-come, first-served. I can coach them through how it works if your parents are divorced.

[We also cover] whether they're gonna get a part-time job in school, what parents expect them to pay for. Sometimes parents break it to them in my office that they're on their own for their cellphone and car insurance. I don't endorse doing it that way.

WACOAN: Let's get back to the other areas the series covers.

Millington: For self-care, the No. 1 issue is how regularly are you showering and washing your face. They won't tell me that in a group of their peers. If they're sitting in front of me and they have acne issues, I can usually tell there's something more going on. I ask, 'What's your self-care routine? Are you putting on deodorant?' It's not a fun question to ask, and they always answer me. I want to ask really hard questions that most people aren't asking them. Even with girls, girls don't always love to go take a shower. They think, 'I don't have an hour to waste. I'll just grab dry shampoo.' I teach them to work [self-care] time into their daily routine. I talk to them about rest and sleep. If they don't get enough sleep, they won't be functioning at the same level.

Then relationships, that's gonna be peer and parental, and the parents are the biggest part of it. (Parents are usually the ones paying.) I want the parents to feel like when their kid is done, they're set up for success and their relationship with their kids gets to be better and stronger.

I have two grown kids and a wonderful relationship with them because they own their half of it. If I haven't heard from them, I can reach out to them, but they check on me. They invest in me and promote me and are amazing humans. I want my clients to have a similar relationship with their kids, so if they do move away for college or career, their relationship isn't strained but can be even stronger.

WACOAN: How did you develop these six areas of focus?

Millington: All of these areas are really organic. I didn't try to shove something in there that wasn't already who I am and how I'm helping people in the world.

It stemmed from meeting with clients who were not on same page with their kid, and when I met with their kid, we organically talked about these six areas. It happened in a conversation between me and a young man. I thought, 'This sets my soul on fire.' When [this young man] left, I told my husband, 'I have to create a program for

young adults.' Within about two weeks it was put together and ready to launch.

WACOAN: How did your background — both your education and your career — prepare you to become a life coach?

Millington: I spent a big chunk of my life, 20 years, training people in hospitality. That meant I was training birthday party hostesses or medical office people or even plumbers in how to treat people respectfully and kindly. That's what I did.

I'd spent several years working in churches, and I was a college minister and a youth minister and a children's minister, so I'd worked with all these age groups of kids, but I love college students a lot. I like being in community with them. I've mentored college students forever.

So I took a job at Methodist Children's Home, did spiritual development for students in high school, for seniors and anyone transitioning out of the program (that meant some college students and some young adults). What I found was they weren't going to have anything to do with the spiritual aspect if they were freaking out about school. If they weren't organized, if they weren't ready to pay their bills, then they weren't ready [for spiritual things]. I became more of a life coach while I was there. I absolutely loved it.

WACOAN: You also taught a year of high school.

Millington: I wanted to go teach high school. I don't know what happened to my brain. I saw an opening at La Vega [High School]. I didn't have a teacher certification, but in [Career and Technical Education] they wanted industry professionals to teach those courses. I'd dabbled in marketing, entrepreneurship, done a ton of hospitality. I had a master's in education, so all of the classes they needed people to teach I had a master's in that field.

I talked with the principal, would he consider me? He said, 'Yes, but if you stay the next year you'd have to get your teaching certificate.' I taught one year, then I was done. I taught entrepreneurship, advertising, principles of hospitality. While in the classroom I realized I ultimately was getting more work done with students outside of the curriculum. Students didn't care about coursework; they cared about these other things.

During that period of time it was all building on the idea that I wanted to help students transition from being a student to being an adult. I realized this is the stuff I want them to learn all the time. This is what I want to be teaching people.

Some of my former students have come on as clients. That says that of my time in education, I was a person who was able to help them solve their problems when they were in high school, and now they come to me as young adults to help them solve problems now. High school counselors have referred people to me.

I went back to school, thought I'd become a therapist, started pursuing a master's in counseling to get my [Licensed Professional Counseling certification]. In that process I realized that I wanted to help people move forward. I knew a ton of great therapists in town who could help people with the trauma of their past. What I wanted to deal with was the stuff in the future. So I got a master's in executive leadership because I wanted to train people to be excellent leaders in every age group.

WACOAN: I wanted to ask you how life coaching differs from counseling.

Millington: For counseling, it's everything that brought you in the door today, and for coaching, it's who you're

gonna be when you walk out the door.

I think of it like a number line: 0 is today, therapy is -10 to 0. For coaching, I'm looking at 0 to +10. What would +10 look like for you academically or in your marriage or in your relationships? We set goals to get there and accountability in the middle and homework. They have to do their work or it's not going to matter.

I office with a psychologist. I have other therapists in town who will do referrals for me. [Life coaching] is a really great complement to therapy work.

WACOAN: I listen to a lot of podcasts, and many of the hosts are in their early- to mid-30s. They talk a lot about 'adulting,' and although I know what they mean, it wasn't a term that was used when I was their age. What has changed? Why does this generation find adulting so difficult?

Millington: What has changed is people are having families later. They are taking their time in academics. And their parents, they're still supporting them so they don't have to grow up in the way some of us did. If it's not costing them something to fail, then they're not learning anything from that.

My parents weren't of the generation that said, 'Stay at home forever, darling.' I have clients who have toddlers, and they say, 'My kids, they're gonna live with me forever.' I say, in all seriousness, 'Then what are you teaching them to walk for?'

My children, I got them at the ages of 9 and 11, when I married their dad. They were adults in training from the time they were teenagers. They're gonna be adults for a long time, so they need to know what it's gonna be like to move toward adulthood.

Because parents are allowing kids to stay at home longer, there's not that pressure to start families right away. Their parents can afford to let them stay at home. That's awesome, but make them pay rent. It doesn't have to be \$750, like for a one-bedroom apartment, but let them pay something.

More than anything, it's taking longer for students to begin adulting because they don't have any skin in the game before that. That's what I try to encourage parents to do — in what areas can they get their kids to have some skin in the game? If they only go to school and live at home, can they get a part-time job? Can they pay for their own gas?

It's cyclical. One generation had parents pay for nothing, then the next pays for everything, then the next wants something in between.

WACOAN: When young people come into your office, do they think everything is fine, or are they aware of some of these issues right from the start?

Millington: When they come into my office, they think everything is fine and going great. They leave my office after the first day and realize they don't know anything. They don't know how to grocery shop for a week. They don't know what their cellphone bill costs or how much it would be to get their own plan and off their parents'. They need to open their eyes and figure out how much the things they do cost. Do they have any idea how much they're charging on the gas card? Do they know what it costs for them to live? They may know what their allowance is.

But they've come because something is off. It may be academically. One of those areas is off to get them into my office, but they're not going to see all of it until they walk out with homework.

I send students on a cost-of-living scavenger hunt. I had one client who wanted to live in Seattle in an RV park. I asked him if he knew what it would cost. He learned that it was around \$40,000, but the entry level job he wanted paid \$27,000. I said, 'Sounds like you're not gonna be in Seattle. Can you do this job in Waco? Can you find some roommates to live with you in Seattle?' Just talking through options.

Reality is a very, very good teacher. If we shield our kids from reality, they're not learning everything they can.

WACOAN: One of my children had trouble figuring out how to pay an electric bill online that first time and called us for help. After that, it's been no problem.

Millington: If I were in that situation, I'd say, 'If you wanted to order from Lululemon, what would you do? Create an account. So go to the electricity provider website and create an account. You know how to do these things, but you're not connecting the dots.'

I will do house calls (there may be an extra charge if I have to travel). Sometimes they would rather me sit with them in their living room. I do have an office downtown.

WACOAN: How do you like officing downtown?

Millington: I love being downtown. I feel like I'm in the heart of everything. Sixth and Seventh Streets are torn up right now, so explaining to [new clients] how to get to my office is very complicated.

With Waco having such a booming entrepreneurship community, I've been able to connect through things like I Million Cups that meets on Wednesday mornings at 9 a.m. at the Hustle coworking space [605 Austin Avenue]. I love being part of that community.

WACOAN: When did you come to Waco?

Millington: I moved here 12 years ago to attend Truett.

I met my husband at Common Grounds at a Bible study. He was recently divorced, two kids and a minivan. A real catch! We had college students meeting with us at Common Grounds every week for a nondenominational Bible study for four years. We married in April 2011.

He is a professor at TSTC. He teaches networking and systems administration. We live on campus and love it. I don't ever want to not live on campus. We build community with college students. I'll have a knock on my door at 10 p.m., 'Can I do a session with you tomorrow?' [I'll say,] 'Of course!' Paypal, Venmo, we do a session.

I'm taking classes. I just finished a customer relations management class. I'm taking an e-business class in the spring. I will have an associate degree in business technology in a couple semesters, just one class at a time. I love learning. I'm a lifelong learner. I'm a self-directed learner. If I'm bored, then I need to find something to go learn.

WACOAN: Is there anything else you want people to know about your coaching?

Millington: There is an executive coaching side to my business. I've just recently expanded into that. I love supporting local entrepreneurs.