

5 Cs to Power Up Your Portfolio

Leading Learning Podcast Transcript for Episode 345

Celisa Steele: [00:00:00] Coaching, cohorts, community, chunking, and credentials—these are five keys that you can use to power up your portfolio, to improve the reach, revenue, and impact of your content.

Celisa Steele: [00:00:17] I'm Celisa Steele.

Jeff Cobb: [00:00:19] I'm Jeff Cobb, and this is the Leading Learning Podcast.

Celisa Steele: [00:00:27] Welcome to episode 345 of the Leading Learning Podcast, and this episode is brought to you by the letter C and the number five.

Jeff Cobb: [00:00:37] That's true. And, hopefully, that doesn't get us in any trouble with the makers of *Sesame Street*. I have images of the Count in my mind as we're talking now. We're going to focus our conversation today on five Cs that we believe will help learning businesses grow their reach, revenue, and impact in the current moment and in the near future.

Celisa Steele: [00:00:57] The five Cs that we have in mind are coaching, cohorts, community, chunking, and credentials.

Jeff Cobb: [00:01:06] And each of those five Cs can touch on and build on the content that a learning business already has. And our take is that content alone is usually not enough to stand you out and make your learning business as useful and successful as it could be. You usually need something else to supplement or enhance your content. And the five Cs—coaching, cohorts, community, chunking, and credentials—are ways that we encourage you to consider.

Celisa Steele: [00:01:36] In some cases, this might mean repositioning or expanding what you're already doing with your content. In some cases, it might be creating new content that's built from the ground up with one or more of these five Cs in mind. So let's talk about each of these five Cs in more detail, and let's start with coaching.

Jeff Cobb: [00:01:58] And we'll stress that there's no particular order to these. We could just as easily have started with one of the other Cs, but we've got to start somewhere, so we will start with coaching. And coaching is just one of those terms, those approaches that we've seen a lot of over the course of the last year, possibly two years, definitely 18 months or so. Over in the corporate world there's a lot of talk about it. If you follow somebody like Josh Bersin, who's one of the main analyst/consultant-type figures in that market, he's been posting about coaching throughout 2022, possibly before that, and talking about it as something to be layered on to corporate learning and development. Those courses that you might be offering-traditionally, it's been to executives, so they're going to get coaching. They may not even get the courses that go with coaching, but, in this case, he's talking about, that should really cascade to most levels of the corporate environment. So, you know, your average manager or your frontline person who is getting other types of training, also getting some coaching to go along with that or just getting freestanding coaching to help them with really understanding the learning challenges that are out there for them right now. And then, of course, rising to those challenges. How do they develop that plan, or develop personally with the aid of traditional learning and development-type offerings but with this coaching as part of that as well?

Celisa Steele: [00:03:25] I think with coaching, we have a couple of advantages that are sort of, almost by definition, baked into coaching. One is just the personalization that tends to happen there. Often, but not always, coaching is kind of one-on-one, and so it's going to be a coach responding to the coachee's issues and questions and where they want to take the conversation. So you've got that personalization baked right in that's going to help that coaching then be as useful to the coachee as possible. I think the other thing is that it just helps with the doing aspect of learning. You know, maybe if it is coupled with a training course, and so you're learning certain concepts or certain information in a course, but then with the help of a coach, you really dig into, "Okay, how do I translate and apply this knowledge to my specific situation day in and day out?" And so, then, the coach is there as that resource to really help hold that learner accountable for doing some of the doing that we know are central to learning, really resulting in behavior change.

Jeff Cobb: [00:04:29] I think that's so important because people just very often need the support, they need the accountability, they need the kind of guardrails that are going to help them along. It's all fine and well to sit through a webinar or go through a course—you acquire some new information. But as you're suggesting, if you're not actually applying that information, if you're not actually practicing those new skills, putting that knowledge into action, you're not going to absorb it; you're not going to integrate it; you're not really going to learn it. So coaching can

really help deepen the learning experience to such a significant degree. And as you suggested, it's a form of personalization. And personalization has been just such a buzzword out there for so long now. And I think people immediately jump to, "Well, that means machine learning; it means artificial intelligence; it means algorithms that are going to know what this person did before and then present just the right thing to them at just the right time. I mean, it's wonderful, you know, we'll certainly get there with that. We have, in some cases. And, of course, there's even AI coaching. It's coming about as sort of a blend of those two concepts.

Jeff Cobb: [00:05:29] But just traditional coaching, good old low-tech stuff where you've got an actual human being interacting with another actual human being, and they're helping move the learner towards those goals, that's within the reach of any organization that can just handle the logistics around making it happen. And, of course, this can be a premium offering. You may be offering traditional events, classroom-based stuff, online stuff, and then to layer a coaching component onto that because we're talking to learning businesses, organizations that actually have to generate revenue from their learning offerings. Adding that coaching component can be an additional source of revenue and a new way to form and grow relationships with your subject matter experts.

Celisa Steele: [00:06:10] And we had Jen Lewi on the podcast, not too long ago, talking about coaching and talking about various ways that learning businesses can add coaching to their portfolio. It doesn't have to just be a standalone coaching offering. It can also be coupling it with a specific training course or training program. There are other ways to do this. We also know that this approach to coaching, there's a flavor of it that would fall under the mentorship umbrella, and I think there are a lot of learning businesses that have embraced that and tried to figure out—how can you pair up or match up folks in an industry or profession who maybe have a little bit more experience, either in general or in a particular domain area, and match that person up with someone who has less knowledge and skills in that area and then can learn from that person as well? So there are a lot of different ways to incorporate coaching. But in addition to all these other advantages we're talking about, it also really connects people. There's a sort of fundamental human-to-human, usually, unless we're talking about AI coaching. But if it's the more traditional type of coaching, you're connecting humans-to-humans. And so, I think there's just a perceived benefit by many learners around that connection, not only to content, but this human connection with a coach.

Jeff Cobb: [00:07:26] I think there's this interesting, as there often is, sort of a corollary in the different worlds of learning that we serve through Tagoras. With Leading Learning we're talking to learning businesses, learning business professionals who work at, say, trade and

professional associations, academic PCO units, training firms—those sorts of organizations. And I think they'll probably be coming at this as "Let's add coaching into what we've traditionally done." But we also serve the entrepreneurial expert market over in our learning revolution world. And a lot of those people just are coaches. That's what they've been doing for years and years in all different varieties of coaching, from business to life to—you name it. And now they're adding in the educational component—the more traditional course component, maybe a membership site, or those sorts of things. So they're taking components that have traditionally been over in that learning business world and adding it into their world as entrepreneurial experts. So coaching plus courses plus training plus events—those sorts of things. It's sort of the flip of what's happening, and now, probably, what the audience for Leading Learning might be doing with coaching.

Celisa Steele: [00:08:35] I think that points to the fact that education courses are a natural fit with coaching. And so, if you offer one, you probably want to think about offering the other because they do have ways of supporting each other and deepening the learning experience that you can offer.

Jeff Cobb: [00:08:51] Definitely. So that is the first of our Cs coaching, one that seems to be getting a lot of traction out there. And, again, definitely worth considering. You may or may not want to add any of these Cs, but to at least have a conversation around them and think about whether this would make sense for your portfolio is something we think is important.

Celisa Steele: [00:09:13] We're grateful to WBT Systems for sponsoring the Leading Learning Podcast. TopClass LMS provides the tools for you to become the preferred provider in your market, delivering value to learners at every stage of their working life. WBT Systems' awardwinning learning system enables delivery of impactful continuing education, professional development, and certification programs. The TopClass LMS team supports learning businesses in using integrated learning technology to gain greater understanding of learners' needs and behaviors, to enhance engagement, to aid recruitment and retention, and to create and grow non-dues revenue streams. WBT Systems will work with you to truly understand your preferences, needs, and challenges to ensure that your experience with TopClass LMS is as easy and problem-free as possible. Visit leadinglearning.com/topclass to learn how to generate value and growth for your learning business and to request a demo.

Jeff Cobb: [00:10:15] Now, not all that distant from coaching, I'd say, is our next C, which is cohorts, which again is about the people part of learning. And, in this case, there may be a sort of coaching or at least a facilitation-type element of this, coming from an expert. But it's also

about peers learning together, supporting each other, and generating a whole that's greater than the sum of the parts by going through a learning experience as a cohort of learners.

Celisa Steele: [00:10:47] And, of course, cohorts provide that same human-to-human benefit that I mentioned with coaching. This is a chance for a learner to interact with peers and hear from them how they're applying the knowledge or skills that are being taught and then to, of course, make that leap and start thinking about, "Well, okay, then based on what my peers and my colleagues are doing, this is how I might apply this or use this in my own work." Again, I think there are a lot of parallels between coaching and cohorts and the benefits that we see there. But with coaching, the person doesn't necessarily have any expertise or knowledge in whatever domain or subject matter is being taught. Sometimes they do, but not always. With cohorts, you do at least have this idea of, "We're all in this together." "We're all kind of grounded in the same content, and we're moving through this." "We're going to help hold each other accountable." I think that there can be a lot that's attractive about that accountability, about helping to keep one another on course, that can be appealing to individuals in the current day and age where, yes, there's a lot of convenience that goes with self-paced learning, but there's also a lot that you can feel like you're missing. You can sort of feel like you're off on your own-learning-and that no one else is really aware of it, paying attention, or helping to keep you going. With a cohort, you have those resources in your peers to help drive your own learning.

Jeff Cobb: [00:12:15] Right. And, of course, cohort is obviously not something new. It's been going on forever in traditional classroom-based learning, offline, since probably that sort of learning started happening. I think back to the days of the Greeks or something like that, cohorts were working together. But even in online learning, that's been there for a long time, it's been part of a traditional academic model of online learning, for example. But I think cohort-based approaches started getting a new breath of life back probably around 2021 or so, when we're sort of in the midst of the pandemic having hit, everybody moving online, a lot of self-paced going on, a lot of just straight up Zoom presentation going on, and people start asking or realizing that there are better ways to do this. We can structure some really meaningful learning experiences by taking people through them and a cohort. And I think it's no accident that probably one of the bigger platform splashes to happen in the last year is that one of the founders, and maybe multiple founders—I'm not sure—of Udemy, which is almost the Amazon.com of self-paced online courses at this point, a huge catalog of courses that creators have made and put into a marketplace under the Udemy label.

Jeff Cobb: [00:13:28] They spun out into a platform called Maven. And Maven is specifically about cohort-based courses. That's what the platform is built for. And they've got a training and onboarding program to help people with expertise who want to create cohort-based courses, kind of move through that and be able to create these highly interactive, human-centered courses that, again, tying it back to the discussion about coaching. Again, this is a personalized-type experience because you've got this group of peers interacting with each other, and each of them is able to get out of it what they need for their particular place in their career, for their particular experience, while also helping the others get out of it what they need. That's what's happening in the best of those cohort-based experiences. So we expect to see a lot more of this, and it's probably less a matter of how to do it. I think most people intuitively understand how to do a cohort-based offering; but it's: How do you get really good at it? How do you become an expert as a learning business in running these cohort-based offerings that can deliver such a high amount of value?

Celisa Steele: [00:14:36] And there are a lot of different flavors and different choices to be made, even if you decide, "Yes, we're going to do something that's a cohort-based learning experience." Just as with coaching, there are a lot of different types and flavors; cohorts can be shorter, longer, and they can make a mix of different online options. You might have asynchronous content and then, you know, synchronous online discussions. It could be a cohort that's brought together physically. So part of a blended learning program where you're doing some things online but coming physically together to take advantage of those peers that you have involved. So if you're going to think about cohort-based learning, just know that you have many, many options. One resource that we can point you to is—I had the chance to talk with Shelley Osborne about cohort-based learning. And so, just to hear what they're doing and how they are thinking about cohort-based learning, could be a good model that you might want to leverage as is or adapt to your audience.

Jeff Cobb: [00:15:34] Yes, definitely. Shelley is at Modal Learning and, in fact, if I remember correctly, Shelley was at Udemy before, wasn't she? So Udemy, who were doing the self-paced thing, and not that that's going away, that's still big. I think they're still booming. But it's interesting that one of Udemy's founders—or maybe it's more than one, I can't remember now; but founders of Udemy went and created Maven as a cohort-based platform. Shelley, who I think was the CLO at Udemy, went off to Modal, which is focused on cohort-based learning, or that's at least one of their focus areas. So it's just kind of a point of evolution, and one we expect to see continue to evolve in the coming years.

Celisa Steele: [00:16:11] The third C is community. This, I think, ties yet again to the social aspect that we've highlighted around coaching and cohorts. In community, you're going to, again, take advantage of the fact that there are others interested in whatever topics you're dealing with—with your learners.

Jeff Cobb: [00:16:32] Another very people-focused C here, one that we're going to see continue to grow. I know we're already seeing signs of this being a very important one out there, mostly because the platform companies are starting to tune into it. And you know when decisions around platforms or promotions around platforms, those sorts of things start to happen around a concept that the makers of those platforms are seeing something out there; they're not just doing this to do it. For example, Thinkific, which is a platform that's traditionally focused more on sort of edupreneurial course creators, that does have some traction in the broader corporate world as well. In their annual digital learning report, which they've been doing for a number of years now, one of the biggest current trends that they identified was "community-first learning," this idea that you really are bringing people into a learning community and that that is kind of the basis of whatever else you might be doing with them in terms of offering courses or Webinars or whatever other types of learning opportunities or more structured-type learning opportunities you might be offering, they're all bound together by this idea of community.

Jeff Cobb: [00:17:41] Of course, that helps with retaining your learners over time, with your learners supporting each other, with having an audience there that's ready and going to give you feedback on what else you should create, and is going to be there to participate in what you create. So I think that's telling. I think it's also telling one of the more recent mergers/acquisitions that we saw in the association world, which is a big part of the Leading Learning audience, was between the more traditional learning management system platform, Web Courseworks and Forj, which is an AI-driven community platform. And there's a lot of buzz out there in the broader world about user experience within the association world, about member experience. And really at the core of that is—how do you create opportunities and value from people being connected to each other in a community? I think, again, we're seeing platform companies look at that and say, "Hmm, there are things we can do here to connect these dots and create learning-driven community and community-driven learning."

Celisa Steele: [00:18:46] And we've seen this interest in the connection between community and learning. It's existed for many years. It's certainly not new. But I do think we're kind of getting to that point with—how can we make it less clunky? I think we've seen the cordoned-off discussion area for people enrolled in a course, but it could sort of feel like an area people wouldn't necessarily go to, naturally. So I think there's this idea of—how can we make that

community that is tied to a learning course also just feel like it's a more organic and a more natural part of an exchange that people might be having with others around a particular topic? And so, I think the systems, the platforms are getting better about how can we connect these two pieces that we've kind of traditionally maybe handled in two different platforms. But now we're seeing, I think, a lot more focus on that. How do we bring these together in a good user experience kind of way?

Jeff Cobb: [00:19:39] I think the more cohesion we can see there, the easier that gets to manage, the easier it gets to be as an end-user experience, the better. And that seems to be a direction we're headed in. Community is definitely one of those people-centric approaches, learner-centric approaches to consider, along with cohorts and coaching. And, of course, all of these things fit together well too, because they are so people- and interaction-driven. So those first three Cs are very, very strong. The fourth C we want to talk about is chunking. I think, primarily, the trend and the buzz around something like microlearning that's been out there for years, has been driving or is driving this fourth C of chunking and getting things into smaller, bite-sized learning objects to work with. But it's more than that. And it's more than that, not just because we need a C instead of an M here. It's also because, regardless of whether you're doing microlearning, we just know from learning science, from what the data tells us, that getting things down into meaningful, concise chunks, even within larger learning experiences—it might be an hour learning experience—but if you can pivot every 10 minutes to some degree to keep the learner's attention, to bring a point home just in terms of design, that chunking is so important.

Jeff Cobb: [00:21:13] And it's something that organizations can go back to content they already have and think: Are there some opportunities for re-engineering this? Are there some opportunities for carving out some chunks from things, maybe making some microlearning opportunities? But, then, also going forward: How do we work with our subject matter experts? How do we design ourselves in ways that our content is more chunked, is more digestible, is going to be more in line with what we know works from a learning science standpoint and, also, just what learners increasingly seem to want and expect?

Celisa Steele: [00:21:43] I think it also ties to personalization. Again, if we have smaller chunks, whether they are freestanding microlearning units or if they are clearly labeled and segmented sections of a larger learning program, that enables the learner to go, "I don't need to know about A; what I'm really interested in is C, and I'm going to just skip straight there and really focus in on that because that's the issue that I'm dealing with at work today." And so, I think there's a lot that chunking can do to help with that personalization piece, which also ties to

This transcript accompanies the episode of the Leading Learning Podcast available at <u>www.leadinglearning.com/episode345</u>.

page 8 of 12

motivation because learners are going to be more interested if it's something that she knows she wants to learn about or knows she needs to learn about. So in addition to the learning science side of things, we also have these other additional benefits around motivation and personalization.

Jeff Cobb: [00:22:33] If you haven't gotten serious about chunking yet, now is definitely the time out of this list. I don't know. These can all be low-hanging fruit to a certain extent, just depending on your organization, your resources. But we all have content. We're all creating different types of content and going back and potentially re-engineering and chunking some, and then making sure that we're doing more of it going forward. Certainly very important. And it does open up those personalization opportunities like you're talking about, Celisa. It can open up new business model opportunities to small bites of content put into a subscription package, potentially instead of your traditional course experience or in addition to your traditional course experience, or using that as a form of content marketing. There are just all sorts of things you can do when you're dealing with smaller units of learning, above and beyond the benefits that may come from the learning science that lies behind that. This is something that we've definitely talked about numerous times in the past. We have episodes of the podcast. We have blog posts that relate to different aspects of this. So we'll definitely be sure to link to a number of those in the show notes for this episode.

Celisa Steele: [00:23:42] And the show notes for this episode are available at leadinglearning.com/episode345. And I'll just put in a plug again that we do have the learning science, the research to back up this idea of chunking and its importance. The kind of roughly ten-minute guideline comes—well, certainly, it was at least popularized in *Brain Rules* by John Medina. We've written about that. We've written about other aspects of andragogy and adult learning theory. So again, you can find out more if you want some further guidance around "why to chunk and how to chunk" at leadinglearning.com/episode345.

Jeff Cobb: [00:24:20] And we should also say that this is a concept that we cover in "presenting for impact," which is our training for subject matter experts who want to create more educationally impactful presentations. This is a free training, so if you're hearing about it for the first time, or maybe you've heard about it before but haven't done anything about it, if you want to have a look at that, we'll also have links to that in the show notes. And that's something that listeners can offer to the subject-matter experts that they're working with to create content, and can help you with that process of institutionalizing, chunking, and how your content is created.

Celisa Steele: [00:24:56] So that brings us to our fifth C, which is credentials. And I will say right here at the outset that "credentials" is, for us, the umbrella term, and you can have a credential that is more or less formal, that's more or less rigorous, that's smaller or larger. Certifications would fall under the credentialing umbrella, as would digital badges, and as would even just a PDF certificate of attendance or completion. But what we want to talk about around credentials is just this idea that, I think, for the most part, learners and then other stakeholders, such as employers, want a learning experience to clearly signal certain accomplishments, skills, and knowledge. And so, a credential is a way to sort of package up the statement saying, "Hey, this is what I know, this is what I learned, and this is what I can do."

Jeff Cobb: [00:25:51] And it has become so much more important. Credentials have always been important. One of the main ones in the past being various types of degrees that people have earned at colleges and universities and various types of certifications that they've earned in different industries. But the need for newer types of credentials— alternative, additional types of credentials—it's just growing, and it's growing pretty rapidly, as we've seen disruption in the workforce and the employment market over the last few years. But even the last few decades, as people are switching jobs, even entire careers more often or even within their jobs, what they have to do is changing rapidly. They're having to reskill, upskill—all of those buzz terms that we're familiar with. And generally, they appreciate—they being the learners and the employees—having some form of proof of learning, having some validation that they have gotten this new skill. They appreciate that, I'm sure, personally and professionally. But it's also a value in the employment market now. Employers like to see that if they're going to consider Jane or Joe for this job, that person really has some proof that they've actually got this set of specific skills that employer is looking for. And a credential is just one of the most logical ways to do that. Always has been.

Celisa Steele: [00:27:05] And you had the chance to talk recently with 1EdTech about some of the standards that they have around credentials or that touch on credentials. And so, we would point people to that episode. Again, you can find a link to that in the show notes for this episode at leadinglearning.com/episode345. I would also point to sort of the overlap between the last C that we talked about, chunking, and this C, credentials, because I do think that, in large part, where we've seen the most demand is for smaller credentials. So it is about—how can I get the skills and knowledge I need to be able to do something specific in the near term? And I think that relates to the need for this upskilling and reskilling and to just make sure that you are able to do your job and do it well in the current economy, or if your job ends, be able to pivot and move into a different position. And so, I think these smaller credentials really help with that

because you can, as a learner, invest a relatively small amount of time and, therefore, also less money than if you were to say, go back to school to get a graduate degree in a different field.

Jeff Cobb: [00:28:14] Yes, definitely. And like everything we've been talking about here, too, there are business model implications that credentials bring with them. They are a way to potentially make your learning experiences more valuable and help with demand generation. I was responding to a colleague just the other day who's at an association who was saying, "We don't have a CE or a CEU requirement in our field." And we know—we, meaning you and I, Celisa, and Tagoras—from research that we've done for many years, that having some sort of a credential that's going to drive the need for CE, that is a big driver of learning enrollments, both online and off. So if you don't have that, you don't necessarily have a great demand driver there for the learning that you're offering. Even if there isn't a requirement in your market right now, there isn't licensure; there isn't some sort of overarching certification that people have to have.

Jeff Cobb: [00:29:09] If you are able to put together a credential, and I think any organization can do this if they're really in touch with the labor market and what employers want, you can figure out what are some credentials we can offer around specific knowledge or skill sets that, if we bundle together three or four courses and maybe layer some coaching or do it as a cohort some of the things we've already been talking about—and create one or more credentials that have some value to them—and these don't have to be full-blown certifications that's going to rightly scare many organizations to get into that—but just a good solid assessment-based credential with some coursework to it. You've often already got the courses or the content that could form the core of the credential. You just need to build a few other components around it and then actually name the credential and make it issuable, and suddenly, you've really added to your potential for demand generation around the learning content that you're offering. And when we're talking about powering up your portfolio, this is a great way to power up your portfolios to get some credentialing in there that's meaningful, and attaching that to your learning, and then being able to charge for that and know that you're going to be able to drive more demand for that.

Celisa Steele: [00:30:21] So that's our look at the five Cs: coaching, cohorts, community, chunking, and credentials. And these are five Cs that you can use to power up your portfolio, to improve the reach, revenue, and impact of your content.

Jeff Cobb: [00:30:37] You can use the five Cs to potentially create new, freestanding products and services, but often they can be leveraged more readily, more simply but still very powerfully to enhance or repackage existing products and services.

Celisa Steele: [00:30:52] At leadinglearning.com/episode345, you'll find links to resources about each of the five Cs, as well as a transcript and show notes.

Jeff Cobb: [00:31:02] You'll also find options for subscribing to the podcast, and, if you haven't yet, please do subscribe.

Celisa Steele: [00:31:07] Yes, please do, as those subscription numbers give us some visibility into the impact of the podcast and our success in using the podcast to create and sustain community—one of the five Cs we've talked about.

Jeff Cobb: [00:31:21] And we'd also be grateful if you take a minute to rate us on Apple Podcasts or wherever you listen, especially if you enjoy the show. Celisa and I personally appreciate reviews and ratings, and they help the podcast show up when people search for content on leading a learning business.

Celisa Steele: [00:31:38] Lastly, please spread the word about Leading Learning. You can do that in a one-on-one note or a conversation with a colleague, or you can do it through social media. In the show notes at leadinglearning.com/episode345, you'll find links to connect with us on Twitter, LinkedIn, and Facebook.

Jeff Cobb: [00:31:55] Thanks again, and see you next time on the Leading Learning Podcast.

[music for this episode by DanoSongs, <u>www.danosongs.com</u>]