Amanda Kaiser: [00:00:00] There are a lot of communities that are struggling, and there are a few communities that are doing really well. And I think it's really time for us to sit down and talk about what makes engagement really engaging.

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] Engagement is at the heart of most thriving learning businesses. In this episode, number 355, we talk about engagement with Amanda Kaiser. Amanda is an engagement strategist, keynote speaker, and author of *Elevating Engagement: Uncommon Strategies for Creating a Thriving Member Community*. Amanda's background and focus is on community engagement in the context of associations, but her perspective on engagement is valuable for learning businesses of all types. In her conversation with Jeff, Amanda offers a formula for engagement and shares a high-level look at the six stages of engagement. Jeff and Amanda get into specific tactics and approaches, including e-mail communication, social proof, and priming members and learners for participation. And they discuss the primary importance of creating an organizational culture that supports and values engagement over transactions. Jeff and Amanda spoke in April 2023.

Jeff Cobb: [00:01:39] I know you work with organizations to help them in a number of different ways. Can you tell us a bit about the work that you do?

Amanda Kaiser: [00:01:46] Absolutely. I'm a researcher at heart. I research, I experiment, I speak, and I write about engagement. And my interest in engagement really started when I was working to help guide the Crayola brand. I worked in marketing at Crayola, and that's what propelled me into this field. And, if you think, Jeff, about your own experiences with that very iconic yellow box with the green chevrons, for most people, it brings up a lot of emotions—the thrill of opening a new box, the possibilities, the creativity, and remembering your childhood.

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So that's a really good example of brand engagement. And nowadays I study brand engagement but also attendee engagement, member engagement, and volunteer engagement, just to name a few places where engagement becomes really important. That's what I'm working on these days.

Jeff Cobb: [00:02:36] It's interesting you brought up Crayola. I knew that was part of your background, but, until you said that, I hadn't made the connection between Crayola and engagement because I just know from having had young children myself and just seeing young children, particularly when you see a child with a crayon in their hand or a box of crayons and that paper in front of them, you're talking about somebody who's engaged. They are just so focused. So crayons and Crayola, I guess, are all about engagement. Now, the main focus of our discussion today is your new book, which is about engagement, and it's called *Elevating Engagement: Uncommon Strategies for Creating a Thriving Member Community*. I think to tee up the conversation, it might be useful to talk about at least a couple of terms. One is engagement. What do you mean when you use the word *engagement*? Because it's one of those terms I think gets thrown around a lot these days. We need to engage people more, for whatever it is. How do you define that, and what led to your deep focus on it?

Amanda Kaiser: [00:03:43] Absolutely. I'm so glad you asked that question because, you're right, people are throwing around terms. There are a million definitions for engagement. In the way that I think about engagement, there are transactions, and then there's engagement. I think most of our interactions with organizations are transactional—you give me value, and I give you cash. And so let me give you an example. The closest dry cleaner to me is adequate. They're just averagely adequate. They take my blazers, and, a week later, I have clean blazers. And I think that they do an okay business, but, when I drop off and pick up, there's never anybody else there. Five years ago, I lived in a neighborhood that had the best dry cleaner. She was the best. She knew my name. I would hand her my blazers, and she would ooh and aah over the fabric. My son was younger at the time. She just loved my son. And the place was always just a bunch of activity. When I was dropping off and picking up, people were always dropping off and picking up, and, when they'd leave, they'd have this huge smile on their faces. With my current dry cleaner, my relationship with them is purely transactional. But my old dry cleaner— that's engagement. I feel like that's engagement. Engagement is more than a transaction. We're starting to get into that realm of feelings, and those feelings are what brings us back for more. And so I think that there are a lot of businesses where transactions are okay, but I think, Jeff, the kinds of businesses that we work with and serve, you've got to have engagement. It's got to be more than just a transaction.

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Jeff Cobb: [00:05:23] I definitely want to talk about that. It's so great to use the example of a dry cleaner because you do think of that, for me, as the ultimate transactional business. Do I really care about engagement with my dry cleaner? And yet, when it happens, you notice it, and it feels good. I have a tailor that I use. When I say tailor, I mean all she's doing is taking up the hem in my new pants or something like that. I'm not having suits made or anything. So I won't see her for six months or a year, and I walk through the door, and she says, "Hey, Jeff!" And just how on earth is she remembering me? And so, like you said, the engagement's there. And, in what would otherwise be a fairly transactional business, I will never go anywhere else to get my pants hemmed as a result of just that simple…because it made me, like you said, it's a feeling. It makes you feel so good. Now, I know that for you (and you referenced our work—we both work a great deal in the membership world and the association world), you're really focused on engagement in communities. That was the second term I wanted to ask you about as we're heading deeper into the conversation is community. How do you define *community*? I feel like there's an issue with engagement and community, or maybe it's particularly with membership organizations and traditional associations that there needs to be more engagement than has traditionally been the case. Or, as you said, it needs to be elevated now. Talk to me about community and then this need for elevation.

Amanda Kaiser: [00:06:48] I like to use the word *community* fairly loosely. You're right—professionals are communities of their peers. With trade societies, the same kind of thing—there's a lot of community there. But I also study online communities. Every time you bring a group together for an event, even if it's just an hour-long event, you have an opportunity to make a community. There are communities popping up and going away wherever you look. So this is not just an association thing, but I think, wherever you look, there are communities that are doing it really well, community leaders that are engaging people really well, and communities that are really floundering. I've noticed, especially with online communities, that there have been a lot of online communities that have popped up, and then they've waned because there's not enough engagement, not enough interest. So why am I writing this book now? When I look at communities and organizations that have engagement, there's something almost magical about them. They're certainly thriving from every single business metric we can talk about, but there's something more. There's that energy. Say they have an event or a conference, and you feel the energy the moment you step through the door. If they have an online event, the same kind of thing—you feel the energy or the warmth. You feel something. And, in today's world of work, I feel like that's really important. It's important when we can get people to a place where they can bring their whole authentic selves, where they can collaborate with other people. That's why the book now. I think there are a lot of communities that are

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struggling, and there are a few communities that are doing really well. And I think it's really time for us to sit down and talk about what makes engagement really engaging.

Jeff Cobb: [00:08:43] You make it clear very early in the book that experience is really at the core of this. And I was struck by that. I get it, and I understand and value experience, but you often hear so much about delivering value. "We need to find the value." "We need to articulate the value." "We need to make sure the value is appreciated." Can you talk to me a little bit about experience versus value, and how they both play into having an engaging community?

Amanda Kaiser: [00:09:12] I arrived here after a lot of work, actually. In the last 10 years, I have conducted more than 477 in-depth, qualitative interviews with professionals from all different kinds of organizations. I've talked to university professors. I've talked to rocket scientists. I've talked to rock scientists, lawyers, CPAs, and all sorts of people. All in an effort to figure out what engagement truly was. And so what happened, as a result of all of these conversations, was that I found a formula for engagement. And that formula is value plus experience equals engagement. If you think about my current dry cleaner, they do a good job with my clothes. That's the value part. I like to think about value as the base layer. So you get the value part, and the value part, again, is very transactional. If, say, a new dry cleaner opened up nearby, I'd try them. There's no reason to be particularly loyal. But, when we want more than just that transaction, what we want to start doing is to layer on experience. So you get your base layer of value, and then you layer on a layer of positive experiences. So value plus experiences equals engagement. And these positive experiences don't have to be elaborate. One of the questions that I'm getting a lot lately is, "Oh, my gosh, I'm so busy. It's almost like you're asking me to do a second job, Amanda. How do I provide all of this value, and now all of these experiences?" I don't think it has to be. I think, certainly, if you are a big organization with lots of money, lots of time, and lots of scale, you might have to invest in experiences. But for small organizations or these one-on-one discussions, maybe not really. My favorite dry cleaner, she smiled at people. She was super chatty, those kinds of things. Your tailor remembered your name. It doesn't have to take a lot of time.

Celisa Steele: [00:11:10] We're grateful to Thinkific for sponsoring the Leading Learning Podcast. At Leading Learning, we believe reach, revenue, and impact are essential for all learning businesses. Thinkific Plus is a new-generation platform purpose-built to help growing businesses scale revenue. With Thinkific Plus, you can generate monthly recurring revenue through course subscriptions and membership programs, sell multiple seats for your learning products to a single buyer, suggest additional products in the learning flow to increase sales, and go global with 0 percent transaction fees and payments accepted in over 100 countries.

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Jeff Cobb: [00:12:26] I think the great thing about the book is how you articulate this experience plus value equals engagement. Great formula for everybody to remember. If you remember one thing from the podcast today, that might be the main takeaway to have. But you also laid out very nicely the stages that an organization or a community goes through in achieving engagement. I don't think they necessarily have to be linear lockstep. You can talk about that a little bit. But these are the different perspectives or areas to look at when thinking about engagement. There are six of them. And I think we have enough time here today to talk about each of those, at least a little bit. We may go deeper on some of them than others, but I'll name them, and then we can go through each one: observe, assess, participate, contribute, collaborate, and lead. So why don't we just take them in that order? Observe—how do you describe or define that stage of engagement?

Amanda Kaiser: [00:13:25] This is when you've got people who are newcomers to you. They're newcomers to, say, a conference, new newcomers to your Web site, newcomers to your community. And so what happens is that they're wondering if they should engage. What they do is observe everything: e-mail, your Web site, signage, registration, how people are behaving with each other, online communities, everything, especially e-mails. E-mail is a big one. For a lot of us, our biggest channel to communicate with other people is through e-mail. They're observing everything. So observe is the first stage. And you're right, Jeff—you had said people don't necessarily go lockstep through all of these six in order. Sometimes they skip over a stage or reverse the order, and that's totally okay. But it also helps to think through these six stages because, if people are going immediately from observe to lead, you might end up with some problems, and then you can reverse engineer out of that. But the other thing that I did was write the book so that if you have a particular question, you don't have to read 200 pages to get to your question. You can actually pick up and open that chapter and read it, and it'll make sense.

Jeff Cobb: [00:14:42] Right. And it definitely resonated in this observe area. Of course, once you decide you're going to join, you're going to be part of a community, even before you make that decision to join, you're going to be watching. You're going to be saying, "Is this for me? Are these my people? Is this going to be helpful to me and an experience that I'm going to enjoy?" A

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lot of times, organizations—people that are trying to facilitate a community, organize a community—can flub up at this point. And you referenced e-mail. Can you talk about what might go wrong with e-mail, or what might go wrong at this stage, and how do you avoid that?

Amanda Kaiser: [00:15:14] You're absolutely right. The other thing about every single stage is that there are go/no-go decisions that people tend to make when they're trying to figure out whether they want to engage further. I tried to highlight all of those, and e-mail is such a critical one. For most organizations, their biggest channel of communication is e-mail. Here's what happens, say, in the example of a member joining. A member joins, they hit join, and then they start getting e-mails, and they might get the ubiquitous welcome e-mail, which tends to be lists and lists. And so it'll say, "Welcome, Jeff, to the oldest, largest association for your profession or industry. And so now you have access to 37 member benefits." And they will list all of the 37 member benefits. "By the way, we have about 22,000 articles on our Web site, but we've carefully curated a good 22 for you. Here are the 22 articles that you should probably read right now. And we also have a learning library that contains about 250 on-demand courses that you can grab. And, by the way, here's a list of the top 10 most popular." So here's what happens. People look at that e-mail, and they say, "Oh, my gosh, not only do I not have time to look at all of this, I don't even have time to figure out what I should be looking at." And so with that one e-mail, we've just trained them that, every time they interact with us, we're going to take a lot of time. That's one of those places where things can get a little dicey. A welcome e-mail should be super warm, super quick, and perhaps informative but at least super warm and super quick. Maybe they'll walk away with a teeny, little tidbit. They're happy, and they're ready to open the next e-mail.

Jeff Cobb: [00:16:54] I like that—warm and quick for that initial e-mail. Everybody should keep that in mind. So that's observe. And you obviously go quite a bit deeper than that in the book. But, for the sake of our conversation today, let's move on to assess. What's happening there?

Amanda Kaiser: [00:17:09] You referenced this before. People are starting to ask themselves questions. "Do people like me engage in an organization, event, or community like this?" "Do people like me do stuff like this?" "Did I make the right decision in joining?" They take everything that they've observed, from your e-mails to your signage, through the registration process to what they're seeing in the online community digests, and they start to make these judgments. If the answer is "Yes, people like me do engage in communities like this," then maybe they'll move on. What helps them to decide that people like me engage in a community like this? Well, one of the tips from the book is social proof. And so here's an unconventional way, perhaps, to do some social proof. There are a lot of organizations that are doing virtual

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onboarding events. Maybe every week, every month, every quarter, they're inviting all of their new attendees, their new members, onto a virtual onboarding or virtual orientation event. And one of the things you can do is have relatively new members—members who have been in your association for a year—ask them to be the chat ambassadors. And so they might be young professionals, and you have all of these new members coming in, and another relatively new member is the chat ambassador. It helps for people to see somebody a lot like them who's already a member. So, wherever you can, try to leverage social proof. It really helps people know that there are people like them in a community like this.

Jeff Cobb: [00:18:47] I love that—chat ambassador. Nice phrase there. And that shows it's not all just about standing a video camera up in front of somebody and getting them to say something nice. In fact, I think something like a chat ambassador would probably be a lot more effective in most situations. So we've done observe and assess. The next one is participate, which, to me, is starting to sound pretty positive. It sounds like something good is starting to happen here in terms of your overall topic of engagement—somebody engaging. We might want to go a little deeper on this one. What's happening in this participate stage?

Amanda Kaiser: [00:19:23] They've decided tentatively that this organization is for people like me, and this is where they start dipping their toe into the water, and they interact just a bit because they want to see how they're going to be received. Maybe what they do is contribute to the chat in a Webinar, maybe they respond to a post in your online community, or maybe they comment on a social media post. And so, again, they dip their toe in the water just to see how they're received. One of the things I like to do as a speaker and facilitator is to prime for participation because I think that there are a couple of things that happen. I want people to get participating as quickly as they feel comfortable because, if there's a huge lag, sometimes it makes it harder to participate later. To the extent you can and to the extent you want participation, think about all of the ways that you can prime for participation. If you'd like, Jeff, I can give one example if there's time.

Jeff Cobb: [00:20:27] Please do, yes.

Amanda Kaiser: [00:20:28] Okay. This is one of my favorite ideas. If I can, I'll reel off some ideas, and I'll tell you where I stole them from. This particular idea is about engaging your early birds. If you're having some kind of live event, a live course, or a live Webinar, there's always a group of your attendees that log in at least a couple of minutes early, but they might log in five, ten, even half an hour early. Some people log in super, super early. I call these folks "the early birds." And this idea that I stole from a friend of mine—his name is Mark Collard. He has a

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database of icebreakers, activities, and energizers that you can use in your meetings, your courses, and your events. And so Mark has this idea of an "unofficial start." So, when people start coming into your waiting room or, live, when people start coming into your room, start. It can be something as simple as just letting everybody into the room and having a very unofficial conversation. "How's it going? Why are you here? What are you hoping to learn?" Or you can come up with some kind of unofficial start activity. I love the unofficial start activities where you just post a question and chat. "Hey, as you're coming in, introduce yourself, and tell me a little bit about this topic." And those things help prime people for participation.

Jeff Cobb: [00:21:49] We've actually got a course called "Presenting for Impact," where we're helping presenters become more educationally impactful. I think it's the same phrase—I can't remember my own writing—but priming for participation because it is so important. You have to give people the opportunities to be able to participate, make it clear that they're there, and make it easy and welcoming for them to do that. It seems like it's also a great time for positive reinforcement and appreciation when that happens, I would guess.

Amanda Kaiser: [00:22:16] Yes, I absolutely agree. With these kinds of things—you've probably found the same thing—they really set the tone. They set the tone for the rest of your time together. And so, as the leader, facilitator, and teacher, you're setting the tone with how you're cueing up those activities but also how you're responding to the way people are responding to them.

Jeff Cobb: [00:22:44] We've got observe, assess, and now participation. Now we're moving to contribute. What's going on here?

Amanda Kaiser: [00:22:52] We've moved from participate (dipping your toe into the water) into contribute. It's a little bit more meaningful. Here we're talking about people who are going to speak for you, maybe in concurrent sessions. They're writing articles. Maybe they're being interviewed, or maybe they're mentoring. They're bringing a little bit more of themselves to the game. And, generally speaking, when we get to contribution, it's the things that take a little bit more time. Participating, I can just do that on the fly, fairly quickly. But, if I'm contributing, it might take me half an hour or 15 minutes. It might take me 100 hours to build a concurrent session. These are things that take time. And what people need to know here is that their contribution is valued. They might also need to know how to contribute. In terms of the go/no-go decision that happens here, I find that professionals talk about two different problems. One problem is "It feels like people are trying to force me to contribute before I'm ready, or I don't have time right now." We try to push people to do things they don't want to do. The other is

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"I'm ready to contribute. I want to write a journal article, I want to speak, and I keep raising my hand, but nobody's taking me up on it." So, to the extent that we can make room for both things that happen, the better off we're going to be in having people make that decision to engage and contribute and then continue in their six-step journey.

Jeff Cobb: [00:24:22] And, with something like contribution, obviously it's going to be true in any community that some people are going to be more motivated, more inclined to contribute than others. Do you aim to try to find even very small ways for everybody to contribute, or do you just resign yourself to the fact that some people may never really contribute, but you can still have an engaged community?

Amanda Kaiser: [00:24:45] I think you can still have an engaged community. There's this term in the association world of mailbox members. They join in. They read. They participate when they can, and they don't do much more. Some of those people are members for 20 years, and that's okay. And, if you push them to do more, they might resist, and that might be a deal-breaker for them. I think that, with some people, there's going to be a sub-segment that is ready to just keep moving up that ladder. And what we don't want to do is accidentally throw barriers up in front of them to prevent them from doing that. But I think the opposite is also true. I've been playing a lot with the whole idea of gratitude and thank-yous. You have somebody that spent 100 hours on a concurrent session, and often there's no thank-you from the organization for doing that. There might be a few thank-yous from people who sat through that session but probably not from the staff, not from the board, or something like that. Well, 100 hours is a lot of hours. And so one of the nice things about public thank-yous—even if you say we have 100 speakers—along with our board members, our committee, our sponsors, and our exhibitors, we also thank the speakers that help do this. When people hear the public thank-yous, then they'll be more likely to say, "Oh, hey, being a speaker is a good thing. They're recognizing them, and maybe that's something I'll try out."

Jeff Cobb: [00:26:13] Yes, definitely. I've personally been in that situation where you put in that contribution and don't necessarily get much thanks for it. I think it is so important to make sure you're recognizing those contributors, particularly the ones who are contributing at that level. Now, the next stage, one I'm particularly interested in, is collaborate. Mostly because Leading Learning is a site that's all about learning. It's an initiative that's all about learning. Our business at Tagoras is all about learning. And I think, so often within communities, the most powerful, most useful learning comes out of the collaborations that happen in the community. Certainly among the people who are collaborating, who are hands-on doing whatever they're doing, but that also tends to ripple out into the community. It's where new ideas and

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innovations and new ways of doing things come from. I think we tend to think learning has to happen in courses, classes, seminars, and that sort of thing. But so much happens in these collaborative-type situations that we find ourselves in. How do you think about this collaborate stage and the role of collaboration in engagement and in community?

Amanda Kaiser: [00:27:23] Well, we are super like-minded, I think, when it comes to collaborate. I'll tell you how I got there. I was doing these interviews, and what I found was that there was this certain sub-segment of very engaged members that I would talk to that I started calling the "innovators." And what's really happening is that people get to a certain stage in their careers where they start having these very big, very thorny, very seemingly unsolvable problems or at least problems that they can't solve themselves or solve within their organization. And so there are some people who get to that stage and say, "The problem can't be solved." Then there are what I call my "innovators" that think, "Well, I don't know if the problem can be solved, but it can't be solved by me. But I think it could be solved by a bunch of us working together. I'd like to find that bunch of us. And I don't know if I can solve this problem, but I'd like to be part of the solution." And that's the collaborate stage. Again, another go/no-go decision. So, when people are part of, say, an association or a community, and they're raising their hand, saying, "Hey, I want to collaborate; I want to get together with like-minded people and solve this problem," a lot of times they'll step out of the association and form a community and do it on their own.

Amanda Kaiser: [00:28:42] And that's a shame because I think that it would be great if it happened within the walls of the association because the experiments they have, the conversations they have, and the conclusions they come to could be captured and then sent back out to the entire community. I think there's really a lot of power there. I think you referenced this idea that collaboration doesn't just have to be for the collaborators if there is a way for you to capture that work and then send it back out. Arianna Rehak and I—she's the CEO of Matchbox Virtual Media—we got together during the deep, dark depths of COVID to put on the Virtual Networking Incubator. We had 150 people that played with all kinds of activities, platforms, and technology with us. And then, at the end, I wrote a research report on everything that we learned together. So that's just an example of how we use that really great, really deep group learning, and then we extended the learning much further than the 150 of us that were doing those experiments.

Jeff Cobb: [00:29:49] And is that report available online somewhere?

Amanda Kaiser: [00:29:51] It is, yes.

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Jeff Cobb: [00:29:51] It is. Okay. We'll make sure we get a link to that in the show notes. We love Arianna; she's been on the podcast twice now. So I'm sure that was a fantastic collaboration. I remember hearing about it, but I haven't actually seen the report, so I would like to. We're now at our final stage out of the six stages: lead. What happens here?

Amanda Kaiser: [00:30:10] You might be more familiar with the terminology of volunteer. Volunteers, they're people who might organize an event. They might create new resources. They might help manage the community or all of the governance. They're on a committee to leading a committee. They're on your board, leading a board. That's the whole lead stage.

Jeff Cobb: [00:30:30] It seems to me that that's an ownership stage too. You're seeing the community members actually step up and take ownership of the community, not just the organizers. And I think, if you are somebody organizing a community, that has to be the most gratifying thing in the world to see that that starts to happen. The book has been out now for a couple of months—two to three months—is that about right? And I know—I've written books myself before—you finish it, it goes off to press or whatever, you put it out there in the world, and then you think, "I would love if I could have talked about this more." Or "Now I've learned this since writing the book." Or "My thinking has changed in some way." Anything like that for you? New ideas that have come along now that you've put this out there and are living with it?

Amanda Kaiser: [00:31:20] Yes, I've got a couple of ideas for bonus chapters. And one idea that I've been playing with recently is the whole idea of culture. And so, when I read resources on culture, we talk about organizational culture, I think what people are talking about is staff culture. But every community actually has a culture. Whether it's a pop-up community that's forming just around a one-hour event or around a couple-of-day conference or your online community, all of those things have a culture. And what I've noticed is that this high engagement often correlates with a very strong, positive community identity or culture. And I think the leaders have a lot to do with how that culture manifests. Actually, there are two things here. If you don't do anything to cultivate your culture, you get this potluck thing that happens, and that can be good or bad. But I do believe that, as community leaders, we can have a very positive impact on our culture. And so I'm going to go back to what Arianna and I did with the Virtual Networking Incubator. We wanted it to be a place that was very experimental.

Amanda Kaiser: [00:32:34] We wanted people to be able to, off the top of their heads, throw out half of an idea, and somebody else would ping off that half of an idea and say, "Oh, what about this?" And then somebody else would grab it and then say, "Oh, what about this?" We wanted

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that to be able to happen, and we wanted it to be able to happen when 80 or 90 people were in a Zoom room together. And so we said, "Hey, it's really important for us to have a culture that's very open, very kind, and very generous." We tried to model that in every possible way we could. Arianna and I were writing e-mails, I was doing the facilitation, and we were just trying to—before every single gathering, I would get those words in my head, and I would just try to model it every single time. We had the loveliest culture. People would talk about the gatherings and about each other: "This is the most joyful thing that I did this week." And so I'd love to start having much more conversations around member culture and how we can cultivate really good ones.

Jeff Cobb: [00:33:37] We might have to have another discussion about that at some point. We focus a lot on learning culture because we think there needs to be a culture in which learning is valued, appreciated, and promoted. And it's not just within the organization. We're talking about in the community and the broader constituency that an organization is trying to serve. And that has to be modeled by the organization. It has to be modeled by the organizational leaders. It has to be modeled by—if there are volunteer leaders—the volunteer leaders. All of those feed into the culture. And it's only when that's there that you really get this vibrant learning atmosphere that enriches the entire field, profession, or whatever the community is serving. I think it is just so important. I'd love to wrap up by asking you about your own learning. We're all about lifelong learning here at the Leading Learning Podcast, so I'd love to know how you approach your own development and learning, both personally and professionally. And, particularly in the context of this conversation, what role does community play for you in helping you to learn, grow, and develop over time?

Amanda Kaiser: [00:34:38] As a very naturally curious person, I find myself signing up for classes, courses, training, and books. You can see my bookshelf behind me. That is nothing compared to my bedside table, which is just packed with books. So books are really a go-to for me. I'm always listening to podcasts. I'm kind of a mess when it comes to learning. I try to learn as much as I can all the time. In terms of community, what I tend to do is gravitate toward live virtual learning events. And I might be saying virtual because we're still coming out of COVID, and so my recent experiences are a lot around virtual learning events. What I love is when I find a really great facilitator who is particularly adept at engaging everybody and getting everybody to participate. For me, it's super interesting because, selfishly, I love to see how they're doing and what they're doing, but I find myself just getting really engaged in the topic because I'm learning from the facilitator, but I also have the opportunity to learn from all of my peers, and sometimes that's just the best kind of learning. When you've got not only the expert in the room

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but 20, 30, or 80 other experts, it's pretty powerful. I feel like at the end of some of those events, we get much further than any one person could have ever gotten by themselves.

Jeff Cobb: [00:36:02] Yes, that's great. Learning is really happening when it's got that social aspect to it—people sharing their experiences and helping each other.

Celisa Steele: [00:36:19] Amanda Kaiser is a keynote speaker and author of *Elevating Engagement*. In the show notes for this episode at leadinglearning.com/episode355, you'll find a link to her Web site, where you can learn more about her work and the book.

Jeff Cobb: [00:36:33] I want to say that I personally enjoyed reading *Elevating Engagement*. It's an insightful, valuable, and fun read. Amanda's sense of humor comes across throughout the book, which makes use of a fictional hero readers see evolve through those six stages of engagement. So I recommend that you, dear listener, check out her book.

Celisa Steele: [00:36:53] Jeff and I would be grateful if you would rate the Leading Learning Podcast on Apple Podcasts or wherever you listen, especially if you find the show valuable, because those ratings help us show up when people search for content on leading a learning business.

Jeff Cobb: [00:37:07] And please spread the word about Leading Learning, whether in one-on-one conversations with colleagues or through personal notes or on social media. In the show notes at leadinglearning.com/episode355, you'll find links to connect with us on Twitter, LinkedIn, and Facebook.

Celisa Steele: [00:37:24] Thanks for listening, and see you next time on the Leading Learning Podcast.

[music for this episode by DanoSongs, www.danosongs.com]

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