



Developing Education Strategy with Pam Rosenberg

Leading Learning Podcast Transcript for Episode 429

Pam Rosenberg: [00:00:00] We're really at a great point in our education strategy because we have the world in front of us to expand and develop and all those good things.

Celisa Steele: [00:00:14] I'm Celisa Steele.

Jeff Cobb: [00:00:16] I'm Jeff Cobb, and this is the Leading Learning Podcast.

Jeff Cobb: [00:00:24] Having a strategy is part of what any learning business needs in order to thrive. But what does establishing a strategy look like? In this episode, number 429, we get a peek behind the strategy-developing curtain in a conversation with Pam Rosenberg. Pam is director of education for the American Society for Nondestructive Testing, and she's been in the exciting role of helping to develop ASNT's first formal education strategy.

Jeff Cobb: [00:00:53] While the association has existed for a long time (it was founded in 1941), the establishment of a formal education department is a recent development in the organization's history. With the establishment of that education department came the need to develop an education strategy and the need to get content quickly as ASNT didn't have a catalog of education to start. The association went the route of acquiring an e-learning catalog to jumpstart their efforts.

Jeff Cobb: [00:01:21] Pam talks with Celisa about build, borrow, and buy choices for creating a catalog; the need to assess the quality of learning content; competition from subject matter experts; the reality and challenge of serving check-the-box learners; the importance of connection; and more. Celisa and Pam spoke in late June 2024.

Celisa Steele: [00:01:53] Tell us about the American Society for Nondestructive Testing—what it does in general and then a sketch of what it offers in terms of learning opportunities.

This transcript accompanies the episode of the Leading Learning Podcast available at www.leadinglearning.com/episode429.

Pam Rosenberg: [00:02:04] Yes. Nondestructive testing is exactly what it sounds like. The technicians and the engineers and all that, they test things without taking them out of production. Or they do a CT scan. Like you go to the hospital to get a CT scan on a part of your body, they'll do a CT scan on an airplane engine or a helicopter engine and figure out where it will fail or if this has enough integrity so that it won't fail, like welds on roller coasters, welds on the hulls of ships to make sure that they're safe. A year ago, when the *Titan* submersible went underwater, there was NDT (nondestructive testing) that was done on that to tell the owners of that vessel that it's going to fail, not if it's going to fail. A nice little shout-out to our industry. But NDT professionals are huge in rail. NDT is literally everywhere, and it's one of those industries that you have never heard of because the NDT professionals keep us safe. Bridges, food, toys, cars, clothing—anything that you touch has gone through some level of NDT inspection.

Celisa Steele: [00:03:18] It's fascinating to think about how pervasive it is, and yet I don't tend to talk about nondestructive testing other than when I have an opportunity, like today, to talk with you. So tell us a little bit about the learning opportunities that ASNT has out in the world.

Pam Rosenberg: [00:03:35] ASNT is very unique with our education strategy and offerings. ASNT has been around a very long time, like a lot of other associations have been, but there was not a formal education strategy; it was housed under a different department and didn't have a standalone strategy. Two summers ago, the board had approved the business case to establish a formal education department and, with that, an education strategy. We are 18, 19 months into having a formal strategy at this point, and our bread and butter—prior to our education department and prior to myself and my team coming on board—was that we had these instructor-led trainings for a certification prep course. That was the bread and butter, and then, of course, conference education and training. But, again, those are housed under our events team. That's one of the main functions of meetings and conferences is the learning aspect of it.

Pam Rosenberg: [00:04:43] So we do have those, and we have a very robust set of publications, and that's been where a lot of the training primarily came from as well, but, again, not through ASNT instructors out in the field but experts and professionals training their own selves. We now have what you would consider to be a typical training department. We're still very immature, and I don't say that in a bad way, in terms of where we are with that strategy. I have matured a lot since our education department inception, but we are still getting our footing in terms of making a name for ourselves in the NDT industry, that ASNT is an education provider. We have e-learning products, which are self-paced, and they range from 8 to 20 or 8 to 40 contact hours' worth of training, and then instructor-led offerings. And we're really at a great

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point in our education strategy because we have the world in front of us to expand and develop and all those good things.

Celisa Steele: [00:05:49] When we think about how to put together a portfolio for a learning business, there are choices. There are different ways to go about finding things to put into a portfolio. At the highest level, we could think about it as this as build, borrow, buy, which I've heard you talk about in the past, and I know that you have some experience with thinking through those choices. Tell us a little bit about thinking through those choices and then, ultimately, your decision to go that buy route for ASNT.

Pam Rosenberg: [00:06:22] Yes, we can dig into it a little bit. In the initial business case to establish an education strategy for ASNT was...we don't have a catalog of offerings yet to spring us forward. So that was one of the initial objectives. One of the first tasks that our new team had to do was acquire and close on a training company. It was an e-learning catalog, and it was fully established. Depending on who you ask, it's 16 to 20 different products, depending on which way you're looking at it, but it was a really unique way to jumpstart our offerings.

Pam Rosenberg: [00:07:04] There are pluses and minuses to buying something outright, and we'll definitely get into that a little bit, but that was really unique. It forced us to learn very quickly what this industry is, and we're still learning to this day because, again, we are not the NDT professionals; we are just the people that bring everyone together for the learning, for the networking and engagement, and so on. That was a crash course, so to speak, to literally put us on the map as a training provider. Since then it has afforded us a lot of opportunities. Once the dust settled on the acquisition and us being the owners of this wonderful catalog of offerings, it allowed us to use that revenue to continue to push forward and think strategically about what new offerings we can build, buy, or borrow.

Celisa Steele: [00:08:03] The driving reason, at least initially for this buy decision, was because you needed something to have in that catalog as you were going out with this newly formed education department. Talk a little bit about what you've learned from that process that might then help you in the future. Or perhaps other people think through that choice around when it makes sense to do what you did and buy/acquire some outside content.

Pam Rosenberg: [00:08:32] Great question. Unless you're working directly with another actually established training association or an organization that has thoughtfully and intentionally used best practices when developing their training, there's going to be a lot of things that we uncovered and that you, potential buyers, will uncover when you do finally get the keys to the

castle. Without getting too nitty-gritty on it, everyone can call themselves a trainer, and everyone is an expert on something. But, unless you have someone like an instructional designer whose expertise is building learning, not just throwing words on a deck and recording it and calling it a training, there's going to be some deficiencies in terms of how the material is presented. Again, this is a blanket statement. I'm not saying that this will be the case in any acquisition that you potentially come across, but, really thinking strategically, you probably won't get the full keys to the castle until money is exchanged and ink is on paper, so that is something to be aware of. And, when the industry changes and knowledge changes and grows and advances and things like that, having that ability to adapt easily with that material that you've acquired can probably be a bit of a challenge.

Pam Rosenberg: [00:09:57] It's hard. People think one hour of training, "Oh, yeah, I'll just record it, and I'll edit it. It won't take a long time." I don't remember exactly what the calculation is, but I know for a live presentation, one hour of live instructor-led training—for lack of a better term—is 10 hours of prep time for every single hour. I think that's what the calculation is. For e-learning or self-paced online, I think one hour of contact learning is 80 or 100 hours. Again, I may be way off on that calculation. I'm not the expert on that. That's why there are instructional designers and learning professionals. But it's enormous. And, if you want to do it the right way, again, you could record a presentation and call it learning, but for the knowledge to transfer successfully and to make it be a successful product, some thought needs to go into it, not just what the words are that are coming out.

Jeff Cobb: [00:10:59] At Tagoras, we partner with professional and trade associations, continuing education units, training firms, and other learning businesses to help them understand market realities and potential, to connect better with existing customers and find new ones, and to make smart investment decisions around product development and portfolio management. Drawing on our expertise in lifelong learning, market assessment, and strategy formulation, we can help you achieve greater reach, revenue, and impact. Learn more at tagoras.com/ more.

Celisa Steele: [00:11:36] So you used that content initially to have something in your portfolio, and then it sounded like you were using the revenue that came from the acquisition, those 16 to 20 products that you then had in your catalog, to be able to fund things that you were deciding to build in-house. Is that true?

Pam Rosenberg: [00:11:53] I'm not going to get into the financial aspect of it because, to be quite honest, I don't understand the accounting side of it and the investment that we had to make upfront to acquire this. But it has allowed us to take a strategic look at what our competitors are

doing and where there are some gaps there and for us too because this industry is very interesting. A huge percentage of the NDT industry are people that call themselves trainers, educators, and facilitators, so we have a lot of competition. But where we excel is we have the learning staff, not just NDT people who have taken on a training role—they play a very important part in this industry; I’m not downplaying them at all. But it allows us to work on—buzzword—“partnerships.” Who has the advanced training but doesn’t have the mechanics to get people in seats? So that’s where we’ve spent a lot of our time. Where can we make those connections with people that have that established training? Can we take a look at it? How does this sound, and where can we elevate it and then also bring people to the training because of our name and our reputation? That has allowed us to do that and make some great new connections that way, and that has also allowed us to, in turn, work with our subject matter experts.

Celisa Steele: [00:13:12] Are you selling B2B and doing bulk sales into an organization? Are you in the subscription space or some sort of bundling space? I’d be curious to know how you’re approaching any packaging and whether it is B2B or B2C.

Pam Rosenberg: [00:13:30] Great question. Before we acquired—again, I’m strictly speaking e-learning because that’s what makes up the bulk of our revenue at this particular moment—it was definitely a mixture, but heavy leaning on B2B sales, and that was a lot of the customers that we retained through that acquisition. It is a lot of bulk purchasing and figuring out what that model looks like. But, again, at the end of the day, we’re a member association, so making sure that we are walking that delicate balance of we’re not just going to give away the farm because you’re guaranteeing us 10 seats or 10 enrollments or something like that. Making sure that some of their particular customers who have an academic lens, is there an opportunity for your students to be involved with ASNT? Again, to make sure that we’re cultivating young and newer entering NDT professionals in the field and learning about their purchasing habits. So we do have a fair amount of one-off sales here and there to individual companies and NDT firms. Right now it’s a good mix of both, and we’re trying to convert a lot of them into those bulk purchasing groups because we get to build a connection with them, and it’s really helping to figure out what our top sellers are, and that will help drive a lot of decisions going forward.

Celisa Steele: [00:14:53] I mentioned build, borrow, buy and so we talked about buying this catalog. You’ve talked some about building internally and partnering with some of the subject matter experts that are already in the field but maybe don’t have some of the skill sets that you can add in terms of, on the marketing side, getting the people in the seats, or, on the instructional design side, trying to improve those products. Talk a little bit about what

“borrow” means in your mind. I don’t know if you’re doing anything with the borrow model at this point, but, if you are, I’d love to hear that.

Pam Rosenberg: [00:15:24] Yes. As I mentioned a little bit earlier, we are working with some industry training providers or people that have very unique or advanced techniques. Again, this is specific to our industry. They’ve got the 40-hour training. We cannot build that mostly. We don’t have a million dollars to go buy a machine and then put it in our training facility. So we need to borrow their training, but they benefit from it, and we benefit from it. We get more exposure, and they do as well. In a lot of industries, there’s a particular subsection of the industry itself, and there’s only one or two players that have the technology or that have the equipment to do these types of things.

Pam Rosenberg: [00:16:13] In a previous organization, in medical gases, the only person in the game was this one company, so it made sense to go with them. There wasn’t any rough competition because we were going with that provider. I can’t think of another example that is across the board. This allows us to “borrow” in a sense, but we are also in an agreement through our e-learning. I was previously talking about live instructor-led. In an e-learning aspect, I think aviation—very, very technical. But another group has developed this e-learning course, and it allows us to—it was part of the acquisition, one of the catalog products—it allows us to easily keep something out there under the ASNT umbrella but fulfilled somewhere else.

Pam Rosenberg: [00:17:04] Those, I feel, have a little bit of an advantage in a different way because you didn’t have to build it, and it’s much easier—maybe not much easier—to terminate that and pull it from the catalog because you don’t have the ownership of it. You don’t have the depreciation on the asset and things like that. So that one is a little bit easier to have in your catalog because you’re not the full owner of it, and you are not necessarily responsible for maintaining the content. However, there is the other side of that. You are not responsible for maintaining the content. It’s harder to say, “Hey, why isn’t this updated? When are you going to get to this technology?” You don’t have that control. You’re dependent on who you’re borrowing from. And, again, if that training company that you’re borrowing from has some bad press in the news, how does that impact you as a partnering organization that’s borrowing and licensing that? What is your exposure and liability? Which is probably, hopefully not much if you’ve done your due diligence, but there is that potential risk.

Celisa Steele: [00:18:07] You’ve worked at other associations beyond ASNT. You were at the Risk Management Association, the American Society for Plumbing Engineers. Those are fairly different fields, but your focus has always been on education in those associations. I’m curious

to know, in your experience, have you seen common themes, opportunities, or common challenges that apply when thinking about education—no matter what the industry—whether it's risk management or nondestructive testing or engineering? Whatever it is.

Pam Rosenberg: [00:18:45] People want to feel connected. Whether they would say that out loud or not, they want to feel connected to an experience or to the training and the learning that they're going through. Whether feeling connected to an e-learning course is a little bit harder, you want to make sure that it is speaking to you and that you are the right audience for what the training is built for. Because, if you can't make a connection and pick up those buzzwords, and it's worthless, you probably won't have a repeat customer on your hands, or you won't have a returning member. I find that to be a really key component of what has kept me in the education space because there is something so special about seeing the lightbulb turn on with a learner, whether they're taking an exam prep course, or they're just learning the fundamentals of the math side of things. It's having that opportunity to get true comprehension and have that ability to ask peers that are in the classroom but also, whether it's through a discussion forum or live with the instructor, have a way to connect with them because that's going to make a huge difference.

Pam Rosenberg: [00:20:01] So much of how we learn is on the job. That contradicts what I was just saying. But you have to have the right tools to learn on the job, and you have to have the right foundation. And, with education specifically—you can say the e-learning and the self-paced ones, depending on how you've built it—but putting people in a room together allows you to make those new connections and not necessarily ask the...because the expert in the room is the instructor or the facilitator, but, "Oh, yeah, this other student said something that was really thought-provoking." Those are the biggest takeaways as an education provider but also as someone in the room. Those are the things that stick with you the most, and giving people that opportunity to get together in an education setting has been, again, what has kept me in the education side of the association house.

Celisa Steele: [00:21:00] That's great. I appreciate the focus on connection because I think you're right that, so often, learners are there for connection although they probably wouldn't say they're there for connection. If you ask them, they'll say they're there for the content or something related to that. But I do think that is such an important part and the benefit of peer learning, and what you can learn from those around you is huge for adults, and especially adults that are in a shared profession or field. To have that chance to interact and hear from one another can be a really big part of the value that comes from any learning experience.

Celisa Steele: [00:21:44] You've been working in education in a variety of organizations for a number of years at this point. If you had to look back and think about, from where you started to where things are now, what big shifts, or even small ones, have you noticed over the course of your career?

Pam Rosenberg: [00:22:02] What hasn't changed a lot is—and I don't get credit for saying this—a large percentage of the learners that I've interacted with, a lot of them are here to check a box. "I got the training. I got the certificate." I don't get credit for that statement, but that's just an observation that we've made as an education team. But, again, you have to be so much more thoughtful about what the training is, with a little bit of "choose your own adventure" sprinkled in there. Because you can advertise a product all day. You can say, "The prerequisites need to be this. You need to have the 101 in this particular topic." But you know that people are going to show up and not have the 101 completed, or they're showing up there on the 300 level. They're just there to get recertification hours. That will be consistent all the time. But, to have a true impact, you really need to build, in my opinion, "Here's this training. It's a total of 20 hours, but I need 50 percent of my time to be focused on this. But the outline shows it's only 20 percent of this. What is a way that I can get more learning specifically on this?" As an education professional, I need to spend more time on the legal and financial aspects of association management because that's not where my expertise is. How can I find something that has been curated that will allow me to do this association training or go to this association conference, that will allow me to choose a slightly different track or a different end goal? Because I know the fundamentals of education or whatever the cases are. I'm the membership professional. But, financially, that's very hard because building these really robust and advanced products takes a lot of thought and effort.

Pam Rosenberg: [00:24:01] The tech is changing very, very fast, and we don't even know what it's going to look like in three months from now, let alone in a year, to make that case for why we need this tool to help us do this or why we need to spend the contract hours to work with a subject matter expert, for example. That, I think, is what I've seen as a need a bit more. And, not new to the association space, but there is an organization or a firm that's going to come to you, that says, "I need these people trained on this, but they already have these things fulfilled, so they don't really need to take your level one training. They really need level one and a half and level two." So finding ways to make your products mold to your clients better is something that...because, again, everyone has similar end goals, but how they get there sometimes varies a little bit, and every organization has slightly different needs about what they need from their learners. I guess that was a long way of saying you've got to build a choose-your-own-adventure-type scenario. That's where I see things going.

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Celisa Steele: [00:25:11] You're talking about, I think, personalization, without saying that buzzword there. And maybe part of why you're avoiding it is because I think that we don't know how to do that in a cost-effective and meaningful way. But, whatever we can do to allow the learner to tailor our solution to their specific needs, that's very valuable, so that they can spend their time focused on what they need to focus on, so that they can choose their own adventure.

Pam Rosenberg: [00:25:43] Yes, exactly.

Celisa Steele: [00:25:45] That last question was having you look back, think about your past and what's changed or remained the same with education. If you look to the future, and you think about continuing education, professional development, and lifelong learning, are there trends or ideas that you have your eye on or things that you see coming that interest you?

Pam Rosenberg: [00:26:07] I would love to figure out what the solution is to allow learners to easily—because people are doing it—have that blend of learning. Again, I'm strictly speaking for adult learning here. "Hey, here's this product. You have homework to do beforehand. You're going to have homework to do in between the modules." Really put the learners in the room together and have thoughtful conversations around that, and allow for more peer-to-peer learning with guided, SME-guided, instructor conversations. Because, again, people learn so much more by having those conversations, asking those questions, and not being afraid to ask those questions because someone in the room has had those questions, and that's why everyone is in this shared room together. This kind of 360 approach where there's a little bit of...there are training companies and associations that do this, but allowing people to balance their time between "I've got my work hat on, so I can do my professional development" but also juggle the work responsibilities and the home responsibilities, and allow for people to have the space in between the training to sit and think about it.

Pam Rosenberg: [00:27:31] I think that is really, really beneficial because you're not going to absorb it in the lecture. When you sit and think about it and digest, and then you come back and revisit that conversation, that's where that knowledge transfer stays. It's habit. You commit it to memory, and then it becomes more of a habit rather than, again, something that I did, and I don't remember anything I learned even though I finished it 30 minutes ago. Allowing for more intentional.... And there's that balance because that's going to be less people that are taking the training, but you'll have a better response, and then people that have success with the program will do the marketing for you. "Oh, I took this course. You need to do this. And it doesn't cost

us anything to market and find that person." So, yes, the cost of the acquisition is a lot lower when you have more thoughtful and intentional training.

Celisa Steele: [00:28:21] We do always like to ask guests about their own lifelong learning given that this is the Leading Learning Podcast. Talk a little bit about your sources, habits, or practices when you think about your own lifelong learning.

Pam Rosenberg: [00:28:39] As I've been in this association space—and I talked to it previously—I learned the most at conferences or little networking sessions from the hallway conversations. "Oh, hey, I saw that you spoke on this topic. This is how we've done it." Or "Can you share more with me about that?" Being in the room and listening to the subject matter experts but also listening to peers because chances are people that are in the seats are in the same position that I'm in—allowing those open discussions. That's where I get the most out of it. I love learning with people together, and I also love bringing people together that are not necessarily in my area. I'm not in the education space. I'm bringing people together in the membership space to talk about something. Is there something in that the membership space at ASNT? Can I learn? Can I take some of those nuggets away about how they're doing it? What I do is not membership-related directly, but let's think about that. I definitely read the articles, the best that I can, that come out in the industry, publications, and things like that.

Pam Rosenberg: [00:29:59] I have found that my greatest leap for association management came from the CAE prep course. I was able to participate in that through Association Forum in the Chicago area. I did my absolute most learning through there, and I still use that learning to this day, especially when it's areas outside of education. Legally this. Financially that. Because, again, I know enough that'll raise a red flag to say, "I don't know enough about this, but this is something that I need to be aware of. I need to go talk to somebody else." And that has kept us out of trouble, or me out of trouble, in a lot of aspects. I don't have a problem raising my hand, saying, "I don't know what this means," or "Can you explain this a little bit more?" Just love learning what other associations do because, chances are, you're not that disconnected from another association that will allow you to make those connections that "We have this opportunity." I can't remember exactly when it was; I want to say it was earlier in this calendar year.

Pam Rosenberg: [00:31:04] But, again, we do magnetic res, and we use the same kind of technology, the NDT profession does, as when you go get an MRI. It's the magnetic particle testing. It's the same. So let's talk with the medical imaging group, and how do they use it? Bring one of their experts to us, and they can use one of our experts for their training. It's a

wonderful way to keep learning and expand your knowledge. One of the best sessions that I ever sat in on was two associations ago. There was a session on plumbing aboard a spaceship and plumbing for NASCAR as well. It was so fun. Nobody in the room will ever probably have that opportunity to do space shuttle plumbing. Never. But it's the way that the people in the room were thinking about how to solve these problems, that we're able to take back and apply to our everyday. When you're in the room with these kinds of people, it's so cool, and it's such a unique experience. So I will always be a lifelong learner. That's just who I am.

Jeff Cobb: [00:32:19] Pam Rosenberg is director of education for the American Society for Nondestructive Testing. In the show notes at leadinglearning.com/episode429, you'll find a link to the ASNT Web site and to Pam's profile on LinkedIn.

Celisa Steele: [00:32:34] At leadinglearning.com/episode429, you'll also find options for subscribing to the podcast. We'd be grateful if you would subscribe if you haven't yet, as subscriptions give us some insight into the impact of the podcast.

Jeff Cobb: [00:32:47] We'd also be grateful if you would rate us on Apple Podcasts or wherever you listen, especially if you find the Leading Learning Podcast valuable. Those ratings and reviews help us show up when people search for content on leading a learning business.

Celisa Steele: [00:33:01] And please help us grow the Leading Learning community. At leadinglearning.com/episode429, there are links to find us on LinkedIn, X, and Facebook.

Jeff Cobb: [00:33:10] Thanks again, and see you next time on the Leading Learning Podcast.

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