



## Becoming a Learning-Centric Organization with Mike Moss

### Leading Learning Podcast Transcript for Episode 463

Celisa Steele: [00:00:03] If you want to grow the reach, revenue, and impact of your learning business, you're in the right place. I'm Celisa Steele.

Jeff Cobb: [00:00:10] I'm Jeff Cobb, and this is the Leading Learning Podcast.

Jeff Cobb: [00:00:16] Many organizations say they want to be learning-centric, but making that real requires structural change, cultural change, and a willingness to experiment.

Celisa Steele: [00:00:26] Our guest in this episode, number 463, is Mike Moss, president of the Society for College and University Planning. Under Mike's leadership, SCUP has intentionally restructured itself to operate as a learning-centric organization.

Jeff Cobb: [00:00:40] In our conversation, Mike shares the journey SCUP has taken, from revising bylaws and governance to committing to staff professional development and giving permission to play. He talks about how the association is experimenting with curriculum, membership models, and communities of practice.

Celisa Steele: [00:00:56] You and Mike also get into revenue and risk—how SCUP is balancing financial sustainability with its commitment to experimentation.

Jeff Cobb: [00:01:05] That's right, and Mike offers practical advice for leaders who want to start down the path toward becoming more learning-centric.

Celisa Steele: [00:01:13] If you want inspiration for how to reimagine structure, culture, and revenue around learning, then you'll want to listen with care and curiosity to this conversation with Mike Moss.

Jeff Cobb: [00:01:29] Can you briefly describe SCUP and the focus of its work and then also how you came to lead it?

Mike Moss: [00:01:36] Yes, certainly. SCUP is a professional association, so we're 501(c)(3), and we are a community of practice focused on the integrated planning approach for higher education. The key component of that is this is a new mission statement. Being a community of practice is an intentional design statement in our mission, and being learning-centric and led through learning is an intentional outcome of that mission. This is all put into play with our strategic plan that launched in 2024. We are 4,000 strong as individuals, about 650 campuses

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with representation, and about half of our members are corporate or other non-campus entities who support both the built environment of learning as well as learning outcomes of students and student success. We have a nice, blended community of both for-profit, nonprofit, practitioner, and those of us that work on the adjacent side of higher ed.

Jeff Cobb: [00:02:28] You and I have had a chance to talk at length before, and you'd made the point that SCUP didn't just adopt that philosophy of being learning-centric. You reshaped the structure, the systems, the talent to make that real. Listeners here would probably love to know what that transformation looked like and what were the tough choices you had to make along the way.

Mike Moss: [00:02:54] Thanks, Jeff. I think what I would offer to start is that, as you outlined in your question, it was a very intentional journey with structure, then systems, then talent. In doing that—to jump to the non-dramatic ending—it did not mean we had to completely replace and replenish talent. The talent was on the journey of creating a learning-centric structure with systems that support it. By the time we got to talent, it was more about our own professional development as an organization to continue the journey, not to reset the journey. In this community of practice commitment, it's all about the standard practice of the learning-centric approach—do, reflect, do differently, at the very base level. We wanted to lead with curiosity and experimentation with the community-led learning initiatives. We do not have a credential; I think that's an important piece to offer. We are a peer-based learning environment and always have been, but we were structured in a more traditional "Committee does this; committee does that; these volunteers are set for this." It was a very hierarchical if not silo-driven operation, and it worked great. There was nothing dysfunctional about that environment other than we felt that the best way to move the association into the 2030s would be to start now, especially post-pandemic, with peer-driven learning.

Mike Moss: [00:04:19] Learning is social. Social comes from all the different modalities. Take the modalities out, and it's just about people doing, reflecting, and doing differently, with both comparable and aspirant peers and institutions. In order to structure that, we had to go back and change our bylaws. We had to give some agility and be agile in our governance to allow the peers in the community to define how they wanted the modalities of learning, what those topics were. We got really good at correlation, and we get the members to work really hard on causation. That balance is how we've become learning-centric in operation. The stated goal of this plan is that we will operate as a learning-centric organization. That is a strategic goal. We didn't have a vote on it, Jeff. The organization decided this was where we were going, so that community of practice actually became the driver as much as any of the specific learning modalities that we put into place over the last year and a half.

Jeff Cobb: [00:05:14] What was it about the old structure that was holding you back from where you saw you needed to go as an organization? Was it just a matter of giving more power to the people in a way? Or what happened there?

Mike Moss: [00:05:29] Great question. I do think it was as simple as, in the old governance structure, it said, "Name of committee, these types of roles, this charge," but it was codified. In the governance, it was codified as to how we structured ourselves for a set of outcomes that were driven from that structure. What we wanted to do was not determine the structure. Let the peer community determine the structure. Obviously, the board has voice. We have a SCUP council, which is a group of volunteers who help us directionally on a year-to-year basis. But the fluidity of what's needed, particularly in a high-volatile environment that we're serving in higher education, things shift very quickly, and we didn't want to end up having to sunset a committee, to create a committee, go through a governance process to be compliant with what we're supposed to do to run when what we needed to do was allow the peer community to rise and fall with what they needed when they needed it in the modality that served them best. So it's not unique. This isn't an innovative practice. But, for us, it was innovative because before we were pretty scripted.

Mike Moss: [00:06:30] We had a scripted set of outcomes that meant you did integrated planning. What we've decided to do with the approach is it is an approach; it is not a script. For that approach to find its enculturation on campuses where you can put in your own culture. If you want to be siloed, and if that works best for you, then go for it. But in the old scripted, it would say, "No, that is a failure to the discipline." The approach works for what the culture of the campus requires, and that is going to be peer-driven on their campuses, so it should be peer-driven in the learning environment of the association that holds the approach. We flipped the script a little bit and said, "Let's be really agile with this and see where the community wants to take it."

Jeff Cobb: [00:07:09] I want to come back to that culture question here in a minute. You mentioned earlier that part of this journey, part of the transformation was a professional development component to it for the talent, for the staff, and, I assume, the volunteers as well. What did that look like? What sort of professional development had to happen to support this kind of change?

Mike Moss: [00:07:28] The first thing had to do with truth and facts. The fact is we stated truthfully that the professional development budget for staff is not going to be cut, regardless of what the world throws at us. We are committed to a dollar amount per person per year for three years, and it will not be touched. And, after the first year, when we had some financial duress and stayed firm on that commitment, it helped reinforce that cultural value now of do, reflect, do differently, and that requires professional development. We are committed to that budget component. What I would offer is that the only thing we did different than most associations that I've worked with in the past is we made the upfront commitment that, no matter what happens, you have professional development dollars for this year. Everything else we will figure out. We flipped that script. We were still service mindset—obviously, we weren't going to cut things that hurt the service of the membership—but we were really committed to that talent training. What it looked like was a non-negotiable commitment, which it was.

Mike Moss: [00:08:27] When the board and the management team committed to that, and the staff then saw what we were allowing, which was they're going to tell us what they need training on, not us telling them that "Mike wants to run this committee structure; therefore, go learn this committee structure," it was more like, "The organization and its peers require this," let's figure out how we want to run that through experimentation, curiosity. Let the curiosity drive your professional development, not some predetermined outcome, because we really don't know what the outcome is going to be. We were managing a set of inputs for people's training. The outputs being that they have ideation, and that ideation could drive the outcomes for the service requirements we have for members as opposed to having that predetermined destination. We wanted it to truly, in an agile, waterfall way, let it flow. And that's some things, some of the experiments have been amazing, and some of them probably "Let's let that one go and not talk about it again," but we did it.

Jeff Cobb: [00:09:27] What you were just talking about you've described as permission to play in SCUP, encouraging the staff and volunteers to do those sorts of experiments. As you just referenced, are there some examples of where that did not work, where it failed? And are there other places where you were surprised by how successful it was?

Mike Moss: [00:09:45] Yes. I mentioned we didn't have credentials. We still don't have credentials, but we have curriculum. It's not like the approach is completely as loosey-goosey as I may be implying. We have a curriculum by which we've done some great training for decades around the integrated planning approach. But, with what's going on in higher ed, the speed of decision-making required, the talent investment we all have to make so quickly, we've deconstructed that. We took the curriculum, as many of us do, and we deconstructed it, and we decided to let member voice decide which components come up. In a four-day course, maybe you only truly need an hour of it because you've been tasked with "Jeff, go write a contingency plan for this scenario," and that's all the training you need. You're not going to go pay for a four-day course. But, as we deconstructed it and then had the peers running the courses, they would share experiences on how they deconstructed their own immediate decision-making to that moment. Let them go talk that out. We formed working groups, and some of those working groups on paper, I'm like, "Oh my God, this is everything for SCUP," and no one signed up. And then there are other ones that were like, "Man, that feels routine; that feels kind of like we didn't try," signed up with a waiting list.

Mike Moss: [00:11:00] We learned quickly that our assumptions based on past learning performance at the organization did not apply to current situations for our members' needs. The investment cost was low; it's not zero—there's time that staff put into it, that volunteers put into it—but it's a quick rise and a quick fall. That one working group that we spun up, and no one signed up for, we could spin it down quickly. It was time lost on the calendar, but not months. It was a matter of weeks. So we're trying to get into that cadence of rise quick, fail quick, all those normal things that we do in project management, but doing it at scale and being driven by the members' voice, not our metrics of how we used to measure learning success. Now, at least one person's already shook their head and said, "But, Mike, you have to make

revenue." Yes, we have to make revenue. That's also part of our operational equation. That doesn't necessarily mean that's the driver for all things that we're testing.

Mike Moss: [00:11:59] Some things that we're testing truly go to that whole mysterious box of the undefined member value that they know about that they haven't told you about. And we are thinking that the successful ones, even if it's not a financial success, the learning that we get out of that has driven communities of practice that have been formed naturally by the members that we never would have imagined would have been on our radar. The staff, data, and the staff experiences would not have said that was going to happen. The lesson I've learned the most, which is probably something I should have learned decades ago, is get out of the way. A lot of our curriculum-based education in the past was very well done. But, in the current higher education needs, we needed to get out of the learners' way and let them deconstruct it, reconstruct it so that they could solve the problems that were on their campus that we didn't have exposure to but yet our discipline can help them with.

Jeff Cobb: [00:12:51] I want to make sure we come back in a minute to the question you raised around revenue, and pricing can be tied to that as well. But, before we get there, you, internally as an organization, had to change a lot and rethink things and change the way that you were doing work. What's your sense of how your members then experienced that? Was it a change in culture for them? Do they perceive more value from the organization? And how do you know?

Mike Moss: [00:13:24] We're still learning that, honestly. The experimentations that we've done at conferences would be the most obvious because they have the largest single-moment impact. And so reprogramming how we structure the flow of the conference, introducing active learning versus the more traditional session-session-lunch-session,-session-dinner formats, and trying to experiment a little bit more with active learning but bringing in the social aspect—those things we've had immediate reaction to because it's a large event in a point in time, easily measured. The harder things to measure have been these things where every other week there's a community of practice call, there's an emerging leader program that has monthly calls, but those take a minute to find their pulse each year, each cohort. It's been harder for us to say that all of those have been great or none of them have been great. But all of them have been active.

Mike Moss: [00:14:11] What we're tracking is that there's a more active voice among our members now that we can see in social media. Is that a metric of success? I don't know, but at least we're being talked about differently and talked about more collectively as a learning entity as opposed to a modality or a mode entity. It's great that you mentioned our conference. What's better is that you mentioned all the amazing things that you met and had happen at that conference. It happened to be a conference. It could have been a virtual Webinar. It could have been a working group. It could have been a coffee shop meeting. We're having local meetings now; for us, that's new. We don't have chapters, but, all of a sudden, we've got these local things spinning up by members serving members. Those are the metrics we're watching. It's too soon to answer that question definitively, but we can definitely see a new behavior in a set of our members that we were hoping for, but we aren't quite sure how to capture that for scale yet.

Jeff Cobb: [00:15:06] If I'm listening to this as your average listener, I'm probably thinking, "This sounds great. This sounds very dynamic. This sounds like what learning should be. But it also sounds a little bit messy." When I'm thinking about neatly monetizing education, it's nice to have courses and conferences and curriculum that you can just put a price tag on and say, "Pay this, and you get this." It's a little messier to think about a community of practice. How do you approach the monetization of this? How do you think about factors like pricing in your world?

Mike Moss: [00:15:39] That's the everything question. We have six conferences a year. We believe we're already at a price threshold, and have been for a while, so the price is what it is, and we all know that the operating costs for all these things are going up. We are also mindful of how we can schedule those to make sure that we can at least get close to maximum capacity for the nets that we require. We are anchored by that traditional practice of having these six conferences. We also still have, as I mentioned, that curriculum with a set of courses. Those are still running, but they're running a lot less frequently because the demand has dropped for having people out of office for three and four days at a time. The market has said, for what they're dealing with on campuses right now, that may not be the best opportunity for them to leave and then come back. This deconstructing is allowing us to come to them. The monetization of coming to them largely is virtual, and, as we all learned in the pandemic, we can scale those prices accordingly. Our operating costs are lower, but the frequency that we have to run those is higher. That experimentation about do, reflect, do differently is not just about the curriculum. It's about the curriculum, the user experience, and also the revenue—what's the net?

Mike Moss: [00:16:52] What we've experimented with in the last six months is taking some of them and making them free to members, and that's it; nobody else can participate. All that normal A/B testing that you do—other ones that are fee-based for everyone, some that are this, that, and the other thing. Having those A/B tests across those come-to-you moments has helped us find a price range that keeps things in a net, but we aren't quite at the frequency we want to be at yet to hit the fiscal year goals. So we're on a path. It's not going to be a hockey stick moment. I don't think those happen very often anymore in life—the huge spike in revenue—but we are consistently growing the revenue. More importantly, we're consistently maintaining an audience. And it's not just the same 10 people. There's a consistency of the level of service we're providing on campus, meaning that type of role on a campus is showing up more frequently. Now it's on us to figure out how we convert them from a learning moment to a participation moment. Because, to your point, the community of practice comes from it's not the same 10 people running the courses all the time. That's what courses are for. The community of practice that we're monetizing is that more and more peers are willing to participate, share experiences, and it scales from that growth, which is much more organic and in a much lower net than we're going to get off of a set of courses. The frequency question has to be answered still as we go into the next year.

Jeff Cobb: [00:18:21] Is the community of practice approach separate from membership, or has any of this impacted your membership structure and fees at all? Or is it separate from that?

Mike Moss: [00:18:32] Never one to not be curious, so I love my staff because they're just as curious as I am. We also are experimenting with a new membership model. We are working on lowering the cost of entry so that we can improve the ability for access to the learning. Because the whole point of the community of practice is not to have a membership community; it's to have a learning community of practice. Last year we built community by putting programming in place that helped people find their comparables and aspirants in a comfortable environment where they could share. This year, '25 into '26, we're building the learning around that group of peers because that's the goal: peer-based learning. What we're doing on the membership side is that, in order to allow that to happen, you can't spend 50 percent of your PD budget just to get in. You need to be able to have that money available for the experiences of the learning, not just the access to learning. So we're lowering the paywall. And it's an experiment.

Mike Moss: [00:19:30] On our Web site, it's still very much the same model you've seen for decades at SCUP, but, on phone call recruitment and pilot, we have others joining in this new model, which is a much lower cost with much higher access. So we're running an A/B test on the membership model. A lot of our members prefer the traditional model, and others are experimenting with this new approach, where it's a learning community of practice that they're investing in, not a membership in an association. It may sound like semantics, but it's two completely different programs. Over the next couple of years, we're going to keep running this experiment and see which of those levers gets pulled the best by the industry, and we're hoping it moves towards the community of practice more so than the traditional enrollment model that we've had for 60 years at SCUP.

Jeff Cobb: [00:20:17] It occurs to me, behind all of this, you must have a pretty forward-looking board that you're working with. A lot of boards would resist this kind of thing happening in an organization. How has this been in conversations with your board?

Mike Moss: [00:20:32] Obviously, I wouldn't be talking openly on a podcast if this wasn't supported. This was a part of the strategic journey that the board had put together when they assembled the strategic plan that launched in 2024, and it was mostly born from the experiences that we had as an organization during the pandemic and the few years leading into the pandemic. We had made a commitment in 2018 to become learning-centric. We didn't codify it into a plan until 2024 because of the pandemic. But, at that point, because of how we learned about how our community responded to volatile times, we needed to codify it so that it is in writing—this is the direction we're going.

Mike Moss: [00:21:11] The board has been super supportive through several election iterations. And that's the other piece—I'm never going to undersell how lucky and supported I am by an election process that continues to bring in board members who support and modify. We always are adjusting but modifying a strategic direction and not taking a 180 on it because it's hard or because it's a bad numbers year. The board has been very supportive of, to support higher education, we also have to be learning-centric. That is what we ask of them—to serve our students. And so that mindset that the board has, they've maintained that themselves. They run the governance. We're a slate process, so there's a governance selection committee that does the

slate for election every year for board members. It's attribute-driven. Those attributes keep getting reinforced and adjusted as the strategic direction moves forward by the board. So, to your point, the process by which the board was assembled, and the process that they're maintaining to stay strategic—their goal is to stay three years out on their work—has reinforced the opportunity for us operationally to do this experimentation.

Jeff Cobb: [00:22:18] One of the points you mentioned in an earlier conversation I had with you is moving SCUP towards what you characterize as a relational matrix in how it operates. I think some of that's embedded in what you've talked about already. But can you talk a little bit more about what you mean by that and how that plays out for SCUP?

Mike Moss: [00:22:36] The more appropriate way to describe it, probably than I did in the past, is that we're a branded house. We're SCUP; this is what we do; here's who we serve. By 2030, we want to be in a house of brands. It doesn't mean that we're all under a brand, like a holding company. There are a million ways to do this; there are a bunch of examples out there in the market. This is not innovative; it'll just be different for SCUP. But what we had imagined in this house of brands is that we all have our independent brand. We have our reasons for being. We have our missions. But we are absolutely interconnected on how we deliver to the campus for student success. In order to do that, it's not just a random selection of X number of brands to do this—the relational matrix. It's driven by all of our missions that have that interconnectedness and serve each other's mission. For simplicity's sake, if each association is a LEGO, they all fit; they fit the right way at the right time, to come to a campus.

Mike Moss: [00:23:32] The other part of what we want to do in this house of brands is that it's not meant to compete with our consultant members. We can't do our work without our consultant members. This isn't an either/or; it's an and. And, with the good work that they do, we can start coming to campuses in this house of brands to really go deep into the enculturation of each discipline that's represented for hopefully getting out of "new president, new plan," out of personality-based driven outcomes and helping to do what we all have pledged to do, which is create sustainable systems for student success on campus. In order to do that, we're imagining a different time here soon, where, if you're not coming to the campus in this consortium mindset to solve the problems, they're not going to be able to come to seven different conferences to get that same information. That's what we're working through. And it's partnership. It's coalition building. There are a million ways to do it. But what we hope for, as a planning entity, is that we're horizontal to all these vertical disciplines that are important. How can we help connect that into this relational matrix that comes to campuses and helps embed practices for student success?

Jeff Cobb: [00:24:40] You've made the point before that associations need resilience right now. There are a lot of stresses on the system. And even things like mergers and closures should be on the table; there are sectors where there are just too many associations serving that sector. For you, what does association resilience look like in practice, and what do boards and leaders need to be thinking about now and dealing with now about what the 2030s are going to look like?

Mike Moss: [00:25:07] We're constantly contingency and scenario planning. What we have to be honest about is—as much as we feel like we're on solid footing now and as much as our reserves and all the key metrics that we have as associations would say, "We're going to be fine for a minute"—don't count on that. The external factors that are facing us now are materially different than they were five years ago, if not five months ago. Depending on what industry you're in, there's a lot going on. We are constantly looking at that. We're planning. What happens if we're approached? We shouldn't be surprised if we're approached. We also shouldn't be surprising people if we approach disciplines that make the integrated planning approach stronger. Data is a huge part of what we do, but we rely on others for that now; maybe we should bring that inside. We're constantly having those planning exercises where we're like, "What would it look like for X, Y, and Z to approach us? And what would be the causation for us to say, 'Yes, let's have that conversation'?" So being prepared for the conversations and planning, but not as a plan.

Mike Moss: [00:26:06] Right now, transparently, SCUP does not have a merger plan or an acquisition plan, but we have scenarios by which we would entertain having those conversations. That's something that we keep in the forward part of our internal and board-level conversations, that proverbial "What if?" What if we do need to consolidate? What if the three conferences that feed us best go away because of external factors we can't control? I don't know if that's a very good answer to your question because the answer was planning, planning, plan, plan. But I do think there's an exercise in there for every association to be prepared. I don't know anybody who's in such a place of comfort that they shouldn't be having some version of those conversations. But I would hope that anybody at any level of the association, even on a team-based conversation.... If I'm running a team—I used to be a product manager—I would be having conversations with my team. "What if they decide not to run our product? What can we still offer the association? What skillsets do we need to go get training on so that we still provide value to what's still here?" Really making it org-down conversations—what if?

Jeff Cobb: [00:27:20] You're obviously very much walking the walk as a learning-centric organization—it's what you represent. My view is that associations can/should play such critical role in lifelong learning, as the organizations that tend to stay with people throughout their careers. What's your perspective on the association role in lifelong learning? What role do associations need to be playing, and what do they potentially risk if they're not playing that role going forward?

Mike Moss: [00:27:53] Everything you said I strongly support. I think associations are not in our last 50 years of existence. In fact, we're probably just now figuring out what the next 50 years mean for us. I do think associations are absolutely at the center of education and professional development, and all the things that we've said for the last 100 years are more important now. What we didn't have when we were founded 60 years ago, for example, at SCUP was this technology hockey stick, and technology really is on that hockey stick evolution. Every three months, there's a year's worth of AI development or some crazy thing like that. Moore's Law feels slow now. All those things. And, as we look at those moments, the association community

is more powerful than ever to bring people together to have the shared experience of what it means to be a learner. Obviously, I represent higher education. I'm also fortunate enough to have a bachelor's degree. Many of my colleagues have master's and beyond. But I also realize that there's a huge part of my personal life community that was best served by not going to college, and I know a lot of them are getting their professional development for whatever they've chosen to do through associations. Sometimes they don't even know it was an association that they got it from.

Mike Moss: [00:29:05] There's an opportunity for us to not just be branded and remind people that "Hey, that association got you that job," but that we're available at a community level. It's what we can do better, I think, as associations and other constructs that exist. We can be at the community level of service with formal education, with formal for-profit business. We are that connective tissue that keeps a community viable. Whether you call it workforce development or professional development, associations are in the mix of all that. What we might need to do differently is get a little more comfortable with being interconnected and not independent. The crowded spaces often are that there are 42 ways in that industry to do something, so there are 42 verticals to support it in the association space. It goes back to your previous question. We may have to configure ourselves a little differently to still support all 42 of those paths, and it may not be all 42 independent associations. But that association structure, the nonprofit service that we can bring in, we need it more now than ever. And because of the speed of change, people need a place with connective tissue. And associations connect the speed of change with opportunity. That's where we can do some amazing work moving forward.

Jeff Cobb: [00:30:23] What would you say to an association CEO, a peer leader, who is still looking at learning as just a product line of the association, as one function siloed there? What's the danger of that at this point from your perspective?

Mike Moss: [00:30:42] As soon as the community shifts to a different learning modality, they won't remember your name. I don't mean to sound harsh on that, but I've experienced that in my career, where another competitor came in with a better way to be up to speed, and no one remembered the association's name. To do that is not wrong, but to do that in the absence of exploring and being curious about what's next is your risk. Running a credential that's run for 100 years the same way and is still working, why would you stop? But you definitely have thought about "What if I had to stop?" That's the risk—that you become too comfortable with taking last year's budget and adding 10 percent. I don't think we should be doing that sort of thinking anymore is what I would advocate.

Jeff Cobb: [00:31:27] If you could give listeners one practical step that they could make in their organization to make it more learning-centric tomorrow, next week, what would that be? How do you get started with this?

Mike Moss: [00:31:41] It's permission to play, as you said earlier, Jeff. And, in that permission to play, don't count on trust. Trust will be the outcome of what you've done. It's not going to be the input that makes it happen. What will make the permission to play happen is facts, and the

fact is, when someone messes up, what is going to be different about their “mess-up” than it was in the past? How do you reinforce the learning moment in that versus the corrective moment? Hopefully, if we do our little sprints that we do here, sometimes they lose money, but they’re not losing a million dollars. There’s calculated risk, and there’s scaled risk. But you give the permission throughout the organization to take those scaled risks as a learning moment, not as an immediate corrective action—“Where are you going to get the money next?”

Mike Moss: [00:32:25] The trust that builds up is born from those facts of “Oh, I got to do this, and I got to learn from it, and I got to do it differently.” As they have that experience with you in leadership of being allowed to be curious, being then given permission to try something different, and then being given the empowerment of learning from it, it starts to take care of itself where then the risk is “Oh my God, there are 17 experiments going on at once.” The scaled risk of everybody being empowered is a risk that I think we should all embrace and see what the outcomes are. I don’t want to oversell it—SCUP’s on a journey too. We’re two years into this. It’s going well now, but external factors can kick in tomorrow that we have to make adjustments on. But what we now have is the permission to make adjustments and not have to make corrections. That’s a huge difference that’s come out of this learning-centric approach. It’s about making adjustments, not transformations.

Jeff Cobb: [00:33:21] As we’re wrapping up here, I’ll switch gears a little bit but still staying learner- and learning-centric, talking about you as a learner. I like to take the chance when I can to ask guests about their own approaches to lifelong learning—your own habits and practices, maybe favorite resources that you rely on to make sure that you’re learning and evolving and can continue to get what you want out of life.

Mike Moss: [00:33:47] Probably not unironically, I listen to a ton of podcasts. I do listen to a lot within our association discipline, but I also listen to a lot that have nothing to do with either my profession or those I serve. I want to learn from all the industries to find those nuggets where I’m like, “Oh, I wonder if that would work with ours.” So a lot of podcasts. A voracious reader. All the things you would expect. But what I’ve learned the most in my learning journey was to give myself permission to do things differently because it didn’t often come from my boss. I do not advocate that anyone be disrespectful or any of that. I’m not asking you to go rogue. But what I learned to do better in my career was go do all that learning, do all that stuff, and then bring in a proposal. Don’t bring in a question. Instead of saying, “Hey, boss, is it okay if I do Lean?,” come in and go, “I think we can do this. Oh, by the way, it’s because you’re going to pay for me to be Lean certified” and getting it back into the application that our supervisors are always looking for, which, is how do we move our mission forward?

Mike Moss: [00:34:45] That’s been my approach now for a very long time. And, so far, it’s not without mistakes, but I still think it’s a thing I would advocate for my own child to do, which is learn everywhere, but then apply it for the permission to play. Don’t just say, “Hey, I read all these books. I deserve a raise.” Prove it. There are probably some tough moments for all of us to learn when we do lifelong learning because the whole point is what I used to know no longer applies and accepting that has been something I’ve learned from colleagues like Lowell

Aplebaum, friends like that in the business. They've really helped me understand that, "Yes, you used to be really good at that, but the key word is 'used to.' What are you doing differently now because things have changed?" Having that application of movement in learning is something that I've learned from my peers. That's definitely helped me on my journey as well.

Celisa Steele: [00:35:39] That wraps up our conversation with Mike Moss, president of the Society for College and University Planning. But stay with us another minute to catch our recap.

Jeff Cobb: [00:35:48] You'll find show notes and a transcript for this episode at [leadinglearning.com/episode463](http://leadinglearning.com/episode463), along with a link to the SCUP Web site, where you can find Mike's phone number and an e-mail address if you want to reach out to him.

Celisa Steele: [00:36:01] If you found this episode valuable, we'd be grateful if you'd share it. That helps more people find the show and benefit from it, and it supports the work that we do.

Jeff Cobb: [00:36:10] In our conversation, Mike shared how SCUP is working to be truly learning-centric, changing its bylaws and governance, deconstructing curriculum, experimenting with membership, and supporting staff and volunteer development.

Celisa Steele: [00:36:23] He emphasized the importance of curiosity and experimentation—giving people permission to play, learn from mistakes, and adjust.

Jeff Cobb: [00:36:32] He also mentioned that associations and other learning businesses have to balance revenue with risk-taking and that learning should be more than a product line—it needs to be part of the culture.

Celisa Steele: [00:36:43] Inspirational stuff if you ask me. Thanks for listening—see you next time on the Leading Learning Podcast.

*[music for this episode by Moarn]*