



Leading with Outcomes with Amy Michalski and Shelly Strickland of AIIM

Leading Learning Podcast
Transcript for Episode 482

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: [00:00:17] Most professionals aren't searching for training. They're searching for answers to problems. For learning businesses trying to market their offerings, that distinction makes a real difference.

Celisa Steele: [00:00:27] Our guests in this episode, number 482, are Amy Michalski and Shelly Strickland of the Association for Intelligent Information Management (AIIM). Amy is AIIM's chief business development officer, and Shelly is marketing manager.

Jeff Cobb: [00:00:40] Amy and Shelly walk through AIIM's approach to marketing a full portfolio of education—from on-demand training and certification to events and Webinars—including how they think about the difference between selling to individual learners and selling to organizations.

Celisa Steele: [00:00:55] We also cover segmentation, conversion, and measurement—and why engagement quality matters far more than the vanity metrics some organizations are still chasing.

Jeff Cobb: [00:01:05] And Amy and Shelly make a strong case that associations already have real advantages over commercial learning providers—advantages like trust, community, and direct access to practitioners.

Celisa Steele: [00:01:16] If you want a practical, real-world perspective on what it takes to market education effectively, even with a small team, stick around for this conversation with Amy Michalski and Shelly Strickland.

Celisa Steele: [00:01:33] For listeners who may not be familiar with the Association for Intelligent Information Management, would you give us a short explanation of what AIIM does? Amy, I'm going to ask you to do that.

Amy Michalski: [00:01:46] Sure, happy to. AIIM is a global community. We're focused on both intelligent information management and helping those organizations become AI-ready. So our name, A-I plus I-M, really fits what we're doing. Everybody's racing at this point to implement AI, but the reality is, if your information is everywhere across your organization, in multiple systems, and isn't labeled accurately, nobody really knows what's governed and what's not. AI

This transcript accompanies the episode of the Leading Learning Podcast available at www.leadinglearning.com/episode482.

can quickly become more of a liability than an asset. What we really do and what we're trying to help our community do is help them get their information house in order. We do this through training. We offer certification. We have multiple events, both virtual and in person. And we have a strong community of practitioners who are trying to solve these same challenges together.

Celisa Steele: [00:02:48] All that AIIM does is done with a small but mighty staff—five staffers to run the full portfolio, including certification, events, on-demand courses, Webinars. Shelly, as marketing manager, you're doing, I presume, a lot of the heavy lifting on marketing those education offerings. Paint for us a picture of what marketing at AIIM looks like. Who are you trying to reach? What channels are you using? And what does the toolkit that you're using look like on a day-to-day basis?

Shelly Strickland: [00:03:23] Marketing at AIIM is definitely a wear-a-lot-of-hats environment, but it's also what makes it very exciting. With the small team, there's no room for silos. Everyone contributes to the organization and marketing, which means balancing strategy, execution, analytics, communication, and customer experience all at once. My role touches on every part of that learner's journey. On any given day, I could be building campaigns for certification, promoting Webinars, virtual training, managing conference marketing, writing e-mail copy, updating the Web site, creating social campaigns, and even troubleshooting, registration workflows as well. It's very hands-on, but it gives us the ability to move quickly and stay connected to our audience. Our audience is primary information managers. That includes record managers, information governance leaders, compliance professionals, legal teams, IT leaders, and content managers. These folks are increasingly focused on AI governance, digital transformation. One of the biggest shifts that we've seen recently is that AI is expanding that conversation. Now we're reaching professionals who haven't traditionally thought of themselves as information managers, but suddenly they realize that the information quality, the governance, and the structure are all foundational to making AI work.

Shelly Strickland: [00:04:53] Channel-wise, we do a lot of e-mail marketing here at AIIM because our audience still responds very well to e-mail. We do some social marketing, especially on LinkedIn because that's where we find a lot of our audience. And it's become increasingly important for us to do thought leadership and community engagement through those social channels. We also use Webinars strategically, not just as education experiences, but they've become top-of-the-funnel for engagement opportunities to introduce people to the AIIM system. Our toolkit is a mix of marketing automation, our CRM, some social scheduling, Web site management, event platforms, and a lot of content development. But one of the most important tools that we have found is just paying close attention and listening to what the people in the industry are talking about. They start to tell us what challenges keep coming up, which topics they're interested in, where AI is gaining traction, and what they need help with. That helps us shape the messaging and create programs that feel timely and not generic to them.

Shelly Strickland: [00:06:05] With a really small team, it's important for us to prioritize constantly, and you learn pretty quickly that the programs and the activities that you're doing, if they don't drive revenue, they're just creating a lot of noise, and there's not a lot of time. So

we focus heavily on practical value, audience relevance, building trust over time. In the association space, most people don't buy a course. They buy credibility. They buy a community. And they want the confidence that the education that we're giving them is helping them solve real problems. So we focus on solving real problems that they have in their work.

Celisa Steele: [00:06:47] Thank you for outlining that approach. You were talking about hearing from the people you're targeting as learners about what they need. Are you doing that through listening, say, on LinkedIn, to what you're hearing members saying, or are you doing it because you're reaching out through a survey? Talk a little bit about how you're getting that information about what they need or want.

Shelly Strickland: [00:07:08] We do surveys. After we have every Webinar, after we have every event, we send out a survey to them. And then, not only do we look at the survey results, we try to pivot based on what those results are saying. If they're saying they have too much of this, then we stop doing that, and we focus somewhere else. But a lot is just keeping up to date with what's going on on LinkedIn with people that are in our community. As a company, we follow our members on LinkedIn and different platforms, and we see the things that they're talking about. We see the pain points. We see the frustrations. And a lot of that education that we come up with is based on those things that they're saying are a pain point for them.

Celisa Steele: [00:07:56] Amy, you're the chief business development officer. I see that as sitting at the intersection of marketing and sales, and I'm imagining that you're thinking a lot about how to take awareness and make sure that that leads to revenue. Talk about how you and Shelly divide and coordinate the work. And how do you think about the overall go-to-market approach for AIIM's learning portfolio?

Amy Michalski: [00:08:21] Good question. Shelley's more focused on the individuals with membership, training enrollments, event registration, and everything that she just described that's involved with that, our Web site design, all of it. I focus more on the organization itself, things like team training deals, group certifications like our CIP (Certified Information Professional), and sponsorships, which is a big component of our revenue. But honestly there is a lot of overlap, in a good way. We collaborate often. We're on phone calls multiple times during the week together, building our content strategy, our messaging, what's our plan for this week, how can we bring new people into the AIIM community. For example, right now we're working on rebuilding our new contact sequence, and we're also working on a re-engagement campaign because we realized that our old approach is a little outdated, a little too transactional. So we want to do some more segmentation and make it more personalized for each individual. And then, naturally, there's a handoff process. If I start seeing, for example, multiple people from the same organization downloading content or attending one of our Webinars or showing up to events, then that usually means it's my time to reach out and have a conversation.

Amy Michalski: [00:09:59] I'll get on an exploration call with them to try to understand what problems they're trying to solve, why they're having team members go to multiple activities from AIIM, and, from there, I'll put together a customized proposal that makes sense for them. Sometimes it includes items like team training. Other times maybe it's a bulk purchase of our

certification exam. And then many times it's a sponsorship activity. Sometimes it combines all three. Shelly's building the awareness and trust at the top of the funnel, and I'm helping turn that interest into, hopefully, a longer-term partnership and revenue. Thankfully, tools like our CRM system help us stay coordinated, so we're not stepping on each other's toes, and we know who's doing what.

Celisa Steele: [00:10:52] Direct-to-consumer marketing, especially of on-demand content—a little bit less of what you were just talking about, Amy, and a little bit more of what Shelly was talking about before—is something that a lot of association learning businesses genuinely struggle with. Actually managing to connect with those prospective learners and getting attention is very tough these days. Shelly, I would love to hear a little bit more about some of AIIM's approaches to marketing its online training library. What does that look like? Have you found things that help you move the needle in terms of getting people to read and then convert?

Shelly Strickland: [00:11:33] One of the things AIIM has learned over time has been that we don't market our training as on-demand. We do say it's an on-demand library, but we sell more of the outcomes. Instead of saying, "Here's our library," we say, "Here's what we have that can help you solve this problem." It's about solving their immediate problems and how to help them move forward in their careers or their organizations. Because our attention spans are really short, and there are people everywhere we're training, and competition is everywhere. Most professionals are so overwhelmed that they don't go out searching for "I want training." They're searching for "How can I fix this?" or "How do I do this?" That's how we focus our marketing to them—what is it that they need help with, and what do we have that matches up to the things that they need help with? A big part of what moves the needle for us is, again, relevance and timing. We focus on topics that have real urgency in our market, like AI Governance or M365. There's a lot around security and automation right now. But, again, these people aren't searching for training; they're searching for "How do I actively solve that problem?" And then we build our marketing around that pain point first and foremost.

Shelly Strickland: [00:13:05] We also try to make it feel less transactional and more connected to your personal growth. Instead of positioning AIIM+ Pro as just a content library, we position it as "Here's your career development path. Here's what you can do to grow in your career. Here are the things you need to know to get certified." They want more outcomes than they do content, and so we focus our marketing on what those outcomes will be for them. Another thing that we've done is leverage live experiences like our on-demand Webinars, conferences, workshops, and things like that. We don't necessarily use them as, "Here's a Webinar. Now buy our training." It's more like, "Here's our Webinar, and here are some of the other things we do." By getting their foot in the door and building that credibility with them, then we're able to say, "If you want more help going towards this path, we have all these things here that can help you."

Shelly Strickland: [00:14:10] One of the last things I would say is that being consistent with them is what really matters. We really test our messaging. Sometimes switching a Webinar title might be the easiest thing to switch your marketing. It's the same Webinar, but how you message that to them in a way that helps them overcome their pain point is what we try to do. Being a small team, a really nice thing is we can switch that on a dime. We can put up a Webinar, and, if it

doesn't have the conversions we're looking for, the next week we can change that Webinar. It's very easy to do when you're in a small team, and it's a little bit harder when you're a big team, but we focus quickly and nimbly on what messaging reaches that right person.

Celisa Steele: [00:15:02] Shelly, you've been talking about the individual learner and sending those e-mails, making sure that you're trying to align to their pain points. Amy, let's talk a little bit more about that other side of the equation, the B2B side, in terms of corporate or institutional buyers. What does that look like? You shared some of it. But, when you're approaching those prospects, how do you think about that B2B sale differently than you think about reaching those individual learners, like Shelly was just explaining?

Amy Michalski: [00:15:34] Shelly has to segment and put individuals in buckets based on the needs that they have, where, for corporate sales and B2B, it's individualized, and it has to be. It's reaching out and understanding your audience's needs, one to one. For example, there's a huge need right now around AI governance when they're trying to get their data ready for AI. I'm meeting with a government agency, and they have a real need for an AI data-readiness-type workshop. We offer workshops, but we didn't have anything specific for them. So I reached out to a few consultant partners that we're working with to customize a workshop for them. Really, it's all about trying to figure out how we can match the needs of the industry and quickly create content with partners that matches those specific needs to be able to work with them. If the opportunity makes sense, and we find that there is an audience for this, it makes a lot of sense for us to collaborate and partner with our industry to be able to provide this service for our members. We wouldn't be able to do that for one individual, where we can do it for a large organization, say, of 50, and then expand from there because we know and see that there's value beyond.

Celisa Steele: [00:17:14] Shelly, it might be useful to ask you a question about the segmentation of individual learners. Can you talk a little bit about how you think about the segments and what those segments look like for AIIM?

Shelly Strickland: [00:17:29] Some of the segmentation comes from what they click on our Web site—what it was that drove them to fill out a form, what particular thing they're interested in. We have, in the past, asked them, "What is your interest?" or "Do you want to hear about this, this, or this?" We stopped doing that, but we're going back to doing that. We're in a project right now to make those preferences a little more granular in the database. Basically, we know what training they've taken, what things they've clicked on, and what brought them to us to begin with. If they've signed up for Webinars, that might put them in the bucket that they want Webinars. Or, if they've taken a course on M365, then that might be my M365 bucket. A lot of it comes in your database as where did the people come from? What are they spending time on? What have they responded to? And what e-mails have they opened? If you sent a general e-mail with ten different things, and they clicked on only one that had something to do with M365, then that buckets them and scores them for M365 or whatever bucket that they would fall in.

Celisa Steele: [00:18:49] I would love to talk about measurement. A lot of learning businesses struggle with knowing what is it right to measure, what are appropriate targets. Shelly, would you talk about what measurement looks like at AIIM? What metrics do you track, are you

setting explicit targets, and does what you learn from those numbers change how you work or what you offer?

Shelly Strickland: [00:19:11] Measurement is something we think about all the time at AIIM. Because we have such a small team, we can't afford to spend a lot of time on activities that don't produce anything. We track a mix of engagement, conversion, revenue metrics, depending on the campaign or program. On the marketing side, we look at those e-mail engagement and conversion rates, Webinar registrations, event registrations. We look at membership growth, how many people are interested in this certification, social engagement, and things like that. But one thing we've learned is that there is no single metric that tells the full story about any particular program. For example, a Webinar might not immediately convert to sales of training courses, but it may bring in more highly engaged prospects who later decide that they want membership or might come to a conference, or they might decide to take this certification.

Shelly Strickland: [00:20:09] We do set targets, especially around registration, lead generation, and membership campaigns. But we try to stay flexible with audience behaviors. They change so fast that what we did and who used to be engaged last year is not the same as who is engaged this year. And just because they did this last year doesn't mean that they're going to do that this year. Data tracking has absolutely changed how we work, and it's made us more audience-focused. We get better at adjusting messaging faster when something isn't opened, when somebody isn't clicking on things. Sometimes even a small change in positioning helps those metrics go up. It's very much about paying close attention to everything you put out there to see how well it works across the board. The biggest lesson for us has been that engagement quality matters a lot more than vanity metrics. Open rates and all of that don't hold the same value they used to. What holds more value is are people clicking through? Are people attending the Webinars? And how engaged are the people that we do have? It's much better to have a small audience of highly engaged people than it is to have a huge audience of people out there who never open or interact whatsoever.

Celisa Steele: [00:21:37] Let's talk more about conversion because that's a pain point for a lot of learning businesses. You can perhaps get traction on generating awareness or get someone to sign up for and then come to that free Webinar, but then getting them to move from that general awareness or that free offering to a paid one can be a bit of a hurdle. Amy, how are you all thinking about moving people from just aware and interested to actually enrolled?

Amy Michalski: [00:22:07] This is where intentional nurturing makes all the difference. Because not everyone who shows up, like you said, to a free Webinar is like, "Oh, yeah, sign me up," and that's okay. We're happy to have them as part of our community because it helps us fulfill other goals. Even though they're not ready today, that doesn't mean they won't be ready a couple months from now. Needs change. What we're offering changes. Shelly touched on how we segment, and segmentation is key. Sometimes we have to make sure we're announcing something like a new event to everybody, but we have the best opportunity when we can personalize and segment to specific audiences. We do this by topic, by engagement, by location. For example, by topic, if they're interested in something like AI readiness versus more general information management or records management, we can share different messaging with those two audiences. Also by engagement level—this is the big one. For example, if we are trying to

get some more people to join membership or take our certification, we'll take a look at those that maybe were doing a lot of engagement with us in the past, have been a past member, have been looking at CIP opportunities. That will be our lowest-hanging fruit, so we'll send them a personalized message, maybe give them a discount, and get some of those to convert into a sale.

Amy Michalski: [00:23:45] We just started re-offering regional events, and we're very specific about the audience. We want to make sure that they're local to that specific area, and we make it free to attend. A lot of times, what works well is ensuring that we're sharing the other types of people that are going to be there because the key to joining AIIM is the community, the sense of community—like minds that can share ideas, get their answers heard, and get their business pain solved. One thing that also works is reducing risk. We emphasize the community side. I just mentioned these memberships. The membership for AIIM includes meet-ups, peer connections, cohort groups, book clubs, invitations to regional events. People don't want to just consume content without engaging; they want to know there's a group of people, like minds, trying to solve the same problems. I'm more focused on training partnerships. After having that consultative call, if one of our on-demand training makes sense for them, I'll offer those key decision-makers a trial to ensure the content quality fits and the content itself fits what they're looking for before they commit. The key is meeting people where they are. Someone who just discovered us last week needs a very different type of conversation than somebody who has been consuming our content for over a year. So it's less guessing and hoping it sticks and more using the data and having much better conversion rates.

Celisa Steele: [00:25:34] You mentioned in your response, Amy, the importance of nurturing and making sure to send some personalized message, making sure to follow up with that. You're a staff of five, though, so talk about how things like those nurturing and personalized messages happen. I assume you're relying some on technology to help with that process.

Amy Michalski: [00:25:54] Yes, and that's something we always set up on workflows in our CRM, and we're in the process of updating these. If, for example, they do this, then they'll get this type of follow-up. We're working to intentionalize this even more so we can ensure that we're reaching them at the right time with the right message versus just blasting and blasting. For example, if they just took the CIP practice exam, we want to make sure we follow up based on how they did. And, if they haven't already purchased the exam, that's a great time to touch base with them to see if they want to get additional training or if they're ready to purchase the actual exam. Sometimes I'll offer an incentive to do so.

Celisa Steele: [00:26:43] Shelly, I would love it if you could tell us about a specific marketing initiative, campaign, or experiment that you feel really delivered—something that you could point to and say, "Hey, that actually worked."

Shelly Strickland: [00:26:58] One of the best campaigns that we've done at AIIM was something we put together on the fly after a big mandate that came down from the government on how things are being regulated in a certain industry. When that happened, we could see all the chatter that was happening around it and all the questions around it. So we pulled together a Webinar with the professionals that are having the pain points, and we did that in under a week. We didn't have some big, polished campaign. We just moved quickly and built the

Webinar around the issue. Then we brought in professionals that are (1) affected by it and (2) the ones that are having the problem with it, and then we put them all together in a room. We put on this Webinar within a matter of a couple of weeks, and it was so successful because it brought in a lot of people that we didn't have in our database before. It took so much less marketing effort than most of our other campaigns. People were so invested in the topic that they came, and then the speakers that were speaking were so invested in it that they shared it with their networks. All these people were sharing it virally without us having to do anything. I think we might have made one social post on it, and all the rest of that advertising came from the people who were involved.

Shelly Strickland: [00:28:26] That was such a successful campaign, and it all came from listening to what was going on in the industry and the loudest voices in that industry. We had 400 people register in the first couple of weeks without us doing anything, and then about 90 percent of them showed up. If you hold Webinars, you know that your show rate is usually around 50 or 60 percent. But there was a 90-percent show rate, and those people are new people who had never heard of AIIM, so we gained about 300 new names from that. We're always looking to replicate that. We do constantly see what's going on and try to use those topics because we have weekly or monthly meetings that are just for members, and it's usually one of those experts in the field who are speaking at those or leading those meetings about a hot topic that's going on. That's one of the ways that we do it. And then, when we can, if we have a Webinar that's coming up, we will try to get those experts in there as much as we can to try to replicate that kind of success.

Celisa Steele: [00:29:42] Amy, I would like to ask you about what you're seeing that's changing in terms of how you market and sell the educational content that AIIM makes available. Are there perhaps things that used to work reliably in the past that are no longer working as well? And, on the flip side, are there some newer approaches or tactics that you've tried that have produced really good results, maybe better results than you expected?

Amy Michalski: [00:30:09] Before I talk about our tactics and how we had to shift in the way we sell, we also had to shift in what we offer. Because what we found is that nobody really wants it more. When we're talking about educational content, we're talking not only about training; we're talking about events because content is everywhere, and that's what we're sharing with our audience. Nobody wants a PowerPoint lecture anymore. They want hands-on, interactive learning where they're doing something and able to engage. We completely rebuilt our annual event last year around a concept that we call "intentional engagement." This is more cohort-based learning, workshops, interactive sessions, and lots of networking-type opportunities. Even our virtual training moved to workshop style with a sandbox environment. Let's say you're looking to learn more about Microsoft Purview. You're not just listening to somebody talk about Purview; you're clicking around, trying it yourself. People want practical how-to training and sessions, not just theoretical deep dives.

Amy Michalski: [00:31:32] The other shift is topic. We took our opportunities. We've been talking a lot about AI data readiness and specific tool training like M365, Purview, governance. Those are resonating with our audience. Once we were able to determine what the community really wants, it shifted our messaging to "Come to our opportunities. We're not the same type

of conference,” or “We’re not offering the same training.” That is our unique differentiator. It’s funny—we just had our annual event a couple of weeks ago, and so many people came up to me, saying, “I loved this event because I come in knowing some people in this audience,” because we have these cohort meetups with the attendees prior to even being on site. They feel connected, and they have some homework to do ahead of time to come up with their business issues that they’re trying to solve. They come there ready to ask these questions, and we give them ample opportunity to engage and get those questions specifically answered. It helped us be able to market because I can use those one-to-one e-mails, or, what Shelly’s doing, she can focus on the engagement piece for those events and workshops to share how we’re different. It’s incredibly important to keep up with what your audience wants and what works. We were struggling before we changed this model with our event, changed some operational things too, and now we’re seeing a lot more success. It’s working, which is exciting.

Celisa Steele: [00:33:19] That is exciting, and it sounds like you’re doubling down on community, the access to peers, and also the hands-on aspect and getting to do something. We know how important the social side is with good learning, as well as being able to apply it and try it out.

Amy Michalski: [00:33:38] Yes, and we’re also relying on our community. We used to try to do everything ourselves. We’re now working with our community to help. We like to say we’re the platform for education, and then our members can provide the actual education through partnerships or asking volunteers to create content for us. It’s a new model that we’ve never done, but, when you’re a team of five, you need to rely on your members. It’s great to have multiple voices sharing their expertise with their community because having many perspectives other than just what we think is what’s so valuable.

Celisa Steele: [00:34:17] Shelly, I want to get your take on advice that you might offer to another association learning business. Maybe this is one that feels a little bit uncertain or underpowered in its marketing and sales approach. Based on your years of experience in different industries and now at AIIM, where would you tell them to focus to get some better results?

Shelly Strickland: [00:34:42] I would tell them to stop underestimating the value that they already bring to the table. Associations have many of these commercial learning companies beat because they already have the trust, community, and direct access to the professionals, the practitioners who are living their challenges every single day. A lot of organizations feel underpowered because they think that they need big budgets or big teams. But, honestly, relevance matters a lot more than scale does right now. Associations seeing the best results are the ones that stay close to their audience and can respond quickly to what people are struggling with in the moment. I also would encourage them to stop marketing courses as products and start focusing on outcomes. Most people are not waking up thinking, “I want training.” They’re thinking, “I need help figuring this out,” and “I don’t know how this works,” and “I need somebody to help me figure out how it works.” The more directly you connect your education to their real-world problems, the stronger that engagement will be for them. That credibility is earned, and then your business will grow from that.

Shelly Strickland: [00:36:01] Another thing: You can't wait for things to be perfect before you get started. Some of the most successful things that we've done were fast and practical, and they were built around what the industry needed. People and organizations pay attention when you show up with that timely message. They're going to seek you out when you deliver answers for them. Finally, like Amy said about leaning into the community, if they lean into their community more intentionally, content becomes easier to find. People will look for those types of connections, shared experiences, and conversations with peers, which positions associations to be ahead of the other learning companies in that respect. They're looking for people that are doing the same job as them that can help them do it the right way. And that credibility is what they need to focus on.

Celisa Steele: [00:37:01] I want to ask you both about how you approach your own lifelong learning. This is the Leading Learning Podcast, so we always like to talk to our guests about that. I would love to know some of your specific habits, practices, or sources that you use as you continue to grow professionally and personally. Amy, how about I ask that of you first?

Amy Michalski: [00:37:22] I feel ongoing learning is so important in the association world. I'm currently working toward my CAE, the Certified Association Executive, which has been a great way to formalize 25 years of working at an association. But my best learning happens in a community. I'm part of PAR, the Professionals for Association Revenue, and I serve on their leadership advisory board. Also, internally, I learn every day from our CEO, Tori Miller Liu, who's very instilled in the association world, and other staff, board members, sponsors, training partners, and our own AIIM community. I love hearing different perspectives and learning how different people tell me different types of information, and it helps what we're offering at AIIM and think of things differently of how we're selling them.

Amy Michalski: [00:38:22] Some of my best growth comes from being willing to learn in public. For example, I use AI tools daily to manage this large revenue portfolio. I've presented at PAR. Even though I don't know all the answers, and I was a little bit nervous the first time I did it. What I found is that, sometimes, the best conversations happen when you're a little messy in the middle of learning alongside everyone else and admitting that I don't know everything and learning, and I want to learn from you as well. Outside of work, my hobby is photography, and that helps keep my creativity sharp. And, at AIIM, I'm always looking for the right angle, the right framing, what to include, and what to cut. Kind of cheesy, but it does play a part. So I think that mindset directly helps with business development.

Celisa Steele: [00:39:16] Thank you, Amy. Shelly, how about you? How do you go about approaching your own lifelong learning?

Shelly Strickland: [00:39:21] I have the mindset of always be learning. I'm always willing to learn and adapt to new things that are out there. I love new technology. I love testing out new things. I think that, if you have a fear of changing, you fall behind so quickly. Personally, I'm a hands-on learner, and I do my best not by reading but getting my hands in there and getting dirty with things. I like to test things, break things, experiment, and see how they work in the real world. A lot of learning that I have comes from being willing to try something before I fully know how it's going to work out. One of the mindsets that I have for learning—and I tell my

sons that I homeschool all the time—the first thing to learning is the willingness to be able to learn. If they're not willing to learn something, then they're not going to be able to learn it. They have to set their minds that they're willing, at least willing, and open to trying, and then all the rest of it comes. The ability comes later, but the willingness has to start. People need to be less afraid of failure. Some of the biggest learning things in my career have come from getting in there, and things didn't work perfectly. You learn really quick what to do different the next time. You just can't be afraid to ask questions, you can't be afraid to fail, and you can't be afraid to adjust your opinion of what you thought something was. Again, flexibility, change, and getting in there and doing it are the most important things to learning.

Jeff Cobb: [00:41:08] That wraps up the conversation with Amy Michalski and Shelly Strickland of AIIM, the Association for Intelligent Information Management. But stay with us another minute to catch our recap.

Celisa Steele: [00:41:18] You'll find show notes and a transcript for this episode at leadinglearning.com/episode482, along with links to the AIIM Web site and to Amy's and Shelly's profiles on LinkedIn. And, if you found this episode valuable, we would be grateful if you'd share it so more people can find the show and benefit from the conversations we have.

Jeff Cobb: [00:41:38] Amy and Shelly returned to a central message throughout the conversation: Your prospective learners aren't searching for training. They're searching for help solving specific problems. The more directly you connect your education to real-world needs, the stronger your marketing will be.

Celisa Steele: [00:41:54] On measurement, Shelly made the case that engagement quality matters far more than vanity metrics, like open rates. A smaller audience of highly engaged people is worth far more than a large list that never interacts. And she made a point that I agree with wholeheartedly—no single metric tells the full story of any program.

Jeff Cobb: [00:42:15] Amy highlighted the power of intentional nurturing—meeting people where they are, segmenting by behavior and interest, and recognizing that someone who isn't ready to buy today may be exactly the right customer a few months from now.

Celisa Steele: [00:42:29] Thanks again for listening—and see you next time on the Leading Learning Podcast!

[music for this episode by Moarn]