



Leading Learning Podcast Episode 263

LaTrease Garrison (00:00):

So as long as we continue to have humans that are lifelong learners, I think there's a space for the third sector. So I think that our importance will continue to be there. I think there may be some ebbs and flows along the way, and we just have to continue to monitor what's happening and take advantage of any opportunities that come along and to view any challenge as an opportunity. That's how I live. If it's a challenge, it's also an opportunity—just might have to dig a little deeper to find out what that opportunity is—but I think as long as we continue to do that, then we'll continue to have a place.

Jeff Cobb (00:29):

I'm Jeff Cobb.

Celisa Steele (00:31):

I'm Celisa Steele, and this is the Leading Learning Podcast.

Celisa Steele (00:38):

Welcome to episode 263 of the Leading Learning Podcast, which features a conversation with LaTrease Garrison. This is the sixth episode in a seven-part series on the surge of the third sector of education. Bucking the trend of short-lived tenures with any single employer, LaTrease has been with the American Chemical Society since 1992. She currently serves as executive vice president of the education division, which serves learners from K to retire. Jeff spoke with LaTrease in January 2021.

Jeff Cobb (01:18):

Could you tell us a little bit more about what you do in your role there, your day-to-day work, and also what ACS does, particularly in terms of educating its members and broader audience?

LaTrease Garrison (01:33):

Sure, will do. So the American Chemical Society, we are a nonprofit organization, and we do service over 155,000 members. We are chartered by the U.S. Congress, and our mission is to advance the broader chemistry enterprise and as practitioners for the benefit of Earth and its people. I know that's a mouthful, but basically we attempt to be the global leader in providing access to chemistry-related information and research throughout multiple research solutions, our peer-reviewed journals, our scientific conferences, our various e-books, and our weekly news periodical, *Chemical & Engineering News*. Within the education division itself, as I mentioned, we do provide learning for all individuals who are interested in upping their skills within the chemical education space. We do training that's technically related to chemistry. We also have soft skills training. We also do outreach training—many people are surprised. Within the education division, if someone's interested in being a volunteer in their local community, at

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available at www.leadinglearning.com/episode263.*

their local schools, and share chemistry, they can come to us to be trained within that space as well.

LaTrease Garrison (02:35):

And I'm also very proud that we provide new faculty workshops. So for faculty who are young within their career and are seeking to develop skills to help them to be better in the classroom, to better connect with students of today, we provide training for that as well. I think within the education division, you'll also find that we're increasing our efforts within the K to 8 space. Traditionally many people have thought about ACS as just being for academic chemists in the higher-ed level and for industrial chemists, but we do seek to have programs, products, and services for K to 8 teachers of chemistry and / or of science. So it is really helping us to broaden our portfolio to ensure that we're able to meet the needs of everyone who's working within the chemical enterprise. And also I would like mention that we consider ourselves a specialist within the scientific information solution space. So our scientific solutions office, Chemical Abstracts Service, is based in Columbus, Ohio. So we have our main offices here in DC and then our other offices in Columbus, Ohio, and then we have staff worldwide as well.

Jeff Cobb (03:41):

I know you said something interesting there that I don't think I tuned into before—that your organization is actually chartered by Congress, which I think may be the first time I've heard that. Maybe it's been true of other organizations I've talked to, but to the extent that you're able to comment on it, what does that mean? And does that charter specifically talk about your role as a provider of education?

LaTrease Garrison (04:05):

It doesn't necessarily mention education versus chemistry. So our charter is more specific towards what we do for the field of chemistry. It also allows us to be able to provide guidance, if you will, or to have an advocacy arm of the organization. So we do have an office that focuses on government relations, and they do go out, we do train individuals who like to be in the space of advocacy, which go to speak to their congressmen, their senators, and the likes. So we do provide information about that as well. And then we have what's called a call to action, I call it, but it's a network, whereas we try to encourage our members, if there are specific things that are going on that are being voted on within the government, how they can provide insight or guidance. So to me it broadens our influence, if you will, when you think about it from a public policy space.

Jeff Cobb (04:57):

Got it. And so then in terms of your educational activities, professional development, and the other forms of education that you spoke about, do you oversee all of that? You're the buck-stops-here person on that?

LaTrease Garrison (05:11):

Yes, exactly. There are 50 staff on my team who all have responsibility for a variety of programs within our portfolio, but ultimately everything does roll up to me within our learning space for the organization. And I think quite often when people hear education as being the name of our group, they think of it as the traditional educational space, but we do expand beyond that, especially when you think about professional development, as you mentioned, when you think about the critical skills. When we talk about the, like I said, science outreach, some of the publications and magazines that we have for high school students, for undergraduates, as well

as for graduate students and postdocs. We're stretching beyond your typical classroom setting, if you will. And some of it is really career awareness, career building. We have great opportunities with many of our products and the constituents whom we serve to help them to make decisions about their career.

LaTrease Garrison (06:01):

We have a great tool that's called ChemIDP, which is an individual development plan tool that was made for chemists. We say for chemists by chemists because we understand what chemists are seeking and looking for and really helping them to chart out their path from a career perspective.

Jeff Cobb (06:19):

So you really are very comprehensive in how you're thinking about education, how you're thinking about learning, which I think jibes very well with our perspective here at Leading Learning. And now you and I are talking as part of a podcast series we're doing on what we characterize as the third sector of education. It's a sector that's made up of providers, like ACS, who serve adult lifelong learners after they've finished their formal, degree-granting education. I know you're involved even earlier than that in many cases, but where do you interact or have you interacted with that third sector of education? And I'm thinking both professionally as ACS, in your role at ACS, but then also even personally if you'd like.

LaTrease Garrison (07:09):

Yes, yes, definitely. So considering myself personally, connecting with your group, Jeff, is one way personally, I think, I've connected with the third sector—going to the events that you all offer. They do provide professional development opportunities, learning opportunities for professionals who are seeking just to build their skillset. I consider the third sector space as being for any lifelong learner who wants to continue to enhance their skills, who wants to keep up with the latest trends, people who want to ensure that they have the opportunity to just explore what's actually going on in the world today so that they can be of better service to others. I think it's critical for individuals in positions like myself or others within their learning space to take advantage of the third sector learning world. Because I believe that provides us with the flexibility that we need to receive additional learning opportunities as they are available.

LaTrease Garrison (08:02):

I would also add to that that the National Academy of Sciences in 2017 put out a report about the skilled technical workforce, and it speaks to how the U.S. is falling behind, but things that we could do as a country to advance our workforce, to ensure that everyone is very prepared to help ensure a more stable economy for the U.S., and just to make sure that our workforce is diverse. And the third sector, I believe, will play a critical role in that looking forward. And the reason is that individuals, as you mentioned, do go through their formal training. They do receive their degree, but things are constantly changing, and not everyone has the time and the space to be able to go back to a full, rigorous program to complete a certificate or a degree or the like, but being able to take a course here or there is something that many people find appealing to them, and it gives them the opportunity to increase their skill sets.

LaTrease Garrison (08:59):

So, at ACS, we have professional development courses, or continuing education courses, as some people call them. And those courses do span within the technical space themselves. We

even have a course that's called "Chemist for Non-Chemists." So that's a great course for individuals who are in the workforce working within their chemistry field, but their college degree may be in business. It could be in technology or some other space where they did not get trained in chemistry, but they are finding that, by working for a chemistry-centered organization, it would behoove them to have some chemistry knowledge and training. So we provide courses to help individuals to do that. We also think about the instrumentation that chemists have to use, and instrumentation changes from time to time. Some of the chemical manufacturers of the instrumentation do provide training, but we can also help to supplement that through training that we provide from the American Chemical Society.

LaTrease Garrison (09:53):

And then, I think additionally, one of the gaps that we often see in competencies for individuals coming out of a formal STEM major program has to do with those critical skills, those soft skills, as some people call them, that may relate to business, may relate to communications. So these are things that we try to provide to non-members who seek to come to us to help fill that gap. We believe that by doing so, we are just additive to the formal education system. And then we are helping to build that skilled technical workforce, as clearly articulated in that report, is a need. I think the other benefit of associations like ACS being in this space is that we can provide diverse learning opportunities. As we all know in today's state, most people are learning virtually. And we're able to transition many of our courses to virtual versus the face-to-face that we would offer. Being able to work with various chemical companies who are looking to train their employees also gives us the advantage to ensure that we're providing the right level of training that they need.

LaTrease Garrison (10:56):

So our long-term customers are clearly confident in our ability to deliver the course content. And it also demonstrates to me that they want to have the third sector as a part of their learning environment for their employees.

Celisa Steele (11:12):

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Liam O'Malley (11:21):

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Celisa Steele (11:59):

We're truly grateful to Blue Sky eLearn for helping to make this series possible. And we encourage you to find out more at blueskyelearn.com. Now back to the conversation with Jeff and LaTrease.

Jeff Cobb (12:15):

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We've noticed over the years of working in this third sector that, for example, when you talk about K through 12 education—elementary, high school, those sorts of things—people know what you're talking about, and there's sort of a clear idea of that. When you talk about higher education, there's a clear idea about that as well. But when you get to this third sector, it feels like things become a little bit fuzzier, and sometimes it feels a bit like a Wild West. There are a lot of different providers out there—there are trade and professional associations, where you would fall obviously, there's corporate learning and development, there's academic continuing education, they're training companies. Increasingly we're seeing that even solo subject matter experts—you probably have some of these—can get out there on their own now with courses and other offerings. When you think about this third sector and how cohesive it is, how aware the different players in it are of each other, or even of their being this sector of education that they're serving,

Jeff Cobb (13:25):

how do you think about that? Is it really this Wild West that I've referred to? Or do you see a lot more collaboration and continuity that maybe isn't immediately visible?

LaTrease Garrison (13:43):

Right. I think, Jeff, there's a mixed bag when you talk about that. I think it's a competitive space. I think when people are trying to enter into this space, I think it may become more challenging if they don't already have a footing because of the number of providers that are in the space, as you mentioned. But then also I think there's opportunity for those of us who may specialize in a subject area. I think when you look at some of the providers out there who aren't dedicated to a specific field, they may be trying to stretch to be everything to everybody. And so I like to think about our influence and ability to be what chemists need us to be within this space in a way that we can have a targeted market that we're working with. I think it allows us to then go and think more deliberately about who our subject matter experts should be, can be.

LaTrease Garrison (14:26):

It allows us to be strategic about our partners. I think it allows us to more effectively tailor our marketing messaging. And then also it gives us the ability that when we need to do some research with our customer base, to really determine what their needs are, it gives us a small enough pool that we can really advance and make some impactful changes there to make sure we're providing the right knowledge base learning them. I think if third sector groups try to stretch themselves too thin, they could miss the mark, and they could dilute the learning opportunity. And the user experience might not be as strong as it could be, if we were to focus more on specific industries itself. I do also recognize that there is crossover in terms of what individuals need to learn and that the interrelationships right now within work sectors, and you see a lot of team dynamics within organizations, and you see when teams come together, you have people with different skills working together.

LaTrease Garrison (15:26):

So I think a part of what we have to think about deliberately is what are truly those core competencies that have to sit within every individual that's part of your team? And then what are those unique competencies that an individual will bring? How do people continue to build upon those unique competencies to make them even stronger within that space? So, for us, I see, we are the American Chemical Society. So I think it is relevant for us to be specific and to think about chemists and to be elitist, if you will, and not really to think about other disciplines. If people need to come to us to get that chemistry knowledge, then we will be the place for them

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to come to. And if our chemical partners in the learning space feel that, hey, the ACS brand is one that we would want to attach ourselves to because of its size, because of its reputation within the industry, there's opportunity there.

LaTrease Garrison (16:16):

So I think, while there are a lot of learning providers, I do think organizations like ourselves and others need to really be strategic about their partners, their subject matter experts, and just be cautious about trying to stretch yourself too thin. I think it's very easy to do that in today's time because we know everyone now has easier access to learning. Because of the remote nature, travel doesn't have to be involved. You really don't worry about flying your facilitators here and there; everyone can stay home and get their work done. And that does entice you, I think, to do more, to bite off more than you can chew initially. But when you really take a step back and think about and do a complete analysis about it and really think about what are your true strategic objectives and what is your ability to be successful in terms of achieving those objectives, then you can build the right portfolio that will allow you to be a successful learning provider within the third sector.

Jeff Cobb (17:07):

And do you actively seek out collaborations? It might be with employers in the sector; it might be with commercial training firms in the sector; it might be with academia. Do you actively seek those out? And to the extent that you do, are there examples that you can highlight where ACS has collaborated with other providers in the third sector successfully?

LaTrease Garrison (17:38):

So I will not necessarily speak about providers, but, because of our large membership pool, we have a fantastic opportunity to collaborate with our members as subject matter experts. That gives us a great opportunity, and great advantage in terms of thinking about the content that we as an organization are going to develop. And it also gives us, I guess, easier mechanisms for owning our content. I know some groups, when you do begin those partnerships and reaching out, you do have to go through the whole ownership conversation, but when we're able to leverage the great talent that we have within our membership, that gives us a little bit more flexibility within that space. I would also say that as we're beginning to think more about this competency-based learning, which we just started in 2019 and are moving forward with that, we are finding opportunities of groups that we can partner with.

LaTrease Garrison (18:29):

We're also finding opportunities to work more closely with employers of chemists. Those are the individuals who truly know what they want to see in their employee base or employee population. So that gives us an opportunity to partner with them, to be able to define and to establish the competencies, and thereby allows us to present to chemists, if you want to be a chemical technician, for example, these are the competencies that the companies are looking for. If you want to work in a national lab, for example, as a chemist, these are the competencies that are needed there. So that's the extent of what we're doing right now in terms of our partnerships and trying to leverage the resources that are available through us, through our various networks. And then we also have to think about, and within the academic space, while universities may not be formal partners, we are able to gauge from the curriculum that they're providing, where there might be gaps in terms of what the students will not have when they graduate and come out.

LaTrease Garrison (19:25):

So that also gives us the advantage, if you will, within chemistry to be able to identify these are the core competencies that our undergraduate, who just finished their BS degree in chemistry at Eastern Blip university, is not going to be able to have these competencies when he or she comes out. So how do we help them to get up to speed, to be ready for the workforce?

Jeff Cobb (19:56):

I'm interested that you mentioned competency-based learning because we're hearing more and more about that. I think a lot of organizations are intrigued by it, but they're also not quite sure how to proceed. So, I'd love to hear, were you feeling the demand from your audience for that? What made you feel like you really needed to move in that direction? And to the extent you can comment on it, I'd love to hear any perspectives you have around business model around that too because I think that's also what trips up a lot of organizations. It's all fine to say, "People need these competencies," but then you've got to be able to generate revenue somehow around that.

LaTrease Garrison (20:41):

Exactly. You're exactly right. So about 10 years ago, the ACS launched the ACS Leadership Development System. When we launched that system, that was one of our first efforts where we did some research on competencies that leaders within chemistry should have and classified as extraordinary leaders, and that's one of the courses within our Leadership Development System. So that was the first time that we approached this from a competency-based framework, if you will, for developing learning. But that wasn't something that we did across our entire portfolio. We only did specifically within the Leadership Development System. We contracted with an external partner to make that happen. We had volunteer leaders that partner with staff to drive this forward. So we ran this by committee, and we had great success in terms of developing the courses that will help individuals to build those competencies, to ensure that they will become an extraordinary leader within the ACS, as a volunteer leader. And then also they were skills that were transferable into their workplace.

LaTrease Garrison (21:43):

So with that being our entree into the competency space, we found success. It allowed us to communicate to our learners this is why you should take this class. This is what you're going to learn. These are the key takeaways. And this is how you can leverage these key takeaways, which were actually competencies. And then we also would clearly demonstrate at the end of each course where the competencies that you, say, learned in course A would overlap if you were to now go and take course B and course F and course G. So we could provide a mapping, if you will, in terms of how to build up some competencies within your individual learning portfolio. So just recently, about two years ago, we started thinking about how do we leverage competencies? How do we think more broadly about them across our entire portfolio of learning assets?

LaTrease Garrison (22:34):

So that's currently what we're working on. I won't share too many details about that, but what I will say is that our research that we've been doing, we didn't know how to approach that from a magnified scale from where we were with just leadership development because now we're expanding across multiple areas of professional development. So we did have to contract—there are vendor partners out there who know how to do this. So we were able to partner with a vendor who's really helped us to drill down, to come up with some competencies. And I think

we're landing somewhere about 12 or so. And it may be up to, upwards of 20, but we're going to have a manageable number. And what we have to do now is to begin to map our current courses to those competencies, so that we'll know where we are already prepared to help that individual to build those competencies.

LaTrease Garrison (23:25):

After that, then we need to look at what courses need to be developed to address the remaining competencies. And, yes, we are building a business model around it so that we can look at it from a revenue stream perspective as well. But then we also keep in mind that we are a member-serving organization. So what is the model that allows for revenue generating, also member value and member engagement? So there are multiple prongs that we're thinking about as we build this out. Once we do officially launch, I will be definitely happy to come back and share more of how we did it, what that looks like, and what our success is going down the road and more about what our vision is. But it is something that we're actively moving within this area because we know it's critically important now for our membership. It's critically important, as I mentioned earlier, for the workforce of the U.S.

LaTrease Garrison (24:12):

And as the job market shifts and as they're changes, we want to be sure that chemists are prepared to move with those shifts and those changes. And so what can we do to help them to be prepared, to apply for and acquire jobs, and to be successful within their careers?

Jeff Cobb (24:26):

Well, that's very exciting. And I think we definitely will want to come back and talk to you more because I know so many organizations are, as I said, they're excited about the possibility, but they may not quite know where to go with it right now. And so you're helping to lead the way once again. And I'm going to pull back a little bit to a broader level because we've dived into this whole third sector and some of what you're doing. Our sense is that with some of those changes that are happening out there—you just referenced some of them, just the pace of work, the pace of change, people needing to re-skill, up-skill, all of those sorts of things—it seems like the third sector (a) has grown in size and certainly grown in importance over the past few decades, even in the past few years. Is that your viewpoint? And how are you most feeling that, to the extent that that is your viewpoint?

LaTrease Garrison (25:25):

Yeah, I think it is growing. I think it's growing in scale, scope. I think it's also growing in expectation by the consumer. And I think a part of that is being driven because of the demands that are being placed among our faculty within higher education. Time is limited for everyone. I do think that our faculty are doing an excellent job in terms of preparing our students to come out, to be ready to work from a technical aspect. I think they're doing it in a way that's ensuring that the students are equipped from the curriculum that the university can provide, but the university resources are limited. Like I said, time is limited. So we're there to fill that gap. And I think everyone has recognized that as being a challenge that we all can solve together. And so I think that has somehow prompted the growth within the third sector space.

LaTrease Garrison (26:17):

Then I'll also think, as humans, we're naturally competitive, and we all want to get ahead. And I think the more you talk to people within the workforce, it's not unusual to hear people talking about what's my next move? What's my next professional move? How do I get the promotion?

How do I move into management? Or how do I transition to another career space altogether? And I think the more that individuals, consumers ask those questions that providers have the opportunity to help them to do that. And so I think that's where the growth is. You rarely see individuals now—well, except for me—who stay in the same organization, same career path for a long time. So as individuals are seeking to move every three to five years into a new space, which may or may not be connected to their formal educational training,

LaTrease Garrison (27:02):

they need to go somewhere to get those skills, and that's where the third sector, I think, comes in. So I think it's been an opportunity, a growing opportunity for the third sector to be able to provide that type of learning. And as fast paced as the world is, changes in technology, we're moving faster than what we've ever moved before, so I think it's going to continue to grow, and it's just a matter of how do we scale it and ensure that people are hitting their niche audience and providing the right level of training that individuals need?

Jeff Cobb (27:40):

What worries you right now? What are some of the potential threats in the sector? And what are maybe some ways you're trying to make sure you're prepared for any downsides that might be out there?

LaTrease Garrison (27:53):

Yeah, that's true. Resource limitations do become a challenge for an organization such as ACS as well. I have to think about, do I have the right number of staff and the right talent on the team to drive the ship, to make it keep happening so that we can meet the needs of our consumer base, our current consumer base, our possible consumer base, just maintain some sense of reality about how much we truly can do and to be successful? I'd rather have a smaller portfolio that's more impactful and relevant than a large portfolio that's scattered all over the place, and people don't value the content and/or the teaching and/or the materials that they might receive. So maintaining a sense of quality is also very important, so that worries me because I think when we get to the hurry up, let's go or hurry up, let's finish space,

LaTrease Garrison (28:40):

we quite often lose some of the quality that we could have had if we had just taken a little bit more time to ensure that we're hitting the mark correctly. So that is definitely a concern. I also think about our competitors out there. I think about can we remain relevant to learners? Can we remain relevant to the chemical industry? What happens if some of our consumers begin to scale back on the funding they're putting towards professional development for their employees? Or what if they do decide to bring more of this in-house? So those are questions that we have to constantly ask ourselves and to keep thinking about. And then what can we do to mitigate those challenges? Are there any current resources that the ACS has that we can leverage? Is there a space that we hadn't tapped into yet? This one I'm able to talk about. Laboratory safety is a big area within STEM, within chemistry,

LaTrease Garrison (29:33):

and so we know we can affect change there and really help with the training in that area. And, fortunately, that's one of the areas that spans from likely middle school all the way up through graduate school and even into the postdoc space and then actually into the workplace because laboratory safety is critical to the work that chemists do. So we have to continue to constantly monitor the market, to monitor the opportunities, and I think that allows us to grow and to

really address some of the challenges. The other thing that we have to think about as a global organization is that we have members worldwide and the needs might be different based on where they live. Their competencies are going to be different in some areas. Us, like many other organizations, we are thinking about diversity, equity, inclusion, and respect these days. What does diversity mean in a country that's not the U.S.?

LaTrease Garrison (30:24):

What does it mean for our members who live in different parts of the world? So how do we provide the right training that's going to be applicable across such a large footprint of individuals? So all of this is, like the larger your organization, I think, you do have different challenges that you have to start thinking about. And, again, to go back to your previous point, you have to make sure that you don't grow too fast because you could miss something. So that's really some of the things now that I try to encourage the team to always watch. Let's be careful as we're thinking about this, and let's really think about who all can we bring in under our learning portfolio in a way that will be successful.

Jeff Cobb (31:07):

And you mentioned the fact that you are a presence globally, and you have a very, very large membership base, a lot of those are outside of the United States. Operating in that global market, I'll come at this from two angles. One, is just broadly how important is your brand, being ACS as a brand in the international market? And then—I don't want to get political with this—but traditionally United States-based, American-based education has attracted people from other places. Does that still feel true to you operating in this global landscape?

LaTrease Garrison (31:53):

Yes. That is still true, Jeff, from what I can see. I think many great researchers that are coming out of the international space, they come, and they present at our national meetings; they are students like, as you say, within our universities here within the U.S. I think the other benefit that we have, we do establish international student chapters. We also charter international chemical sciences chapters. So they are equivalent to our professional chapters here, which we call local sections for the professionals, and then the students are equivalent to our student chapters that are at our universities in the U.S. Working with those chapters and being able to provide them with programs, products, and services from the ACS, it does help us to build that connectivity. It helps us to learn more about their needs, and it also allows us to be able to tailor some of what we offer

LaTrease Garrison (32:43):

so it is more relevant and applicable for the particular region of the world where they live. It does present some challenges when it comes down to delivery because we aren't as readily able to just go there, even prior to the pandemic. Traveling internationally as frequently as they do domestically is quite expensive for any organization. So we have to think differently about how do we service our members that are abroad? Just recently we ran some career workshops for some of our members in India, and we did it virtually, and it worked fine. We were able to run a complete series. So we're learning as we do this to ensure that we're meeting the needs. And we take the time to talk with our constituents to see exactly what it is that they need and what they want and how is it different from what we've already developed. And then we try to make those adjustments accordingly so that the content that we deliver is relevant.

Jeff Cobb (33:46):

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And what do you see going forward for this whole third sector of education? We talked about it growing in importance. I think there's a—I don't know if it's a contrast—there's a continuation from higher education into the third sector. Right now there's obviously criticism of a lot of what's going on in higher education, and that may not be quite as true in the sciences, I'm not sure, but I think that in a growing number of instances, I think people are thinking, well, what goes on in the third sector, the type of education, the type of training, that might be just as valuable. It may even be a replacement for many people for what happens in higher education. What do you see going forward? Is this third sector going to grow in importance? Is it going to assume a greater role for educating people for the careers that are out there? Or are there potentially some disruptions that are on the horizon for it?

LaTrease Garrison (34:51):

Yeah, I think it is going to continue to grow, Jeff. And I just think about where the ACS was when I first started with the organization back in '92, and how small our unit was that focused on third sector, that focused on professional education and continuing education. It was probably about two people in that office. And now, as I think about where we've grown over the course of the 28 years—and, again, I'm just looking at my tenure there—the new courses that we're able to offer, the number of courses that we're offering, the number of staff and volunteers and subject matter experts that it takes for us to be successful. I still see there being continued growth within this area. Will it level off at some point? Potentially, but I think what will happen eventually is that, again, there'll be another spark of something that will occur, whether a positive or negative force from wherever, that comes in, that we'll say, hey, we either need to amp this up, or we need to change what we're doing, or we need to really think about how do we enhance our portfolio.

LaTrease Garrison (35:56):

So I think it is going to change as time changes, but I do also recognize that as we continue to become more digitized, and as you can pretty much find everything that you need on Internet, just like, I think the traditional academic systems now are negatively impacted by the fact that kids can get pretty much everything off the Internet that they need. So teachers have to learn how to battle against that. And I think the same is going to be true for the third sector in some shape or form. But I do think that the notion of face-to-face learning in education is not going to go away. So I do think that we will continue to have the ability to meet people where they are, to provide that personal touch in terms of learning in education. I do think the third sector could have more flexibility in doing that

LaTrease Garrison (36:41):

than what might happen in the various academic settings. I think as long as we have funding agencies who are in support of some of the training that we seek to provide, I think as long as the employers continue to rely on third sectors to provide the training for their employee base because it's cheaper and it may be requiring less resources for them to do that, I think there's great opportunity there. So as long as we continue to have humans that are lifelong learners, I think there's a space for the third sector. So I think that our importance will continue to be there. I think there may be some ebbs and flows along the way, and we just have to continue to monitor what's happening and take advantage of any opportunities that come along and to view any challenge as an opportunity. That's how I live. If it's a challenge, it's also an opportunity—just might have to dig a little deeper to find out what that opportunity is—but I think as long as we continue to do that, then we'll continue to have a place.

Jeff Cobb (37:36):

This transcript accompanies the episode of the Leading Learning Podcast available at www.leadinglearning.com/episode263.

And are there specific ways that you're trying to make sure that you and your team are as prepared as possible for the future of the third sector? And any advice that you would give to others who hope to thrive in that future as well?

LaTrease Garrison (37:50):

We try to maintain constant communication with our learners. I think being willing to evaluate and assess your success or not is critically important, not being afraid to get that 2.3 on a 5.0-scale for a course. Being willing to say, hey, this isn't working. We need to pull back, or we need to revamp and do something. I do encourage my team to...it's okay to fail. Let's look at this failure, and let's figure out what can we learn from it. Because I think within every failure, there are some learning opportunities. And if you can pull those out, then you can probably make something bigger and better the next go-around. So just be willing to try things out is what we have to continue doing, being willing to talk to your customer base and really listen with the ear and with the intent of either changing or not doing it, that's where the research is leading you.

LaTrease Garrison (38:41):

We've gotten a lot better as an organization about being data-driven in terms of figuring out what we should do. And as a membership-based organization, sometimes it can be a little bit challenging to say, no, this is what the data is telling us, but you have a few people in your ear, but this is what we would like to see. So you have to really be willing to have that difficult conversation and to figure out some middle of the road that you're going to meet to allow you to be able to drive forward as an organization, as a business, but still being able to meet the needs. So I would just say to groups that are interested and that are in the third sector, just continue to press forward, continue to rely on feedback from your users and your customers, follow the trends, follow the data, and just to make sure that we're putting out quality education that individuals can truly use, leverage, and learn,

LaTrease Garrison (39:27):

that's going to help them to grow professionally and to allow for the U.S. and around the world to be that skilled technical workforce that the National Academy of Sciences is saying that we're going to need. I wholeheartedly believe in that—if our workforce is skilled, the world is going to be a better place.

Celisa Steele (39:49):

LaTrease Garrison is the executive vice president of the education division at the American Chemical Society. Connect with LaTrease on LinkedIn, and learn more about the education division and ACS programs, products, and services on the ACS Web site. And know that the ACS site has something for everyone, including resources to help adults support kids with remote learning and kid-friendly activities for downtime at home.

Jeff Cobb (40:18):

You'll find links to LaTrease on LinkedIn and the ACS Web site in the show notes at leadinglearning.com/episode263, along with a transcript and a variety of other resources.

Celisa Steele (40:31):

At leadinglearning.com/episode263, you'll also see options for subscribing to the podcast. To make sure you don't miss the final episode in this series, we encourage you to subscribe. And subscribing also helps us get some data on the impact of the podcast.

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Jeff Cobb (40:48):

We'd also be truly grateful if you'd take a minute to rate us on Apple Podcast. Celisa and I personally appreciate it, and those reviews and ratings help the podcast show up when people search for content on leading a learning business. Go to leadinglearning.com/apple to leave a review and rating.

Celisa Steele (41:06):

And we encourage you to learn more about the sponsor for this series by visiting blueskyelearn.com.

Jeff Cobb (41:13):

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Celisa Steele (41:24):

Thanks again, and see you next time on the Leading Learning Podcast.

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