



A Coach for Publishers

**Interview with
Amy Beisel**

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KENNEALLY: As head coach of the UCLA Bruins, John Wooden won 10 national basketball championships, including seven years in a row. A succession of UCLA teams won 88 consecutive games under his leadership. Wooden shared his insights on coaching in many bestselling books. “A good coach can change a game,” he said, “a great coach can change a life.”

Welcome to CCC’s podcast series. I’m Christopher Kenneally for Velocity of Content.

In business, coaches emphasize personal development, helping employees to make positive changes in their work habits and job skills, such as communications, leadership, and team-building. Over two decades working in publishing, Amy Beisel held management roles in editorial, product strategy, and business development. She applies that experience to coach rising leaders in research and publishing on how to overcome organizational limitations and to find the clarity that galvanizes action. Amy Beisel joins me from Bavaria, Germany. Welcome to Velocity of Content.

BEISEL: Thank you, Chris.

KENNEALLY: How does a coach like you, Amy, help scholarly publishing teams and players?

BEISEL: Sports coaching is a great analogy. A coach sees players’ unique skills and talents and figures out how to leverage those for the benefit of the team. I’ll give you another analogy. If you think of the word coach in the old-fashioned sense, like a stagecoach or a carriage, a coach helps people get from Point A to Point B. So at the simplest level, a coach helps someone get from where they are to where they want to be professionally or as an organization. And in scholarly publishing in particular, we’re all essentially working to validate and disseminate research that will have a positive impact on the world. So the more effective we are as individuals and organizations, the better we can meet that important mission.

KENNEALLY: Amy Beisel, what motivates someone or some organization to reach out to a coach?



BEISEL: People come to coaches with a range of challenges. At the organizational level, it could be that they're struggling with employee engagement and turnover since the pandemic. The leadership team is struggling to align. They're working on a new strategic plan, and they're worried about their blind spots as an organization. Or they can't follow through on their priorities. It feels like they're just putting out fires. So it can cover quite a range.

Sometimes, people come with personal career goals. For example, they're working towards a promotion. They're a new manager. They have so many questions, and they've received zero training. Or maybe they've gotten feedback on a few different performance reviews. They really want to make the change, but they're just not sure how.

Then we assess your starting point. What's Point A? I like to do verbal 360s as well as an assessment of thinking styles and behavioral traits to get a full understanding of where the person is starting from and how they impact others in the organization. Once we have a clear understanding of your starting point and your ending point, we can focus each coaching session on moving you closer to that goal.

KENNEALLY: Scholarly publishing is not as diverse as it wants to be and needs to be, Amy Beisel. Can employee coaching help publishers achieve their goals in diversity, equity, and inclusion?

BEISEL: Yes. We can look at the Workplace Equity Survey from the Coalition for Diversity and Inclusion in Scholarly Communications, C4DISC for short, to see how much work there is to do across many measures of diversity, whether it's gender, sexuality, race and ethnicity, age, ability, caregiving responsibilities, and more. C4DISC's last report was in 2018, and their new report will be coming out in January, so I'm really looking forward to seeing that new data and hope to see progress.

Of course, there are women at the helm of a number of organizations in our industry – Elsevier, Emerald, IOPP, PLOS, Wolters Kluwer, CCC, for example. But at the same time, we can look at recent gender pay gap data for publishers in the UK and see that on this one measure of equity, pay by gender, there's still a long way to go in our industry.

Sticking with gender for a moment, McKinsey and LeanIn published a report a few weeks ago on women in the workplace in the United States that mentions that one of the reasons that there is so little diversity at the top of the corporate ladder is that there is a broken rung near the bottom, and that's the first rung into management. The report found that last year, for every 100 men who were promoted to be first-time managers, only 87 women were. And the numbers are even worse for women of color – just 73.



I see that on a personal level. Early in my career, I was at a couple different organizations where my team was entirely women, 100%. And as my career progressed, I was surrounded by more men and fewer women. Then at some point, I was the only woman in the room. So I think a lot about that broken rung. And as a coach, I place special emphasis on early- to mid-career phases – how I can help women in particular step over the broken rung and how I can help managers and organizations fix that broken rung so that everyone has equal opportunities to lead and succeed.

Nancy McKinstry, the CEO of Wolters Kluwer, mentioned on a recent Harvard Business Review podcast that Wolters Kluwer has really focused their diversity efforts on middle management as a stepping stone into senior leadership, and they've seen really positive outcomes for that approach. So I think that everyone in our industry has a role to play in making workplaces safe, equitable, and welcoming for everyone, and coaching is just the role that I've chosen.

KENNEALLY: Changes in business models and workflows have transformed scholarly publishing since the beginning of this century, Amy. With so much more change yet to come as AI takes hold, how should publishing adapt its culture?

BEISEL: My former colleague, Alberto Pepe, likes to say that scholars produce 21st century research written with 20th century tools packaged in a 17th century format. So our industry is both on the cutting edge and completely stuck in the past. There are some ways that publishing must change to be more inclusive, accessible, international, and there are some ways that publishing must not change, like upholding integrity and ethics. But from an organizational culture perspective, there's a real opportunity.

I can't tell you the number of meetings I've sat in where someone comes in with a big idea to revolutionize our business, serve our customers, make a big impact, and everyone else in the room spends the entire meeting saying our systems can't support that. Our sales team don't know how to sell that. Our financial systems can't process those transactions. It can't be done. You know what happens? Absolutely nothing. And over time, people bring ideas that are smaller and smaller, basically limited by what our organization already knows how to do. That's the path to smaller thinking, smaller revenues, smaller impact.

Now, to be fair, everyone in that meeting is doing their job. From their perspective, within their function, they're simply describing their functional capabilities and limitations with a focus on cost and complexity. The problem is that the team isn't aligned on what matters most, which is serving our stakeholders in new and better ways and leaning into growth. That alignment and orientation towards the future, towards growth, towards opportunities is really important across the whole organization – not just in business development, product development, or marketing, every function. That's the real opportunity.



KENNEALLY: Amy Beisel, how do you expect AI will transform your own work as a business coach?

BEISEL: Coaching is typically done at a one-to-one level, sometimes at the team level. The benefit of that approach is that it's entirely tailored, but it's less scalable to the whole organization. Companies will often bring in coaches to work with senior leaders, maybe high-potentials, and then provide more scalable but generic solutions like online courses for the rest of the organization. I think that artificial intelligence will make tailored professional development resources more accessible to everyone.

There are already a few AI apps that are really marketed for personal and professional development. I tried one out and found it to be pretty good. I actually had to remind myself that I was interacting with software code, not a human being on the other end. And AI could have some real advantages over human coaches, because they have access to so much more data and case studies that could apply to a client's situation across the whole of the internet – of course, more than any human coach could keep in their head. They would remember everything you've said without taking notes, and they'd be available any time, day or night.

On the downside, AI apps do hallucinate sometimes. They can be just as biased as humans, depending on training data and parameters. And some people might be uncomfortable typing a lot of their personal information into a third-party app. But for some, AI could really be a great, great coaching solution.

At some point, I expect that organizations will each have their own customized AI coaching platforms tailored to their particular company, mission, values, goals that everyone in the organization can use to get really personal insights and coaching. But for now in this sort of in-between time, I think that coaches should experiment with AI tools that can help them better support their clients, and that's the approach that I'm taking for now.

KENNEALLY: You hold coaching sessions online, Amy. Does the virtual workplace present special challenges for publishers in developing high-performing teams?

BEISEL: Yeah, I've been fortunate to work in hybrid and remote settings for over 10 years. There are many upsides to remote work, and there are a couple downsides. I'll just talk about one scenario to talk about, which is meetings. To paint the scene, think back five or 10 years ago, pre-pandemic. I was working remotely. The rest of my team was in a conference room, like 20 people, and they had a speakerphone in the middle of this enormous conference table. Of course, I couldn't hear everything. I didn't always know



who was speaking. I certainly couldn't read the room. And I didn't want to just jump in as a disembodied voice from the table. So it was very hard to participate meaningfully. A lot of people have had this experience with conference rooms and speakerphones. The meeting dynamic is essentially everyone's huddled together in one room except that one person who's dialing in.

Fast-forward to 2020. Everyone is suddenly working remotely. Of course, it was pandemonium and tragic for a lot of reasons. One small silver lining of that very difficult period was that we all adopted better meeting technology. Everyone was remote, and therefore everyone in the meeting had an equal opportunity to participate. We're all little faces in squares on the screen. We all have a dog barking or a child crying or a doorbell ringing in the background. Now, we all have an equal opportunity to participate in the meeting, and we're a little more empathetic to each other's circumstances.

So as companies figure out return to office or hybrid work schedules, I'll offer this one little piece of advice for meetings. Either everyone is in the room or everyone joins by Zoom. You'll have better discussions and more engaged employees when everyone has the chance to participate equally.

KENNEALLY: What is the relationship of coach and client like, Amy Beisel? Do you relate to John Wooden's view that a great coach can change a life? Maybe you can share a success story.

BEISEL: I'd like to think that a great coach can change a life. At least, that's what I aspire to. So I'm happy to share a recent client story as an example. A client came to me with one particular challenge. She was managing a fully remote, cross-functional project team with people around the world. They were struggling with communication, accountability, meeting deadlines, and really just getting traction.

So as we dove into the particulars of her situation, I would often ask her, what would success look like here? What's the ideal outcome in your mind as that sort of Point B? And we would talk about what strengths, skills, and experience she could leverage to help her team communicate better, make real progress, meet their deadlines. Week after week, she made small changes that had an incredibly positive impact on the team.

As we continued working together, my client started applying those ideas to other parts of her professional life. So she started asking herself, what would success look like in her career? What would her ideal role be? What strengths, skills, and experience could she potentially bring to a different role?



Through those questions and our evolving coaching work, she decided to look for a different role that better aligned with her professional goals. Now, she felt really confident going into interviews, because she had done so much work to understand her strengths and her skills. And of course, now she could talk about her experience leading this successful team.

I recently learned that she received three job offers and accepted one with a double-digit pay increase that allows her to work on the things that really matter to her. That made my week.

So as I mentioned at the beginning, a coach is going to help you get from Point A to Point B, and then, like this client, potentially also Points C and D. It's a really close, supportive, dynamic relationship that helps you lean into new opportunities and experience real growth.

KENNEALLY: Amy Beisel, thanks so much for speaking with me today.

BEISEL: Thanks, Chris.

KENNEALLY: That's all for now. Our producer is Jeremy Brieske of Burst Marketing. You can subscribe to the program wherever you go for podcasts, and please do follow us on Twitter and on Facebook. You can also find Velocity of Content on YouTube as part of the CCC channel. I'm Christopher Kenneally. Thanks for joining us.

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