

Peter: Hey, welcome to episode 15 of Improv Is No Joke podcast. I'm Peter Margaritis here, and thank you very much for listening today. Today's guest is Hayden Williams, who was recently promoted to CFO at the Washington Society of CPAs. At the time of the interview, Hayden's role was the VP of Education, and the conversation is around the topic of professional education. I've known Hayden for about six years, we think. We met at a conference at the Stanley Hotel in Estes Park Colorado – just as a side note, the Stanley Hotel is where Stephen King got his inspiration in writing the novel *The Shining*. The hotel plays the movie 24-7, if you care to watch it while you stay in there. It is a wonderful hotel, but I didn't get a whole lot of sleep for those couple of nights I stayed there – As I've gotten to know Hayden over the years, I realize what a visionary he is in the areas of learning and development at the professional level. He has integrated technology in the classroom and online so that he can serve the members of the Washington Society of CPAs in their learning needs. For example, the Summer I was scheduled to present a course at the Washington Society of CPAs, but the enrollment in the class was low. There was some discussion about canceling the course, because the economics of bringing me out to Bellevue from Westerville is costly. We came up with the idea of holding the all-day course, but I was going to facilitate it from my office in Westville using Adobe Connect. Now I could see and hear the attendees, and they could see and hear me too. Long story short, it was a huge win-win for everyone. Being a visionary means taking risks, and Hayden, by far, is a visionary and an all-around great guy. Before we get to the interview with Hayden, I'd like to share with you a review that I received on iTunes from Alimacadam, who wrote, "Peter is such a great host, and his guests are just as amazing. Love the key concepts of the show, and the message that Peter's putting out there to his audience. I would definitely recommend this to any entrepreneur or business owner working to build up their business and improve their communication skills." Thank you so very much Alimacadam for that wonderful review. If you listen to this podcast, I would appreciate if you take a moment and write a review. It helps the podcast find greater visibility in the iTunes community. Here are the seven steps you need to take in order to leave a review:

1. Launch Apple's podcast app
2. Tap the search tab
3. Enter the name of the podcast you want to rate or review
4. Tap the blue search key at the bottom right
5. Tap the album art for the podcast
6. Tap the reviews tab
7. Tap "write a review" at the bottom and begin writing the review

Peter: If you'd like to leave a review but remain anonymous, all you have to do is go to your iTunes account information page, go to your settings and click, "Edit nickname." Also, if you're not signed up for the SN challenge, please go to my website PeterMargaritis.com and scroll down to the SN challenge call to action, and click to register to begin building the effective habit of "yes and," and the principles of improvisation. And remember to share your experiences on Twitter using the hashtag #yesandchallenge. By the way, I have been tweeting using this

hashtag. If you're not sure what the SN challenge is all about, please go back and listen to episode 0. This is where we discuss the SN challenge in more detail, so go back and take a listen. This week I'd like to share with you an article that was published on CNN, titled, [Why Using Improvisation to Teach Business skills is No Joke](#) by Mark Tutton. In one of the interviews for the article, it was stated that, "Improv teaches you how to think on your feet and how to react and adapt very quickly to unexpected events and things you may not have planned for," and, "It applies to leadership and it applies to negotiation, where you never have control over what happens ... Negotiation is a dynamic process -- you have to be able to think on your feet and adapt." I put a link to this article in the show notes, along with the link to an article that I publish titled, [Successful Negotiating In Corporate America](#). Well I believe my to-do list is completed, so without further ado, let's get to the interview with Hayden Williams.

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Hey, welcome to the Improv is No Joke podcast. This is Pete Margaritas your host, and today I'm interviewing Hayden Williams, Vice President of Education with the Washington Society of Certified Public Accountants. Hayden, welcome to the show, I greatly appreciate you taking time to be part of my podcast

Hayden: It's an honor Peter. Thank you.

Peter: Thank you very much. Hey, can you take a moment and tell us a little bit about yourself? About your background and what you do here at the Washington Society of CPAs.

Hayden: Sure. I am, as Peter said, the Vice President of Education for the society, and I started off as a CPA almost 20 years ago. I worked in a small public firm in Arizona, and from there I went on to become the vice president of education for the Arizona Society of CPAs. I worked there for about seven years and had a dream of living up in the Northwest, and had an opportunity to come up and be the CFO here at the Washington Society of CPAs, and so I started there. I worked two years as a CFO, and then was asked to transfer into education and run the education department here. So we provide about a thousand webcast and webinars to our members, 300 live programs – and we actually webcast a hundred of those – and then we have 15 conferences – and we webcast five of those conferences as well. So we're really heavy into the technology, and have been for about the last five years.

Peter: So how long have you been in the Association world?

Hayden: About 17 years.

Peter: And no matter whether it's the Washington Society of CPAs, or the Columbus bar association, or the real estate association, how have you seen the education landscape change during this period of time?

Hayden: Well in the last seven or six years, education has changed dramatically with the introduction of the internet – the internet was always here, but when the downturn in the economy came, I'm not sure if people were looking for new opportunities, or what it was, but there was an onslaught of education being provided via the web. So whether it was self-study, webcast or webinars, and that changed the landscape totally for CPE, where a state society or a county bar association had a geographic lock on education. That doesn't exist anymore. So where we had, seven years ago, 400 live programs and a few conferences, we actually had to reduce the number of live offerings and start in on the webcast seven years ago, because of the the change in technology, and the use of technology, for CPE purposes.

Peter: This change in technology. I'm happy to say that I understand Hayden's love for the Pacific Northwest, because I'm actually sitting in his office today, and it's actually sunny in Seattle.

Hayden: It's beautiful today.

Peter: It's absolutely beautiful today. But I've been in the continuing education business for quite some time, and what I can say is – I've known you for a number of years, we can't figure out exactly, 5 or 7 –

Hayden: Right

Peter: But the one thing that I've noticed about you, and the way you approach education, is you're very adaptable. You're not stuck in, "Well this is the way we've always done it," you have this approach and demeanor about, through conversation, how can we fix this? How can we make it better? In a lot of ways, I think a lot of other associations aren't going down that path. How have you been able to be successful and, you know, sometimes visionaries are chastised initially but once it's seen, then they're glorified. Can you speak to that?

Hayden: Yeah, well, it was clear after the downturn in the economy, I mean, the attendance at our live courses dropped dramatically, and we had to do something, and so we actually had seen a piece of equipment called a tricaster. I realized that, if I bought that tricaster and a

couple cameras, that I could do some of my own webcasts, and what would happen if we did something like that. Well as luck would have it, we actually did our first webcast before I was the VP of Education, and we had 300 people from all over the country attend this 990 course via webcast, and that that always stuck in the back of my mind. And so I thought we should be doing this on a regular basis, and so we bought the equipment and we actually started producing our own webcasts a week later. What we did was, we packaged them up and sent them off to a platform to replay out to, let's say, 46 states. And our ethics course had done very well, so we knew we had a hit there, so we've really embraced technology. We have partnerships with five or six states that we webcast, they were buying our webcast and we have webcasts that we purchased from other entities, and so we really embrace that technology. We're not worried about saturating the market. We will have a class, let's say on 1040s, and three days later we'll have a webcast of a 1040. What we're trying to do is penetrate the market as much possible with all forms of CPE, meaning webcasts, webinars, seminars. And it might be the same subject matter, but if we don't have that class for our members, somebody else is going to, and they can use the web to easily do it. So we came up with the concept seven years ago called the one-stop-shop. So we're trying to provide all of the self-study that they would need; all of the webcast and webinars that they would need; and conferences and live seminars. And that's really helped us. We haven't grown the market share, but we certainly maintained our market share, where I can tell you that a number of other societies and associations are decreasing. We've been pretty good about maintaining that market, because what's happened is the live seminar – what we call live butts in seats people actually coming to the event – has decreased. But we increased in self-study webcasts and webinars by really embracing technology, not being worried about stealing a live butt-in-seat for a webcast. What we've done is, we've known what's going to happen, someone is going to steal it, so we stole it ourselves, and that really has helped us.

Peter: So just so the audience knows, because whether they're at a CPA or the law profession or whatever, give me the definition or the difference between a webcast and a webinar.

Hayden: A webcast is a video and audio presentation with a powerpoint. A webinar is the audio and the powerpoint presentation, so the difference is you've got a talking head on a webcast. Now entities will use the webcast title, and it might be a webinar, and it really is just a marketing ploy because you get there and it's actually a webinar, but that's what you should expect when you hear a webcast. There should be about a video and audio portion to the powerpoint presentation.

Peter: And these webcasts that are video, they're live, they're not pre-recorded?

Hayden: Well, the webcast can be pre-recorded, but they're considered live. Now this is for CPA education, and maybe it's the same rules for other entities, but a webcast can be pre-recorded as long as the speaker is there, present, at the time of the showing, or the rebroadcast, so they're there to answer questions. Typically what happens is, somebody will have a question, they email it, and that speaker needs to be available to answer the question at the time, and that

is still considered live, even though it's been recorded. So it could be a live broadcast, and a speaker's there to answer your question live, or it could be pre-recorded, but this speaker is still there to answer your question live.

Peter: Okay, got it. And from a a a webcast perspective, you've been able to grow the size of your conferences dramatically by having them, or certain sessions within that conference, webcasted out to your audience? Whereas before there could be a lot of constraints that might not bring someone to your conference. Now they can attend, for lack of a better term, sitting at home having a cup of coffee in their slippers.

Hayden: That's right. So we've grown with the conferences that we do webcast, in some cases as much as twenty percent. So we've got a fairly sizable audience coming, 40 to 50 people, and we try to create an atmosphere. Because we've got three or four cameras at the conference, we try to create that atmosphere as if they were there themselves, and so we do close-up shots; we have what we call lower thirds, where we introduce the speaker across the bottom of the screen; and we change up the different camera angles, so that way people will pay attention. It's not just one shot. I think that it's important to have varied angles, so if they happen to look away or they lose their attention span, the camera angle will change and might bring their attention back to what's being said, and have them refocus

Peter: Yeah I can imagine that's a challenge. For anybody who's ever taken a webinar. The challenge of a webinar is maintaining that focus.

Hayden: That's right.

Peter: I have a greater opportunity to maintain the focus with a video feed on it, as well as just from the visual stimuli, by different camera angles, you're helping me try to stay focused –

Hayden: Right

Peter: Versus drifting off and — hey, what was that a squirrel that went... back now, okay.

Hayden: That's exactly right.

Peter: Okay, so what you want from cheeks in the seats seminars

Hayden: Right

Peter: Saw the that audience decline, but the webcast, webinars, self-study things maintain. You haven't lost market share, but you said that you've done better than most

Hayden: Right

Peter: And my question is, this is 2016, what is the future out there in continuing education for CPA's, for attorneys, for engineers, for realtors? What do you see out there as what's potentially next? What keeps you up at night, as it relates to this?

Hayden: CPE in general keeps me up at night. When I think about the vastness of what could be and what needs to be, I can't get my arms around it sometimes. What I'm working on next is, I think we still need to work with webcasts. I think they need to be more interactive. Webinars more interactive. I think that the speakers that are working in this venue need to also be thinking about how they can be creating an experience, if you will, for the web audience – because this is only going to grow. When I look at a classroom event that we have and we're broadcasting it live, and I may have eight people in the live course but I have 18 out on the web, that's the majority of your audience. So we have to start thinking about: how do we embrace that audience? How do we create that experience? So multiple cameras, having the speaker talk to the audience by using their names, knowing who is out there in the webcast, so you're engaging that audience. For the webcasts. The webinars, that's tough, but I think, also, there's engagement there. There's an opportunity to engage, and I think you have to use the folks that are on the webinar. You need to use their names when they're asking questions, ask people to ask questions, engage them differently. So I think there's also an opportunity in self-study where I think we need to start looking at how to create an interactive environment with self study, as well. A true interactive environment, where maybe the speaker is also available – not on demand, because that would be impossible – but the speaker that's doing the self-study might be available from 2:00 to 4:00 on Fridays, and so you would know that if you took a self-study program that that speaker was available from 2:00 to 4:00, and you could ask them a question about something that you were studying. I think that the Millennials, and the folks that are coming up after the Millennials, all they know is digital, and so we have to embrace digital on a constant basis. So we've got a lot of work ahead of us.

Peter: And as you were saying that, I'm thinking about my [course](#) today here.

Hayden: Yeah

Peter: And I made a comment, I said maybe seven eight years ago, if I came in and taught a course, and there's laptops up, and people are on their iPhones, I would feel... and I i left a blank. Someone said disrespected, and it probably along those lines, but not today. Because we have to remember, a lot of people, no matter whether they're Millennials, Gen X or baby boomers, they are taking notes on their laptops, are taking notes on their iPads, taking notes on the phone. As you're talking, we're thinking about this live audience and how to keep them engaged, this idea just popped into my head: Are we utilizing Twitter in that virtual space, to say, you know what, you may have a question. Why don't you use this hashtag? And there's some Twitter feed – I know there's platforms out there – that you can ask it from a virtual environment, and maybe a little bit more engaged versus I may have to call in, or there's a maybe a chat piece in there, maybe to turn it into a live stream. Actually I've seen – it's been awhile, but Tom hood with Maryland Association of CPAs.

Hayden: Right

Peter: He had a live Twitter stream going up one of his conferences so that people could ask questions. It just helped with that interaction, because CPAs aren't really the most gregarious people –

Hayden: Right.

Peter: So it inspired them to be able to ask questions without having to stand up, and maybe feel embarrassed. As you get this virtual world out there, how do we get them more engaged?

Hayden: Well one of the notions, and this is going to sound way out there, and this was about 4-5 years ago and have yet to see it, but what if you could have the live audience, and the remote audience, using the same platform to take the course. So imagine this: so everyone has an iPad, and there's a piece of software that the instructor runs on each of your iPads. You sign up, and the software is downloaded whether you're remote or you're in the course. So when the instructors teaching, the book's in this piece of software, and so when he turns his page remotely he turns your page, and you can take notes, and those notes would be annotated, and then after the course is done – this would be for both the remote and the live audience – that course goes up into their digital book shelf, where it stays. So everything now is completely paperless, but what you do is, you have taken the classroom and replicated it, but digitally. So then there could be opportunity in there to also type in questions to the speaker –

Peter: Mhm.

Hayden: and so there's that digital chat that I think most people are going to, when we think about the fact that I rarely talk to anyone. I text them. So I think we're going that way anyway, and I think you could get more involvement with something like that, but it's got to be a platform that everybody can use, so it's no different for the webcast audience and the live audience. Because I think you're still going to see people that want to take it live, and I think there's a lot of value in live. So what if we could have some type of software that would basically replace the book and the classroom situation, but we digitize the classroom so to speak.

Peter: Wow, that would keep me up at night. Probably will keep me up tonight just thinking about that. How do you do something like that? And I hear, in creating this classroom experience, which is outside of a compliance role, because even though we have to have X amount of hours in CPE, that's not the real meaning of CPE. It's learning. It's continually learning, not checking out the box, and if I've got these different platforms I have to be as engaged online at a webcast (or a webinar or self study) as I do if I'm live and in person.

Hayden: Right.

Peter: And I think that's a challenge a lot of organizations like yourself have, and I think you're doing a great job here in Washington in embracing that and engaging that audience to do this. I think the challenge is what's next in creating a classroom experience? And if I think about our audience, the size of the Millennial population has exceeded the size of the baby boomer population.

Hayden: That's right

Peter: So baby boomers are now number two. We're not number one. And the only way we can be number one again is... we'll never be number one again.

Hayden: That's right, we won't.

Peter: So we still need to respect that part of our audience. But I truly believe going in the way of digital and virtual mixed with live – because I still believe that there needs to be, at some point, some live – and having that blend, is really where the future of continuing education in the professional marketplace will move. If you're not moving down that space, you might be the next Blackberry

Hayden: Yeah, there's no question, and associations in general all are facing this exact same issue, and I would love to be the guy that has figured that out, and I hope I am at some point.

Peter: I think you're well on your way to being that guy. It's just resources, opportunity, but I think first and foremost, and I talk a lot about this to my class, I believe you understand your audience, and that is number one. I think once you understand that audience, understand how they tick – what makes them work – then you can adapt to that situation.

Hayden: Right

Peter: In order to provide a learning experience that they walk away, whether it's a 4-day course or a one hour course. So say, "If you can walk away with three takeaways from today, then I've done my job," and I believe that can be done in a virtual environment as well.

Hayden: Yeah, absolutely, absolutely.

Peter: Hayden, I'm glad I'm not you, because it doesn't look like you get a lot of sleep, but you know what? I don't get a lot of sleep too, because I think a lot about the same things. About where this is going, because it's part of my business model as well, but what I do know is that you are one of the national leaders in CP education in the United States, as relates to the CPA profession. I've enjoyed working with you for I can't remember how many years, but I don't care, and I enjoy our conversations. I thank you immensely for taking time out of your very hectic schedule to spend a little time with me talking about the future of continuing education, what you

have done, and what you've shared with our audience. And if somebody wants to get ahold of you, how can they get in contact with you?

Hayden: They can email me at hwilliams@WSCPA.org.

Peter: In the subject line, if they put, "Improv is no Joke podcast," just so you have an idea where this is coming from. Would that help?

Hayden: That would be great.

Peter: Super. Once again, thank you very much Hayden for your time. I look forward to interviewing you again here in the coming year or so to see what changes have been made, what changes you're making, and more importantly seeing the success that you're reaping from all the hard work that you've and selling well.

Hayden: I appreciate it Peter.

Peter: Take care.

Hayden: Bye