

Cheryl Broom (8s):

Hi, my name is Cheryl Broom and I'm the CEO of GradComm and today's guest is a near and dear friend and colleague who is currently the CEO, President at Blue Mountain Community College. But prior to becoming the president, he worked in marketing and Communications for the College of Western Idaho and North Idaho College. So Dr. Mark Browning has an amazing wealth of experience and Communications and marketing, and he's taken this experience to his new institution where he's made sure to hire a new marketing director and has already seen his college's enrollment numbers tick up following the pandemic.

Cheryl Broom (49s):

Mark got an extensive background in Communications media, government and public Relations and management, and he's a higher education leader who really believes in relationships and people and the worth of the calm and good for all. Mark's a great guest and I think you're really, really gonna enjoy this conversation. All right, Mark or Dr. Browning,

Mark Browning (1m 16s):

How about that? Huh?

Cheryl Broom (1m 19s):

I feel I can call you Mark. But you're now a college president, so you have earned that title. I'm very excited to have you on the podcast today. Thank you for joining.

Mark Browning (1m 30s):

Oh, It's my pleasure. I've been looking forward to this.

Cheryl Broom (1m 32s):

Oh, good. Well I'm so excited to have a conversation with you because you have such an, an incredible background. You and I have known each other for a long, long time and

Mark Browning (1m 41s):

Yeah, we were both very and kids at one point. Yes.

Cheryl Broom (1m 48s):

And you've had a really interesting career where you've done a lot in the college space, but you are a marketing director at a community college and now our president of one. And I think that journey is gonna be something that our listeners can really learn from.

Mark Browning (2m 2s):

Yeah, it has been one that would be hard to map out at the front end to end up here, but somehow we have managed to navigate it and it's been, it's been a great adventure all along the way. Absolutely.

Cheryl Broom (2m 14s):

Okay, well I have so many questions for you, but before we, before we get started, why don't you tell us a little bit about yourself, who you are, what college you're with, and then we'll dive into our conversation.

Mark Browning (2m 24s):

Sure. So my name is Mark Browning. I am the president of Blue Mountain Community College in Lovely Pendleton, Oregon, which if you do not know your Oregon geography, we're in the northeast part of the state, very close to the Columbia River and kind of close to the nexus of Idaho, Washington and Oregon, where they all come together. The really cool part about our area, it's, it's geographically, it's a really cool area, busix-fourt we're 45 minutes from Walla Walla and amazing wine country, so that's a plus. Yeah, it's a small town. We're out on the, the rolling wheat fields. We're on the, we're on the east side of the Blue Mountains, but the west side of the Cascades. And we've fallen into this just beautiful rolling kind of dry farm wheat fields.

Mark Browning (3m 8s):

So agriculture's very big here. We do actually quite a bit with data storage and Amazon Web, so we do a lot of cloud computing courses here. And then it's the rural interior west, so cowboys are still big here. It's not uncommon to actually see someone riding a horse around town. So it's kind of a fun combination of things. We have a really large service area and we have a main campus in Pendleton and then forest service areas that span about 16,500 square miles. Our district is three and a half hours from one side to the next north to south, about five hours over. Some really open and some fairly mountainous terrains.

Mark Browning (3m 48s):

So lot of acres, lot of miles, a lot of cows, not a lot of people.

Cheryl Broom (3m 54s):

So do you ever ride a horse in between your satellite campus?

Mark Browning (3m 59s):

Not well, no. I'm more of a motorcycle rider. I'm more of a dirt biker, so yeah, the, the cowboy thing does not, we love 'em here and we celebrate it, but I am, I'm not a good horse rider. I'm, I'm very good in the back of the wagon, not so much on the front end, the saddle. So yeah, my legs drag on the ground. It's gotta be.

Cheryl Broom (4m 19s):

I was gonna say, you're a really tall guy, so I don't Yeah,

Mark Browning (4m 22s):

I'm six four. Six four and a half. You gotta have like a percher under or a Shire or a Clydesdale to carry me around.

Cheryl Broom (4m 29s):

Like the Budweiser Clydesdale I could see you rolling around town with those.

Mark Browning (4m 33s):

Well, I like where they eventually end up cuz it's always close to, you know, close to, to the factory. So that's not a bad place to go

Cheryl Broom (4m 41s):

See, this is why you and I always got along so well when we were on the NCMPR board.

Mark Browning (4m 45s):

Yep. Absolutely. We knew where to go,

Cheryl Broom (4m 48s):

We knew where to go. Now, prior to becoming college president, you were the marketing director for college Now, was it in Idaho? Is that correct?

Mark Browning (4m 56s):

Yeah, so I spent quite a bit of time in Idaho. My first foray into education was at the Idaho State Board of Education and in Idaho that's a K to 20 board with oversight from everything from early childhood clear through doctorate programs. There are now, there are four community colleges in Idaho. And while I was at the state board, I did legislative work and Communications work for them. And I really found myself kind of aligning with the mission and the culture of a community college. And so an opportunity came to go and serve as in a vice presidency role at North Idaho College in Coe d'Alene. And went there for five years and loved it, did Communications government, Relations did, had the marketing and the community Relations departments and worked a lot there.

Mark Browning (5m 41s):

And that, that's where you and I first, first met on the N C N P R board. I was in Coeur d'Alene and beautiful campus and right on the, the, the banks of the lake. And that took me eventually back down to the Boise area where I was in a similar role at the College of Western Idaho, which was a new college at the time it was only five or six years old. And so we worked to get our original standalone accreditation much bigger. It was in a metro area. Boise Ampa Caldwell was the largest area in the country without a community college in 2007 when the college was voted into existence. And when we opened our doors in 2009, we had 1200 students. Our first semester we had 3,600 by the fall. Five years later we were knocking on the door of 30,000 students that were Wow.

Mark Browning (6m 23s):

So. it just ballooned. And yeah, that was a great and wild ride just dealing with all that growth and expansion and trying to find places to, to hold classes and yeah, that was, that was an incredible opportunity. And it, so between the two I had North Idaho College, which it was a 80 plus-year-old, you know, institution that had been around since 1933. And then CWI that came around really in the modern era. It was, it was a great background set that, that led me over here to Blue Mountain.

Cheryl Broom (6m 52s):

Wow. I can't imagine the chaos that happened with growth that quickly.

Mark Browning (6m 56s):

Way to describe it. Yeah, on our good days it was controlled chaos.

Cheryl Broom (7m 0s):

And what an exciting role for you to be in to help shepherd that growth. I mean, clearly there was a community need, but was anything else done to help get the word out or to drive that type of enrollment?

Mark Browning (7m 15s):

It really was Cheryl a a, a true partnership between business industry, community at large and, and the college. So the genesis of that college really was the college of technology at Boise State University, NBSU really wanted to kind of pivot and get more towards an R one research status. And they felt to do that they, they needed to kinda leave their roots behind. They had come up as an original junior college and then a comprehensive community college before they converted to a four years. So moving those programs over to what became the College of Western Idaho was really the genesis of it. And we really embraced that workforce and community education side of it.

Mark Browning (7m 54s):

And then when you had industry that needed so much customized training, it really was a great dovetail and we partnered well with the, the state legislature and the local counties to help make sure that we were in a position to do that. And it's really turned out to be one of the great success stories, I think for community colleges in, in now in the modern era.

Cheryl Broom (8m 12s):

Yeah, I would say so. And I'm sure it prepared you for the job now. I mean, how has all that work in the Communications arena prepared you to become a college president?

Mark Browning (8m 22s):

You know, these jobs Cheryl are really, they're so different than what they used to be perceived to be. It was someone who had been a tenured instructor or had an, an expansive background in perhaps student services. And those are all really important. But these jobs really do center on relationships and they center

on taking those relationships and finding the path forward that's gonna best serve that community. And then working those relationships such with your legislature, with your community groups and industries such that you can move the institution forward.

Mark Browning (9m 1s):

It's less about knowing all the intricacies of a pedagogy that's going to give you the best outcome there. It's less about knowing all the intricacies of financial aid or advising. It's more about relationships than being able to cultivate new ones. Fundraising. And it's a lot about what you and I used to do almost full-time, which was government relations. You are in a partnership with your state here in Oregon at this institution. Our largest funding stream is our local property taxpayer. So we're in a partnership with our counties and our property taxpayers and we have three counties that we serve. So for us it is really understanding how all that works and not just how you get more, but what you are delivering for that.

Mark Browning (9m 46s):

And then the communication of that message back, here's the return on your public dollar invested and here's what it's doing for you and your area. So that's where I think that preparation, this is something that we've talked about, you know, for years that people in the Communications side of community colleges often think, Hey, I'm gonna get to be the executive director of my department or maybe an AVP or maybe a VP and that's it. No, you're in the best position to serve as president because you understand message and that, and I really, I don't, I hate the term spin. The minute you spin you lose all credibility.

Mark Browning (10m 27s):

But an ability to message and understand what the message is, what it needs to be, and how to effectively communicate that, I think that puts you in the best position and, and the skills that you acquire as a marketing and Communications person. You understand messaging, you understand markets and communities and you know, I I, I just for years tried to get Communications people to embrace the role of government Relations. I'm like, I don't like politics. I don't wanna lobby. You're not lobbying, you're just communicating to another audience. That legislator or that committee or that the house or the Senate or whatever it might be.

Mark Browning (11m 7s):

That's just another audience. You're already doing the work. You should get credit for what you're doing. So that I think is probably the best preparation then being able to just, you know, sit and talk or stand and talk, know, know your institution and not just one side of it.

Cheryl Broom (11m 23s):

I, I love that focus on relationships. I remember when I, I was an interim director at Marita and then I had to apply for the permanent job and one of the questions in my final interview was about government Relations and how do you, what is the most important thing in government Relations? And my answer was

relationships. Yeah, absolutely. Because we had formed great relationships with our local legislators. So when we needed something, they were there. If we had a big event Yeah. They wanted to show up. We had a state assembly member who came to every single one of our citizenship ceremonies so he could hand out the citizenship certificates. Yeah. And was such a meaningful thing to the students.

Cheryl Broom (12m 4s):

And all of that was because we had invested time and resources into building relationships,

Mark Browning (12m 10s):

You had the credibility with that assembly person. Exactly. And, and that integrity and credibility build that relationship. And that's where I think the value comes from Communications people engaging in that work because you understand that that's your capital. Yes. That's what you have to work with.

Cheryl Broom (12m 28s):

Yeah. Yeah. And I, and I didn't know, and neither did my college president, every single assembly bill that was being voted on in the education world or you know, there, there wasn't need for that level of knowledge. But, you know, he would, he would call us because he needed an example for a speech. We would jump on it cuz that what a great opportunity to be showcased.

Mark Browning (12m 50s):

It's perfect. When you have that relationship, you really can lay back in the areas where, you know, there's just not some space or, or a need for you to be there. Yep. Knowing that really helps build you more capital because you're not in there messing around when there's really no role for you.

Cheryl Broom (13m 6s):

Now I know I have spoken over the years with a lot of either AVPs or, or even some deans of Communications cuz that's a popular change that's happening in California as, as directors moving into dean roles, how important was your doctorate degree in your pathway to becoming a college president? Is that something you would recommend to others looking to make that move?

Mark Browning (13m 31s):

I, I, I would and it's my path in higher ed is, is I am the quintessential first gen non-traditional. So I didn't not start my undergrad edu education until I was 39 and married.

Cheryl Broom (13m 44s):

Oh wow. Really? You were an old man. Just kidding.

Mark Browning (13m 48s):

I was an old man. Absolutly .No, you're absolutely right

Cheryl Broom (13m 50s):

To be 39 again

Mark Browning (13m 51s):

Yeah. Kim and I had a, our youngest son was five months old when I started classes at Idaho State University for my mass comp degree. Wow. And had no idea at the time that I would ever be in education. But I would give someone a similar amount of advice that someone gave to me. And I completely just threw it aside when they gave it to me. I, I finished my undergrad and two years later went to work at the state board and they immediately like, you gotta get your masters. Gotta get your masters. I'm like, no, I am done. You know, I'm in my mid-forties here. My kids are gonna go to college. But working in education, I saw the validity that that advanced credential would give you.

Mark Browning (14m 35s):

And once I started the coursework, I enjoyed it because the master's degree for me was about the industry and what we're working in. I did mine in public administration, So. it was very applicable. I I enjoyed that part of it. Maybe not some nights writing the long papers, but, you know, I'm past that now. When I got done someone said, oh you, you need to go enroll in in the doctorate program right now. And I'm like, why I, this is as far as I want to go. I don't aspire to be a president. I don't wanna be a provost, I don't want to do those things. I just want to do my thing. And my best friend talked me into it. He said, Hey, I'm gonna go, we're gonna go and this, so we took the one credit introduction class nearly got thrown out because we're a couple of kids and you know, can't control ourselves.

Mark Browning (15m 17s):

And we were disrupting class and it was a Zoom class back in 2013. And I thought, why am I doing this? Why am I away from my family two nights a week when I really don't want what the end outcome is? So I dropped out, I dropped out and our youngest son was in middle school and I thought, you know what? I, I worked in media for 23 years, worked nights, missed a lot of ball games and piano recitals and cub scout pack meetings and those kinds of things cuz I was working. I thought, I'm not doing that again. So dropped out and you know, you have a seventh or eighth grader, you understand middle school, there comes a point when they don't want you around. And for us, with our youngest, that got to be at about the time in his sophomore year of high school.

Mark Browning (16m 0s):

And then at that point I was thinking more, I'd had a couple of mentors who had said, look, given the background, this is where the industry is going. And I went, all right, I'll give it a whirl. So we jumped in in, in January of 17 and I did coursework straight through for, for three years. Pandemic hit right as I was taking my comps and starting dissertation. And, but I would encourage, if you have any thought of a future in higher ed, work towards that. You don't have to bomb through, keep working one class at a time. Lifelong learning

will keep you sharp. You taking a a class helps align you with that student that you might be trying to help or that other colleague and peer that you're working with who's trying to do that.

Mark Browning (16m 42s):

It gives you, you know, a point of alignment. And I think it's, you know, yes, there, there are things that you learn. And certainly in this position there is an amount of credibility that comes from, hey, you know, they saw it all the way through. They made the commitment, they made it work. And, and I still get a little freaked out when people call me doctor. I still like, are you kidding? No. Really? So it's just Mark.

Cheryl Broom (17m 11s):

Well, that's great advice. I, I mean I've always thought about doing a doctorate myself, but it has to be like you as three when the time is right. Yeah. And you can throw yourself into it. Cuz with children, I just, there's no way.

Mark Browning (17m 25s):

You're, you, you own your own business. You know, these are demanding positions and I was fortunate in that I had everything but my defense done when I came here. And so I was just finalizing some of the editing. It would be really difficult at, at your level as a business owner at this level as the c e o and president of this organization that demands on your time are such that you don't have a lot of extra time. So my advice, don't wait till you're 39 to get started and get after it.

Cheryl Broom (17m 55s):

No, I think the other lesson is even if you are 39, it's not too late to get started.

Mark Browning (18m 0s):

Yeah, absolutely. And the, the only I have very few regrets. I wish there had been a community college, college in my community to be able to do that first two years of coursework. I think I would have done better as it was, I was dedicated, I dialed in and Idaho State University was wonderful and they have a community college mission within their college of technology. But my general eds were all, you know, I sat in the big lecture room with 150 other students in biology one 10 and watched Captain Cap PowerPoint up there on the stage going through his flight plan, you know, of his PowerPoint and went, I was just as lost as the 18 year olds. I think a community college would've been wonderful to have that access.

Cheryl Broom (18m 38s):

Yeah. Well now that you are president and you do have such a demanding schedule, I don't believe you have a marketing director, right? Or is that position vacant at your college?

Mark Browning (18m 48s):

We just barely added one back, so yeah, boom. Oh great. It's been through a, a wild journey. At, at one point

we were about 4,500 full-time equivalent. So kind of medium right in the middle of the pack with the Oregon schools from essentially the end of the great recession. So 2011, 2012 until coming out of the pandemic in 22, 23, no Oregon school lost a bigger percentage of their enrollment than Blue Mountain. We are a third. The size that we were a number of really intense and deep cuts took place in the institution in 20 and 21. I got here mid 21, we had to do some more last spring.

Mark Browning (19m 30s):

I am very happy to report that this year we'll hold a budget steady. We won't eliminate any more instructional positions in our general fund. We have one contract with the state with corrections education that we're just gonna let expire because we don't get enrollment calculation off that. And quite frankly, we need to turn our attention to areas where we can grow enrollment, which with the upcoming potential for Pell, for prisoners that's coming out of the feds. That's an area we want to concentrate on. So in all of those cuts, the entire marketing department was eliminated in 2020. So when I came here, we, you know, there had been random things done and, and people are trying hard, but they, you know, this is a skill, it is a learned talent to navigate all the different avenues that are available to us now as marketers, you know, between digital and, and all the different things that can be done and how and when.

Mark Browning (20m 24s):

And really nothing had been done for a year and a half. And, and here's enrollment floundering. So one of the first things we did is go to work to find the money to replace that position. And we got a person in, at the start of last year, took us a year, right. And we got a person back in and we're already seeing results. Our enrollment's up two and a half percent this year and we're seeing results. So, you know, if if no one's telling your story, how do they know about you?

Cheryl Broom (20m 48s):

Yep. They just And that's such a, it's a position that always seems to end up on the chopping block when times get tough, but it's the one that's gonna help you turn the ship around.

Mark Browning (20m 59s):

I I, I know why. I don't understand why. And it's because we as marketers probably have, you know, everybody watches, shows, they see advertising and they feel like they're experts. Right. I know how to reach, Hey, I'm not interested in a 48 year old with masters. Right? I need the 27 year old who's got an \$800 truck payment over here who just simply can't hang Sheetrock anymore. That's why the marketing is always, oh, somebody can pick that up. We can run some ads, we'll get somebody to do it. The expertise that's needed for your local market is really best navigated by someone who knows the local market. And there are many other protections in, in place for a lot of the other employment classifications that just quite frankly, make it easier to go that way.

Mark Browning (21m 47s):

It's a really bad move. You know, when businesses are down, that's when you should be looking at expanding your marketing efforts. Right. It's business 101 when everybody else is retreating, you go out and you get it harder. So. Right.

Cheryl Broom (22m 1s):

And you don't stop just because things are great either.

Mark Browning (22m 4s):

You gotta go get more, stop

Cheryl Broom (22m 5s):

Telling your story and then there's always a turn. There's ups and downs and you have to be there the whole time.

Mark Browning (22m 12s):

Yeah. Someone's, if someone's gonna tell your story, it better be you.

Cheryl Broom (22m 15s):

It better be you. Exactly. How does a marketing director now, like now that you're a college president with your crazy schedule, how does that position support you and your goals? What are some advice you would give to maybe somebody new in a marketing position on how they can prove that they're valuable and serve their president?

Mark Browning (22m 35s):

You know, it's more than just setting up what's the run of the schedule gonna be? And here's the ads we're gonna run. This is our message, this is our new tagline, this is our hashtag. It's, it's really anticipating what, what the communication needs are going to be for your president who is here, there, and everywhere. And your day goes. You never know who you're going to talk to during the day. So having the materials available to you, do you have a fax at a glance? Do you have a strong digital presence that president can, can take their phone and text, look, here's a number of things, here's a QR code that would get you, you know, I can send you this. Boom gives you everything. Making sure that they have that information at their fingertips in a form that's digestible, easily digestible.

Mark Browning (23m 17s):

Because you, you just don't know as a president, am I gonna be talking to the CEO of the local tractor company in our area? Or am I looking, am I talking to someone who's looking for food processing help? Or am I dealing with someone at Amazon who's looking for another camp to teach people how to splice fiber? You know, you can have all that within two hours. So from a marketing and communication standpoint, make sure that you're anticipating the needs of all the different conversations that your, your president might have

and that they have that information and that they're kind of trained up. You know, you and I have an advantage in that we've been doing this kind of work on the other side, but you get presidents who really, sometimes they're not very comfortable in front of people.

Mark Browning (23m 60s):

And this is, you know, people, you've run in somebody an airplane or, well not with the airplane, but you're on the airplane and someone says, Hey, what do you do? Oh, I'm in the people business. What is that? Well, I'm, I'm in community college education, but I work with people. We provide opportunities for people to, to have a pathway to a better life. It's, I don't work in education, I work in the people business. Well, working with your president to be comfortable not in a pitch, but in storytelling and understanding that maybe they have to picture it in their mind that there are four slides right in front of 'em. Right. This is where I set up my story. This is where I introduced my characters. Here's the conflict, here's the resolution.

Mark Browning (24m 40s):

And slide five, you know, how do we get you into a class today? Right? Because it's all about enrollment and retention. So I think training storytellers, trying to get everybody on campus to understand that enrollment is just not the marketing and, and recruitment department's job. It's everyone's job retention is everyone's job. So yeah, all of those things I think are how Communications people can really help serve their, the presidency.

Cheryl Broom (25m 8s):

And I like that idea of anticipating your president's needs. And I think there are some, there are definitely some college presidents I've worked with who don't fully utilize their public information office. And so I think you need to be the one to go to your president and say, what, what can I help you with this week? Where can I, what can I provide you? Who are you meeting with? What, what do you need? And that helps elevate you as well to become more of a central role.

Mark Browning (25m 35s):

I I totally agree. Cheryl and, and you know, we're a small institution, so, you know, our, our person walks in, you know, the office on the other side of the wall. They walk right in and say, Hey, what do you got going this week? If you're at a larger institution or your chancellor's office, get to know the executive assistant. That's your gatekeeper. Hey, what's the president got going in the next two weeks? I've got some ideas on how I can help them. I know that a meeting with the board is coming or they're, you know, the, the legislative hearing is coming, coming. Here's some ideas. Can you get me 10 minutes? I'll have everything to you ahead of time. Just anticipate, try to be anticipatory as possible.

Cheryl Broom (26m 13s):

A little funny story, I used to, I went through, gosh, I think my college went through like seven. We had a big scandal and we went in and out, in and out of presidents. And one of the presidents I really loved working

with actually relied on my office a lot. But he was fantastic. He was a fundraiser, he was just so engaging. People wanted him to speak everywhere. So we did, we supported him a lot. Well, I wrote a speech for him and he couldn't read a speech. He had to have just bullet points. Cause he wanted to speak extemporaneously and it was a timed speech. He only had 20 minutes and he was very verbose. I literally wrote in one of the bullet points I wrote in all caps, DO NOT GO ON AND ON HERE.

Mark Browning (26m 58s):

Good advice.

Cheryl Broom (26m 59s):

He read it while he was speaking.

Mark Browning (27m 3s):

Oh, that's funny.

Cheryl Broom (27m 4s):

He looks around and he goes, do not go on and on here. And he looks up, he goes, oh, that was my PIO wrote that. Like, she knows me so well.

Mark Browning (27m 13s):

Oh, that's funny. I like it. That was so funny.

Cheryl Broom (27m 15s):

So anyway, I learned a lesson.

Mark Browning (27m 16s):

Good advice by the way.

Cheryl Broom (27m 19s):

He did speed it up after that. But it was like a, 400-person audience So. it got a good chuckle, but, wow.

Mark Browning (27m 25s):

That's funny.

Cheryl Broom (27m 26s):

Yeah. I think it's so rewarding as a marketing director, p i o when your president really leans on you, that's a very rewarding part of your job I think, to serve in that capacity.

Mark Browning (27m 38s):

And, and now that I'm on the other side of it, it is such a wonderful, it's not a crutch, but, but what a wonderful partnership to know that you have a person that you can't work with, that you don't have to figure everything out yourself. Right. Hey, you know, we've got this coming up. I'm kind of thinking this, what are you thinking here? We, we do a, you know, Pendleton is, is very traditional, a lot of ways local over the air radio is still very, very big here. And we have a local station that does a half hour every morning, five days a week, and they do something called the Coffee Hour. And even though it's a half hour and you know, various people, so I know second Monday of the month I got it eight 30 to nine, right?

Mark Browning (28m 20s):

What are we gonna do for coffee hour? What's gonna set us up best? What do we need to be talking about? You know, rather than reacting, how do we act and get proactive? So having those kinds of conversations, ahead of time. Wow. The, the value of a great Communications person, you just simply cannot put a value on it in my, in my mind.

Cheryl Broom (28m 39s):

That's great. That's the clip we're gonna use.

Mark Browning (28m 42s):

I love it. I love it. There's your soundbite

Cheryl Broom (28m 45s):

Yeah

Mark Browning (28m 47s):

That's the soundbite.

Cheryl Broom (28m 49s):

It's been so much fun talking to you and

Mark Browning (28m 51s):

Oh my gosh, it's been fun to catch up. We could go a couple hours, but I know, you know, you're an important CEO, you got things to do.

Cheryl Broom (28m 58s):

We could, I'm definitely gonna keep tabs on how your enrollment's doing. So it's great that you've made a swing and you're committed to, to getting out there and marketing again. So I'm hoping to see some success stories in the coming year.

Mark Browning (29m 9s):

You know, we're pretty excited. I've, I've been reading all these articles about the doom and gloom that's coming, right? The enrollment cliff is coming and people don't see the value in higher education. And for us here, it simply is just about shifting our direction. We've been really focused on two-year transfer degrees, and it's always gonna be a big part of what we do because we're the access point for students to go on and they want to get into a career and say accountancy or they want to go to law school or, or whatever they might want to do. But a big share of what we're gonna do is really gonna be about skill acquisition. You know, and we have expanding fields here in food production, in tech that are really, and our ag programs, the, the kinds of things that we're doing now with all the technology woven into the ag approach, but it's more and more concentrated.

Mark Browning (29m 59s):

It's no longer about a two year degree. It's maybe a nine-month certificate, maybe it's a six month certificate completion with, with a demonstration of skill. But the, there are great possibilities and that's what's exciting for us is that we've got different ways to go. We just need to have the courage to respond to them as an institution. And I'm, I'm excited for us.

Cheryl Broom (30m 18s):

Right. Well, I'm excited for you too and congratulations.

Mark Browning (30m 22s):

Thank you

Cheryl Broom (30m 22s):

on everything you've done and you've accomplished you

Mark Browning (30m 24s):

Too. Congratulations on, on your own firm. This is awesome. And I love seeing your success and gonna keep tabs on you too.

Cheryl Broom (30m 32s):

Excellent. That's a deal. You got it. All right, Dr. Browning, it was great to talk to you, and I hope you have a wonderful afternoon.

Mark Browning (30m 39s):

You too. You take care and all the success in the world. Talk to you soon.

Cheryl Broom (30m 44s):

That wraps up this month's episode of Higher Education Coffee and Conversation. I hope you enjoy the discussion and learn something new. And if you like the podcast, I would love it if you would leave us a

review and make sure to take a screenshot and email me or hit me up on LinkedIn and I'll send you one of our fantastic GradComm shot classes and a little something, something to go with it. On behalf of all of us at GradComm, thank you for listening and thank you for working hard to make higher education a reality for students across the nation. Until next time.