TOPcast Episode 57: “Do You Want a Degree with Those Fries?”
Education as an Employee Benefit

Narrator: What will your future look like? The job you do today could be different than the jobs of tomorrow. Some see this as a challenge. At UCF, we see opportunity, a chance for you to grow your knowledge, and strengthen your skills from anywhere life might take you. With in-demand degree programs and resources for your success, UCF Online can help you prepare for the future and all the possibilities that come with it.

(music transition)

Tom Cavanagh: From the University of Central Florida’s Center for Distributed Learning, I’m Tom Cavanagh.

Kelvin Thompson: And I’m Kelvin Thompson.

Tom: And you are listening to TOPcast: the Teaching Online Podcast.

Kelvin: Indeed.

Tom: Good morning Kelvin.

Kelvin: Good morning Tom, and might I say, “Happy New Year!”

Tom: Happy New Year! Yeah! And so, we are recording this in the morning.

Kelvin: Yes.

Tom: And you are getting ahead of yourself a little bit, I think, with the new year although by the time anybody’s listening to this…

Kelvin: That’s my point! We’re time traveling!

Tom: That’s right! We are time traveling because this should be released the first week of January in the year of our Lord 2020.


Tom: Yeah.

Kelvin: We’re going to have fun with that all year long, this 2020. “Let’s have a vision statement!”


Kelvin: (laughing) Ah, yeah.
Tom: So, you’ve just handed me my hot cup of joe, which I am stirring gently.

Kelvin: Indeed.

Tom: And while I am stirring maybe this is a good time to talk about something a little bit different that we’re going to do in 2020.

Kelvin: Yup, so let’s talk about that. So, this was your bright idea, and I think it’s going to work but it’s an experiment. We’re framing it as an experiment.

Tom: So, you’re officially putting it on the record that if it doesn’t go well, I can be blamed.

Kelvin: I’m just saying! I’m with you! You came up with it. So, if it works, yay! But I was behind you, and if it doesn’t work…I was convinced…I was—what was I? Complicit!

Tom: Complicit.

Kelvin: I was complicit.

Tom: Culpable! *(laughing)*

Kelvin: Culpable! That’s right.

Tom: Yeah.

Kelvin: I go to jail with you. So, we’ve had a…I guess there’s two things. Here’s how innovation happens, Tom. We’ve had a backlog of interviews. We’ve got a backlog of coffee. *(laughing)*

Tom: Yeah. Yeah, both of those things. That is true. Yeah.

Kelvin: And so, then you thought, “What do we do about all that stuff?”

Tom: Right. Well, yeah. We actually do have a certain amount of guilt on both of those fronts that we haven’t gotten to all the coffee and that we haven’t gotten to all the interviews, because we have so many great interviews with our colleagues from around from around the country. Actually, around the world!

Kelvin: Around the world!

Tom: Stay tuned, TOPcast listeners!

Kelvin: That’s a little foreshadowing.

Tom: That’s right. So, we thought rather than just hold them until we get to them, we would potentially increase the frequency of our TOPcast episode distribution for 2020. And so, the idea is that we would release two episodes a month.
Kelvin: Mhmm.

Tom: And the first one in the month would be one of our standard “Tom and Kelvin pontificating—”

Kelvin: “Talking in the closet.”

Tom: About something. Hopefully, of interest. And then the second one in the middle of the month would be one of these interviews, and they’re really interesting, a lot of them.

Kelvin: All of them.

Tom: We want to make sure people hear them.

Kelvin: All of them are interesting.

Tom: Actually…yeah. All of them are interesting.

Kelvin: (laughing) You should listen to all of them.

Tom: If not, it’s my fault. (laughing) It’s my half that’s not interesting. Yeah, but some of them are timely, too, and we want to make sure that they get out in a reasonable amount of time.

Kelvin: And we failed on that from 2019. (laughing)

Tom: Yeah.

Kelvin: 2018 into 19. So, I think this is what we’re going to do. First Monday of the month will be the first episode like normal—and as you said Tom, the in-studio kind of us—and probably the third Monday of the month, I’m guessing, will be the interview thing, and so we’ll keep that alternating thing we’ve had. It’s just there’s more of it. So, you have to let us know what you think about that.

Tom: Yeah. “Too much Tom and Kelvin!”

Kelvin: That’s right.

Tom: Let us know!

Kelvin: “If you just lop off the wraparound, I like the people that you [interviewed].” (laughing)

Tom: Yeah, but I think everybody will find those interviews really interesting, and we’ll try it for 2020. We think we have enough inventory or close to it that we should be able to pull this off, and we’ve met with our vast support team. (laughing)
Kelvin: Mhmm.
Tom: And I’m not even exaggerating.
Kelvin: It’s grown over time.
Tom: Yeah, and we could not do this by ourselves.
Kelvin: No.
Tom: That was a decision that did just not impact Kelvin and me. It was a group decision, and everybody seems to be on board.
Kelvin: Yeah! So, we’re gonna give it a shot.
Tom: Yup.
Kelvin: So, we’ll see.
Tom: Okay! So, I’ve had a couple of sips.
Kelvin: And?
Tom: And my usual question is…I mean, I like it. What’s in the thermos?
Kelvin: What is it? Yes, well, Tom, in a return to one of my favorite versions of the Coffee Connection, I brewed the coffee, but you chose it. So why don’t you tell us about today’s coffee?
Tom: (laughing) “What’s in the thermos, Tom?” Yeah. This is from TOPcast listener Gates Bryant, a friend of mine. We’ve done some work with [him]. Gates is a partner at Tyton Partners.
Kelvin: I did a webinar with him once. I think I filled in for you. So, that’s the closest we’ve been together. Virtual. On the same screen.
Tom: (laughing) And so, yeah, I’ve been on some committees and done quite a bit of work with Gates, and Tyton has done some work with us. So, Gates shared some coffees with us…Actually it was quite a while ago, and it was one of those backlogged coffees but we’re finally getting to it, Gates.
Kelvin: But you know? It’s drinkable! I think this is not bad. I like it! It’s fresh! Freshly ground this morning, just for you.
Tom: So, we are drinking this just prior to the holidays or in the holiday season of 2019, even though you are listening to this in 2020.
Kelvin: That’s right.
Tom: It’s appropriately titled—or called—“Jingle Juice.”

Kelvin: Ooh! I love that!

Tom: “Jingle Juice!”

Kelvin: Happy holidays!

Tom: It’s from Redeye Coffee Roasters in Hingham, Massachusetts, which is in the greater Boston area where Tyton and Gates are. And there’s a story behind it, which is why I thought it was appropriate with today’s episode.

Kelvin: I like me some coffee with a story. Let’s see what you got!

Tom: So, the person who started this coffee company started or was previously serving as a creative director in a marketing agency, and had a, you know, a hobby of roasting and brewing coffee and was able to turn that avocation into a vocation, and now that’s what he does! And Gates thought it was kind of an interesting example of the kind of difference that education can make to transform lives and to help people find their passions and achieve their dreams.

Kelvin: Yeah!

Tom: And I thought that made a lot of sense for today’s episode, so maybe I’ll turn the tables on you.

Kelvin: Yeah!

Tom: Do you get the connection?

Kelvin: Yeah! I can feel my way in the dark. I think that’s good.

Tom: (laughing)

Kelvin: There’s passion. There’s vocation. There’s, like, employability. There’s the transformative power of education. Those are all good story elements because in this episode we’re discussing the modern trend of education as a benefit, especially among large employers, and what that has to do with online education, and we’ll zoom in a little bit with an illustration of how these themes intersect with our work here at UCF so I get it.

Tom: Yup.

Kelvin: That makes sense! That was worth waiting for, this “Jingle Juice.”

Tom: (laughing) Good. Alright. Well, thank you Gates. So yeah, education as a benefit. If you are listening to TOPcast you probably are aware of this trend or at least some of the players in the space. And the idea is that companies are increasingly offering education to their employees beyond the more traditional, just tuition
reimbursement programs. So, a traditional tuition reimbursement program might require—and this is what I did when I got my MBA.

Kelvin: I was going to ask you that. I thought that you had been a part of an entity that offered that.

Tom: I was! That’s why I picked the school I did because the tuition fell right under what they would pay.

Kelvin: Uh huh.

Tom: And I was…I had to front the money, and then if you get a certain grade, they reimbursed you up to, you know, a certain limit and you had to, you know, kind of apply for that. These education as a benefit companies—these third-party companies that manage these programs on behalf of the bigger companies—typically arrange it so that the employees don’t have to front the money.

Kelvin: Yeah.

Tom: And that’s a big difference, and you will see higher adoption of these opportunities as a result of that, I think.

Kelvin: Yeah, although I guess in some situations, there is some money that’s paid in but it’s not nearly the “pay all of it” and then submit and wait.

Tom: Yeah, and every one of these is different depending upon the corporate culture. In many cases they will only pay for certain degrees. In other cases…If you think about the one that’s gotten a lot of publicity, the Walmart program that Guild Education is managing. We’ll do a full disclosure on Guild because we are working with Guild. I think Walmart calls it $1 a day.

Kelvin: Right.

Tom: And the employees have to pay the equivalent of, you know, $365. $1 a day. So that’s their, you know, personal match, and then the company picks up the rest for some approved degrees.

Kelvin: Which is a whole lot better than fronting a couple thousand bucks.

Tom: Exactly.

Kelvin: Which, just to comment on this, right? The traditional stuff, like your experience that you told us, some of the criticisms I’ve read are that, that sounds good, but it ends up not getting nearly the engagement with employees that one might hope for.

Tom: Yeah.
Kelvin: And you turned me on to this episode of EdSurge on Air that Jeff Young did kind of related to this topic, and he made this point that it’s the folks who can afford to upfront the money—

Tom: Right! Right.

Kelvin: —that engage. Maybe your executives and all, which is not—which is great, which is wonderful—but for the individuals involved, not so great if you don’t have the cash flow to take advantage of it, so that’s where these new—

Tom: Yeah, and I think it was…He interviews a number of people in that episode including Rachel Carlson, the CEO of Guild, and I think she makes that point, as well. We’ll link to that episode in our show notes, and thanks to Jeff for that. I think it’s a really well-done episode.

Kelvin: Part of a two-episode series!

Tom: It is! Yeah, and the second one is the one that has that comment that we’re talking about, but interesting, the first one talks a little bit about the hourly frontline workers and just, you know, the challenges associated with working in those kinds of jobs. And one of the criticisms of these programs is that yeah, you may offer these programs as an employer, and that’s great PR, but these people are being scheduled in such a way that they can’t even take advantage of online education with all of its, you know, inherit flexibility.

Kelvin: Yeah, so you’ve boxed them into a corner somehow.

Tom: Right. You know, he talks a lot about this idea of the “clopen” where you get scheduled for a close and then an open and then you know, a human being…It makes sense by an algorithm who’s doing the scheduling, but human beings have to, you know, actually live that way and have predictability in your scheduling.

Kelvin: It’s very sad.

Tom: Yeah, I get it, but you know, to your point earlier about, you know, bringing this back to online learning. It’s only through online learning that you can even give people who have those kinds of struggles a path, you know?

Kelvin: Right! We’ve talked a lot about that here before—maybe in our episode with our friend Chuck Dziuban here—opportunity. That’s what online especially and various forms of digital learning, adaptive learning do is they provide opportunity through flexibility.

Tom: Yeah.

Kelvin: Which is powerful.

Tom: Well, a big one that got a lot of press number of years ago—I’m sure everybody’s heard of it—is the Starbucks program with Arizona State.
Kelvin: Yup.

Tom: And in our conversations with ASU, my understanding—and in reading some of the public stuff that they’ve talked about—I think they have 10,000 baristas and other Starbucks employees in that program, and the last number I heard which may not be current was I think they had graduated at least 2,000. And so that one’s been really successful, and it shows the power of the partnership.

Kelvin: It’s the earliest big one that I can remember. That goes back. That’s like five years old. Can you believe that?

Tom: Yeah, I know.

Kelvin: That’s like 2014.

Tom: Yeah, and it’s interesting because ASU has now kind of turned that model into another company very much like a Guild Education but with some differences, called InStride. There’s another one out there that is run by Pearson—Pearson Accelerated Pathways—and they just bought a company called Lou Merritt that does this. And you can see some big players in the space kind of coalescing around this opportunity, because the unemployment rate is low, and employers see this as a retention strategy.

Kelvin: Yup.

Tom: And frankly, there’s an ROI for this. It’s a lot cheaper to keep your employees and skill them up than it is to try and go and recruit new employees when they’re leaving and you have a high turnover.

Kelvin: Yeah, and you know, those aspirations are the same as the traditional education-as-a-benefit, right? The International Foundation of Employee Benefit Plans—who knew there was such a thing?

Tom: Yeah!

Kelvin: —did this 2019 survey, and it’s like 92% of American employers offer some kind of an education as a benefit.

Tom: Wow.

Kelvin: But that’s, of course, predominantly the traditional kind, and the reasons they did it? Exactly what you said. Recruitment, retention is the biggest goal, but the biggest problem with it is how expensive it is.

Tom: Yeah.

Kelvin: And that you don’t get it always right and so people get ticked off about how, you know, they aren’t or are accommodated or whatever. So, these new companies and these new efforts make things better, hopefully.
Tom: And in the past, as I said, traditionally these programs have restricted the kinds of degrees or programs you can pursue. You know, related to business or IT or something that is directly related to your particular profession if you’re in health care or something like that.

Kelvin: Which you can understand.

Tom: Absolutely! You know, as a capitalist, I get it.

Kelvin: Right.

Tom: But there is also a benefit in retention and others in opening that aperture a little bit and letting people kind of have a little more freedom and flexibility. When you look at the Starbucks program, you know, that’s—

Kelvin: It’s kind of quintessential.

Tom: It is.

Kelvin: Makes the case.

Tom: Yeah, and I mentioned we are working with Guild. We’re part of the Disney Aspire program.

Kelvin: You want to talk about that a little bit? How we got there and…?

Tom: Sure, but before I do, just to kind of close that thought, that Disney may not let you study whatever you want, but it’s pretty darn close. We currently have, I think, 70 different programs available to Disney employees, or at least their hourly frontline employees who meet, you know, requirements. And you name it, it’s on that list, so it’s not very restrictive in my opinion. Of 70 programs—undergrad and grad—I think you can find pretty much anything that you’re going to be interested in. So, you know, good for Starbucks. Good for Disney. Yeah, so I could talk a bit about that. You know, we’re here in Orlando, if you haven’t noticed, and…

Kelvin: *(Mickey Mouse impersonation)* Oh boy!

Tom: Yeah. There are only a few employers bigger than UCF.

Kelvin: *(laughing)* There’s at least one with a mouse running the show.

Tom: Yeah. So, our friends at Disney—and, you know, we’ve partnered with Disney Company and Walt Disney World for years as an institution. So, we’ve got a longstanding relationship with them, and it just sort of made sense for us to support them and their desire to help their employees. Here in Orlando, I think there’s something like 53,000 eligible hourly employees who could take advantage of Disney Aspire, and what that does is it lets the hourly employees pursue higher education if they have 90 days of continuous service.
Kelvin: 90 days!

Tom: Yeah.

Kelvin: I mean, that’s great.

Tom: Yeah.

Kelvin: That’s like a probationary period.

Tom: Yeah. So, at the time that we’re recording this, we’ve been in it really for one semester. We kind of launched it over the summer, we’ve run it for the fall of 2019, and we had, I think, tremendous response. We’ve had hundreds of students that want to be a part of this and interestingly, about—at least this first batch of students—a good percentage of them—I want to say between 30 and 40% of them—were already students at UCF. So, now Disney is paying for the education that they were previously paying for.

Kelvin: That just makes it better.

Tom: Yeah.

Kelvin: I ran across this quote from our interim president here at UCF, Thad Seymour, that kind of makes that point which I really so appreciate. I wrote it down. “Many of our UCF students already are Disney employees”—which is what you just said—“who will ultimately benefit, and this program has the potential to change lives in our community for generations.”

Tom: Yeah.

Kelvin: See, that to me…I have to come back to stuff like that, right? You know, corporate and benefit. This is what we’re trying to do.

Tom: Yeah.

Kelvin: You’re trying to make a clearer, smoother path for folks who wouldn’t necessarily get a higher education through these innovative models and in our world, the educational technology/digital learning part of it, too.

Tom: Yeah, and you know, I personally find it inspiring, and it reminds me why I am doing this instead of the corporate training that I did prior to getting into higher education. I spent a half a day out at Walt Disney World at their Disney Aspire Expo here in town. We also sent a team out to Anaheim to meet with folks out there, but I participated in the one here. I was just so inspired by the students that I spoke to. The potential students. Not all of them I think are going to be a good fit for UCF. Some of them might be a better fit for our partner at Valencia College. Or maybe some, you know, get your high school degree, kind of, you know, but all of those are offered within Disney Aspire.
Kelvin: Which I thought was great! It’s not just “go to college.”

Tom: Yeah.

Kelvin: It’s “complete your high school [degree].”

Tom: Yeah, and they even are now doing some language training and some other kinds of things so you can learn English if you don’t, you know, speak, you know, Business English and whatever. But in talking to the students I interacted with, I just found it super inspiring and, you know, drove back to campus just feeling like we were doing the right thing.

Kelvin: Yeah, you’ve sent a link—which we’re going to put in the show notes—to this video that Disney put together of one of their cast members getting the word that she’s going to be able to go to college at UCF because of this program.

Tom: Right.

Kelvin: I have watched that thing probably five times, and I cannot watch—what is it 30 seconds? A minute?

Tom: I know!

Kelvin: I can’t watch it without tearing up.

Tom: I know!

Kelvin: Every single time!

Tom: It gets dusty in the room every time I watch it. She’s so happy, and her bosses—because they’re the ones that surprise her with the admissions acceptance and it’s great.

Kelvin: Yeah.

Tom: So, it’s really inspiring, and you know, I think I’ll include a link to a Tweet I did after I spent a morning out at Disney. They had a couple of these banners with all these Sharpies on it, and the students could go and write sort of self-affirmation kind of sayings or things. Like, you know, “I will do this.” You know, “I will accomplish this.”

Kelvin: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Tom: I took a picture of at least one of them. There were two of them and they were huge. They covered a giant table and that in and of itself was really inspiring.

Kelvin: See that’s the reason, right?

Tom: Right.
Kelvin: I mean, that’s what you’re shooting for here.

Tom: Absolutely. And so, beyond Disney…So, Disney is our personal experience within the past semester, but when you look at some of the others, we talked about Starbucks. ASU’s also working with Uber, and Guild is also working with Walmart and Chipotle and Lyft. Papa John’s signed a deal with Purdue Global. I saw a big sign in the local Papa John’s when I got a pizza about “get your degree.” Drive for us and get your degree from Purdue Global. It filled a window. I thought that was pretty cool.

Kelvin: Well it is. I mean, we’ve talked before like if we’re really going to try to move the needle on degree attainment—I mean, I know it’s also a trend which we should probably talk about at some point, Tom, these, you know, smaller credentials, non-degree, little certifications, and stackable credentials at the especially two-year schools and all—but if you’re going to move the needle on degree attainment, it’s going to take stuff like this.

Tom: Yeah. So, all right. I’m a believer in it.

Kelvin: Uh huh.

Tom: For what it’s worth.

Kelvin: Yup.

Tom: I totally have drunk the Kool Aid on this one.

Kelvin: Is there a but coming?

Tom: Yeah, but there are people who have concerns, right? And we’ll link to some of these concerns. So, here’s one that I’ve read. So, we know that the employers typically will cover up to the tax threshold of $5,250, and some have expressed a concern that policymakers will view the growth of these kinds of programs as an evolution that means they don’t have to fund it. So, that the…Like healthcare. Like rather than…So, some people feel like we should have a national healthcare and that should be publicly funded, and people worry that policymakers will stop funding public education and say, “Well, that’s now become the responsibility of employers.” And if you don’t have one of these jobs that offers it, then you are going to be locked out of that sort of opportunity. Who knows? It’s an interesting concern, though, and probably one worth putting on the table.

Kelvin: Yeah. I’ve also seen some criticisms—and I would just say, before I say the criticism, I would say this is why we need good data and good research always—but one criticism I read of even the newer models is okay, we purport to be making a straighter path for underserved populations, but there were some assertions I read in one analysis that, well, often underserved populations don’t do as well in these new models and online education and so forth, so you know that’s disingenuous to say that you’re going to help people. I just think we need better data, and I think we need research and let’s take a look and see what’s happening. I think the aspirations are definitely there, though.
Tom: Yeah.

Kelvin: And our experience here has been for years that our underserved populations are not disadvantaged by online education, I would say.

Tom: No, certainly not at UCF.

Kelvin: That’s right.

Tom: They perform as well as if not in some cases a little bit better, but particularly in blended.

Kelvin: That’s right.

Tom: Yeah.

Kelvin: That’s right.

Tom: I will say that the Guild partnership with UCF—the Disney Aspire partnership in particular—is not limited to online education.

Kelvin: Right!

Tom: So that’s just, I think, an advantage of geography for us.

Kelvin: That’s right.

Tom: So, we have a number of programs that are not online that are available to students. We do have a regional campus that is, like, just six miles from the front door of Disney World and so that’s available to students as well.

Kelvin: Yeah. I know our coffee is dwindling.

Tom: Yeah.

Kelvin: Anything else that you can think of that we need to mention that we didn’t about either our experience or this phenomenon in general?

Tom: Maybe two last thoughts. So, one is the investment world, I think, sees value in—whether that’s venture cap or whatever—sees value in these programs because Guild Education recently just became what they call a unicorn, which is it’s got a billion dollars of market cap, and that’s not insignificant, and it’s one of only a handful of companies that is a unicorn that is led by a female CEO. So, I think that’s interesting, and it’s worth watching. The market will be watching these companies very, very closely. InStride, which is ASU’s company that they have started with The Rise Fund, which is a big venture capital fund. It has been set up as a public benefit corporation, which means in addition to the bottom line, they are also measuring themselves on social impact, which is interesting, as well.
Kelvin: Yeah.

Tom: And maybe the second thing that I’ll mention is that there is a McKinsey report that came out that talks about the future of work, and I think these companies, in addition to a retention strategy for tuition benefits, are also looking to try to identify future pathways for students—employees, I guess I should say—in jobs that are going to be potentially replaced by automation or other kinds of things because when you think about the sort of frontline retail workers, in Jeff Young’s podcast—

Kelvin: I was just thinking that.

Tom: —he talks about McDonald’s, and he talks to an executive at McDonald’s responsible for their Archways to Opportunity program, which is their program.

Kelvin: Right.

Tom: But have you been in a McDonald’s lately?

Kelvin: Mhmm.

Tom: There’s an awful lot of kiosks.

Kelvin: Kiosks, yeah.

Tom: And people are starting to be replaced, so how can you reskill your existing worker population? Partnering with an education company or an education provider like UCF or whoever is one pathway to do that.

Kelvin: And there’s two different thoughts there, right? Reskilling or upskilling versus de-skilling, and you want the first. You don’t want the latter. (laughing)

Tom: Yeah, absolutely! But I don’t know. I tend to be maybe naive and optimistic, and I think people’s hearts are in the right place when it comes to this, and if people’s hearts being in the right place can intersect with positive market forces, like profit motives, then it can be really powerful.

Kelvin: But we should collect data, analyze the data, and see how we’re doing and how we can improve. This is all still in its infancy, really, these new things.

Tom: Yeah, really is, and I’m glad to be part of it. I think it certainly is consistent with our mission as a public university

Kelvin: Absolutely. That’s right.

Tom: Okay. So, do you want me to—

Kelvin: Try to put a button/bow/runway on it? (laughing)
Tom: Alright. *(laughing)* If you say so. So, higher education benefits both individuals and society and education as an employee benefit, though, has the potential to increase college degree attainment by providing better higher education access to underrepresented populations in the service sector, those frontline hourly workers.

Kelvin: Yup.

Tom: Online education is an accelerator for this effort.

Kelvin: Yeah.

Tom: You know, I’ve used my mom as an example, and although it’s a little bit different, she was a nurse before she retired and worked the graveyard shift in the ICU for many, many years. And if she had wanted to go back to school, she was not going to be able to go to Monday, Wednesday, Friday at 10 o’clock in the morning.

Kelvin: Right.

Tom: Online education would have been the only pathway for somebody in a job like that, and if you think about somebody who’s working an hourly shift, as in the first part of Jeff’s two-part podcast, you’ll hear how the retail and hourly workers schedules are not predictable.

Kelvin: No!

Tom: And it’s really hard.

Kelvin: Not human friendly!

Tom: Right! Yeah! So, in some cases, they don’t even know until that week, which, you know, all kinds of implications: childcare and just being with your spouse or whatever.

Kelvin: Right.

Tom: But when you think about trying to work into a semester’s, you know, schedule of classes, it just doesn’t work. Online is the only way to make it work.

Kelvin: Yeah.

Tom: So, you want to do a plug?

Kelvin: Sure!

Tom: I think we have one, right?
Kelvin: We do. We’ll try to make it brief but TOPcast listener, Jason Johnston, who is the Director of Teaching and Learning at the University of Kentucky, left the following review on Apple Podcasts. He says, “I work in higher education and daily navigate the complexities of guiding and practicing quality online education. This podcast understands the current strengths and challenges of distance and blended learning, because the hosts are actually doing it. Full of timely topics, content, and guests but with light hearted banter saving it from banality. Great work Tom, Kelvin, and UCF!” See, that’s my favorite line, right? The banter saves us from banality.

Tom: *(laughing)*

Kelvin: I love that.

Tom: Yeah, we were saying before we hit record, there’s a bumper sticker if I ever saw one!

Kelvin: We may add that to the TOPcast store! *(laughing)*

Tom: *(laughing)* The banter saves us from banality. Wow. Hopefully, that doesn’t mean the rest of what we’re talking about is banal or however it’s pronounced.

Kelvin: Yeah, that’s right.

Tom: Banal. That’s awesome. Thank you, Jason.

Kelvin: Yeah, that was great. Well I think that’s about it.

Tom: Yeah! I think my coffee’s gone. Thank you to Gates Bryant for the coffee and the story!

Kelvin: Indeed. Thanks Gates.

Tom: And I think our time is up. So, until next time, for TOPcast, I’m Tom.

Kelvin: I’m Kelvin.

Tom: See ya!