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YSP Podcast Transcript: 461 - A.I. Won't Save You: The Real Shift Strata Managers Need to Make

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Intro: Welcome to Your Strata Property, the podcast for property owners looking for reliable, accurate and bite-sized information from an experienced and authoritative source.

Amanda Farmer: Hello, and welcome to this week's podcast episode, a solo episode from me. Today I've set aside a little more time than usual to prepare for and record this one, because this topic has been on my mind for some time now, probably at least since the beginning of this year.

It's 2025, and because the universe kind of works in this way, the more I think about it, the more I see the signs around me that others are thinking the same way, especially in our strata circles. And by the way, that's a proven phenomenon. It's basically that experience where you're thinking about buying a particular type of car or you've just bought one and you're driving it around, and then you see that car everywhere.

The things we focus on start to show up in our lives. It's not woo-woo, it is science. Check it out. So anyway, if you will humor me, I want to share these thoughts with you today because if I'm right about what I'm noticing out there, I think these thoughts will resonate with you, too. And a heads up today, I will also be inviting you to a brand new online training, a webinar that I've put together specifically with our strata managers in mind, but open to everyone. I'll tell you more about that towards the end of today's episode.

So here's what I'm noticing. Over the past couple of months, I've been having one-on-one conversations with a number of strata managers. I've also been quietly watching what is being posted on LinkedIn, which is always a hotbed of opinion about what's going on in our strata space. Yes, there are the usual voices from strata thought leaders, but I'm seeing more and more managers, both business owners and employees, getting the confidence to publicly share their own views about their day-to-day work.

And I suspect that confidence partly comes from easier access to AI tools that help us to articulate our views in bite-sized, social media-friendly chunks. It's never been easier to give ChatGPT a rough outline of how you're feeling about a particular issue and have it reworked into a polished LinkedIn post, complete with emojis and weird punctuation. I'm going to come back to this proliferation of AI in a moment, but here's the real shift that I think I'm noticing.

It's subtle, but it's there. More strata managers are recognising that the traditional ways of running a strata management business are not working, and to be honest, haven't been working for quite some time. There is less faith in a business model that's focused simply on bringing on more and more buildings for more and more revenue, with fingers crossed that that will translate into larger and larger profits. It often doesn't.

By the way, I spoke to a manager this week who told me that in his old company, the mantra was, "It's fine if we lose one building as long as we bring on two more in replacement." Here's the truth. Bringing on more and more buildings may bring more revenue into a business, but it doesn't necessarily make for more profitable businesses or happier, more fulfilled employees. And it certainly doesn't make for more satisfied clients who are then dealing with a strata manager who is stretched ever more thinly.

So this is the realisation I see dawning in our strata management circles. And no, it's not something new. This has been a shift in our workplaces generally, I think, for some time. The pandemic certainly sped it up. More of us are looking for meaning from our work, not just money. Some say that's a generational shift. Younger people are more motivated by their employer's values or the company's mission rather than their salary package.

I think it's a little bigger than that. I think everyone, whatever age, needs to, wants to find meaning in their work. I'm a little more persuaded by the view that this is a cultural or societal change rather than generational. That just means these ideas are more mainstream than they have been before. And strata owners are tuned in to this shift, too. I'm seeing more posts on Facebook, comments on Facebook from strata owners, things to the effect that the largest strata management companies are the worst, meaning they provide the worst service in the eyes of the owners.

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Often in their eyes, it's the largest companies that are most likely to abuse their positions and accept third-party payments, commissions, benefits disclosed or otherwise. That's certainly also been the view of our media. When reporting on these practices, they've certainly focused on the big guys, and meanwhile, the little guys, the smaller operators, they're standing tall on social media proudly declaring that they do not accept commissions, third-party benefits or payments.

That's a powerful stance, and it's resonating with owners. They're noticing that it's the large management companies trying desperately to hang on to these old-fashioned, conflict-ridden ways of being remunerated. The large companies are the ones bending the era of government, trying to delay what I personally sincerely hope is the inevitable. At least in New South Wales, the banning of commissions. So from the business perspective, I see a move toward good customer service or a desire to move toward good customer service, and a desire to move away from growth for growth's sake.

At least in a lot of the smaller, perhaps newer companies that are cropping up, that are being led by the former employees of these larger companies. Those people have broken away trying to build something different, something better. At the end of the day, I think that's always a good thing for strata owners. More competition, more choice, more opportunity to explore a different way of being managed. From the individual manager's perspective, whether you're a business owner or you're an employee, I see a realisation.

When I'm having these conversations with your strata managers, you're telling me that no amount of money is worth sacrificing your health, your relationships or your sense of what is your true purpose in life. That sense of meaning, yes. There is a growing desire for more meaningful work, more freedom to choose more respect from those you work with, whether they're your clients or your colleagues. More time, more opportunity for creativity.

There is a reordering of priorities, if you like, prioritising your health, your family, your well-being and happiness ahead of financial reward. Now, I've intentionally said that this is a prioritising of these things ahead of financial reward. It's not a replacement of financial reward, and nor should it be. Everyone doing work of value deserves fair compensation. I am certainly not advocating donating all of your time to charitable causes, though of course, that might be something that you might be able to choose to do with some of your time if you have that freedom to choose.

I believe it is possible to be healthy, to have healthy, fulfilling relationships, to have the freedom to choose what you want to do with your life, and to have a thriving, financially successful and rewarding business or career. It's not an either/or; it is both. And I believe this in large part because I live it. This is a powerful secret. When you look after your health, your relationships, your happiness, you can actually build a thriving business or career hand in hand.

One feeds the other. About eight years ago, I made some big changes to my business. I realised that trading time for money was not sustainable, at least not at the level that I wanted to be able to serve my clients. I realised that the difference I was making in my client's lives was incredibly valuable and that needed to be reflected in my pricing. And I realised that I enjoyed certain types of legal work more than others and that it was okay to focus on what I enjoyed the most.

So I committed to making a change, not overnight, but gradually, step by step, and those steps have led to the business that I have today. I still love the one-to-one client work in my legal practice, but now a substantial part of my business is in education, training, speaking online and offline for both strata owners and strata managers. Now, there were a number of things that I had to get serious about and clear on in order to build a business like this, and there are still a number of things that I have to continue to do and to be disciplined about so that I can maintain and continue to grow this business in the way that I want to see it grow.

I'm going to be sharing more about my commitment to change and the steps that I took and continue to take on the webinar this week. Now I've prepared this webinar specifically with strata managers in mind. It is called From Burnout to Boundaries, three counterintuitive ways to reclaim your time as a strata manager, and I focus this webinar on identifying particular time traps because in my conversations with you, strata managers, what keeps coming up again and again is I don't have enough time.

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There aren't enough hours in the day. I am overwhelmed, overworked, and I am burning out. The emails just keep coming. I don't know how to make it stop. I'm thinking of walking away, but deep down I love what I do. I enjoy helping the people I help, and I want to find a better way if it exists. That's some of what we're going to be talking about on the Burnout to Boundaries webinar.

It is happening at midday Sydney time. That is on Thursday, 4th September 2025. It's free, but you do need to be registered to attend. You can do that over at yourstrataproperty.com.au/webinar. If you are listening to this pod after that date, there may still be time to hit that page. Same page. You may be able to catch the limited-time replay as well as the opportunity to take some next steps with me, which I'll be saying more about live on the webinar.

I do this week plan to share a few personal things publicly for the first time. Explaining why I've made certain decisions in my business, how that has impacted my life, and answering questions that many people have asked me again and again over the years. Lawyers, strata managers, committee members, and owners, about how and why I do things the way I do. I want to share these things with the intention of helping you, too, to think differently about the way you work, the way you serve your clients, and the way that you value and protect your time.

This is not another productivity hacks webinar. You can Google those kinds of things. You don't need me to show them to you. This is something deeper than that. I'll be inviting you to commit to real foundational changes in the way that you think about and approach your work as a strata manager. So yes, this webinar is for strata managers, but you don't have to be one to join us.

If you are an owner or a committee member or you're just someone curious, you will get a behind-the-scenes look at the pressures that strata managers face every day. And if you know a strata manager who could use some time back in their week, please let them know about this webinar. You could just be giving them the introduction they need to work smarter and serve you better.

Share the registration link with them, yourstrataproperty.com.au/webinar. That link is in the show notes for this episode as well. Now I do want to close a loop for you. I promised I would come back to the topic of AI - artificial intelligence. Yes, the AI tools are here. They are powerful. They can. I'm pretty sure they will make your work faster and more efficient. And of course, you should be exploring them.

When I first started making shifts in my business, these tools didn't exist at the level they do today. Today, AI adds an extra dimension to this type of conversation, and it's one that I don't want to ignore. So, we know there are tools out there that help you work smarter and faster. These tools have the ability to answer hundreds of emails for you. They will have conversations with owners, so you don't have to.

They will instantly deliver up the answers that owners are waiting on you for. I'm not going to talk about those tools on this week's webinar. Just like the productivity hacks, you can Google all that. There are others out there more qualified than me to share with you what they have available for strata managers, building managers, and even for owners in this AI space. And I completely accept that we are all eventually going to be using these tools pretty much as second nature, the same way that we now use the Internet, email, and even social media.

Some of us are going to take this up faster than others, but eventually we're all going to get there. We're all going to have to get there. But here's my concern about AI and why I wanted to include it in this discussion. What I'm about to say might sound surprising or even a little bit jarring in light of all that I've said so far about more time, freedom, clarity, and prioritising customer service.

But tools and tech will only ever get you so far. In fact, the tools and tech might actually be keeping you in the burnout cycle on the hamster wheel because they free up time that you then only end up filling with more revenue-generating activities, more buildings, more clients, more products and services, business owners. I see you, I hear you. I can relate because it can. You use the tech to leverage you.

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But I have a deep, personal and growing concern that AI and AI tools are not the complete solutions that some loud and incredibly wealthy voices around the world are telling us they are. Don't get me wrong, absolutely. AI has an incredibly important role to play in strata and strata management. I hope I've been clear in acknowledging that. But it's not the complete solution and nor should it be our sole focus.

In fact, I think many of us right now should be focusing on quite the opposite. The more our society, our culture, the media, the algorithm, whatever it is you want to call it, tells us to lean in to AI tools, the more I encourage you to seek out real human connection and human experience. I am not the first to recognise that we are feeling more disconnected than ever.

Despite being more digitally connected than we've ever been, we are feeling more burned out than ever, despite enjoying more comfort and greater material wealth than any other society in history. As a human race, we have never been more dissatisfied, more lonely, more depressed or anxious. More and better tech has not been, and I think is never going to be, the answer to these problems. There is a movement out there of AI contrarians, if I can call them that.

These are people who see the incredible value in zigging where others are zagging. And today I am outing myself. I am in their camp as online voices all start to sound the same because they're using ChatGPT or similar to draft their copy their content, their social media posts, their emails. I want to take the time to craft content that comes from my heart, my brain, my own experience, my own voice.

That's not to say that I'll never be using AI. Of course, I'm using it every day to make my job easier, but I'm trying to do that more consciously and only when it feels like the right choice. As it becomes easier to improve, and I'm doing air quotes here, it's easier to improve the way that we look and the way that we sound online. I want to show up more real than I ever have before, where we're losing personal connections.

I want to invest and take time to invest in the relationships that I have, and I want to build new and stronger ones in a world that is obsessed with the artificial. This is a return to real, and that is not my phrase. I have picked this up from Ryan Levesque, 7-Time Inc. 5000 CEO and founder and a best-selling author. He writes a weekly email newsletter called the Digital Contrarian, offering unconventional business advice.

I'll include a link to that one for you in the show notes. It's a strong recommendation from me. Ryan Levesque is at the heart of this return to real movement, and he asks the question: when tech, automation, and AI, in particular, are at the center of virtually every business and marketing conversation that is happening right now among the smartest minds in the world, is this really the only way forward?

Now you're going to hear me speak more about these ideas and where I'm taking them on this week's webinar. This is just the start of a conversation that I want to continue to have with you all in strata. I am keen to hear if it resonates with you and where we might take it together, and if what I've shared today has struck a chord with you. If you are nodding along, thinking yes, "I want more meaning, I want more balance, I want more of the real," then join me online for the Burnout to Boundaries Webinar.

yourstrataproperty.com.au/webinar is the place to go to secure your free seat with me online. If you've liked what I've talked about today, and yes, it's a little different from our usual strata conversations, our challenges and our curly questions. Let me know. Post a comment under this episode. Drop me an email or a comment on socials. I would love to hear from you. That's it for now. I look forward to catching you all next time. See you!

Outro: Thank you for listening to Your Strata Property, the podcast, which consistently delivers to property owners reliable and accurate information about their strata property. You can access all the information below this episode via the show notes at yourstrataproperty.com.au



Demystifying the legal complexities of apartment living.