

SAIT Podcast: SAIT Live Event Episode 6

[00:00:00] ANNCR: The Best Careers You Never Knew Existed Podcast sparked by SAIT, the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology and co-hosted by CITI Careers in Tech Innovation, the podcast that helps you navigate jobs in Alberta's emerging and exciting economy. Learn about careers like UX Designer, Robotic Process Automation, and international kitten cuddler.

[00:00:24] ANNCR: Maybe not the last one, but you get the picture. By talking with experts, leaders, and those who have done the journey in Alberta's emerging landscape we will provide the insight you need to expand into a new career.

[00:00:40] Lora: So, the latest podcast episode that went out was on Thursday, which was on product marketing. And our guest Vicky Laslow emailed us this morning and said, "I have a really bad cold. None of you wanna see me." And so, then Zach said should I just read out Vicky's answers? Because she so kindly actually crafted some answers for us.

[00:01:00] Lora: And I said, yes, Zach, emulate your inner Vicky. And he was like, who else do we know? And then we realized that Renee was coming tonight. And we know that what an amazing speaker you are and how knowledgeable you are about not only product management, but also product marketing.

[00:01:19] Lora: So big thanks to you for jumping in and I think it'll be a great conversation. And finally, big thanks to Terran, who is our podcast producer, Jenna, who is also one of the producers on the podcast. She couldn't be here because she was also sick. Hopefully, we're not spreading it around. But yeah, so as you can see, Terran is very detail oriented.

[00:01:40] Lora: I am not detail oriented. Are you detail oriented?

[00:01:42] Zach: No.

[00:01:43] Lora: Okay. I have my name. My name is actually on this, which I think is like super impressive.

[00:01:48] Zach: But what is that?

[00:01:49] Lora: I don't know. It's just something Terran told me to speak into.

[00:01:55] Zach: We are recording. So, we can have another podcast episode. So that's what these devices are for.

[00:02:01] Lora: This is why you're the co-host. So, what we wanted to do tonight was provide an opportunity for everybody to network and hopefully eat some pizza and cookies, which are always my favorite.

[00:02:12] Lora: But we thought, because the three of the episodes that are out so far are product related, we thought we would invite a conversation around the secret sauce of creating great product, because I'm sure all of you have listened to the podcast, but what we didn't really talk about there and the opportunity here is to talk about how teams work together to create great products.

[00:02:35] Lora: So, pulling together product marketing, design, and management, it is a great opportunity just to talk about some of those skills that maybe are less apparent in terms of how you work together as a team. So that was our plan that we came up with this weekend. So maybe I will kick us off just by asking, what comes up when different teams work together on product?

[00:03:01] Lora: Give us all the dirt.

[00:03:06] Mai: Ego.

[00:03:09] Renee: We always say there are no product problems, there's only people problems, and we've seen that a lot. Like most problems can be solved if you really stick to it. If you follow design thinking methodology, you're open to testing and trying and failing over and over to find the right direction, most problems can be solved.

[00:03:26] Renee: And yeah, what often gets in the way is fear and human nature, being afraid of failure. So, when we're working on teams, we can't solve big problems without teams. It's not possible, but it is that fear that gets in the way. That's what I see.

[00:03:44] Mai: Yeah. I agree with what Renee's saying and also I feel it's a test to your own self.

[00:03:50] Mai: You have to be open-minded and you have to be trusting. You're governed by so many biases when talking to different types of teams, and you think somehow, oh, my opinion is the correct one, and I should influence that across teams. During collaboration with different teams, you gain the innovation of different experiences, different knowledges.

[00:04:10] Mai: So you have to keep yourself in check to realize what is the benefit? What is the outcome? How is that serving towards a delightful product towards the end?

[00:04:20] Emily: Yeah, I can definitely speak to that. Coming more from like the UX lens of things, sometimes people will think that they have the answer to the problem already before we've necessarily researched the problem or specifically the solution, which is always challenging when somebody comes to you, hey, design this screen that does exactly this.

[00:04:37] Emily: Okay, but why? For who? How do you think this is gonna work? So, making sure we invest time to actually solving the right problem is something that I'd like to put a lot of emphasis on. Doing our research upfront so we don't have to go back and solve the correct

problem later after we've solved the wrong one is something that I run into occasionally,

[00:04:57] Zach: What are some approaches that you use to get to a place where you're aligned around product, especially if you have differing opinions.

[00:05:10] Emily: So, something that I always try to remind myself is that, generally speaking, everybody is coming into this trying to help the situation. They're not coming here because they dislike your idea. They wanna benefit something and they think they know the answer. Recognizing that is helpful if you have a difference of opinion then just trying to take that opinion for what it is.

[00:05:29] Emily: Everybody's gonna have different feedback to share, especially as a designer. It's very visible. People are gonna have opinions, so take it for what it's worth. And even if you don't agree, it's still great cause it will make you question why you think it's that way. And you can strengthen that or research more to build a stronger foundation.

[00:05:45] Emily: But just recognizing that everybody is coming from a good place can be helpful for diffusing any kind of tense situations as well.

[00:05:51] Mai: Yeah. On my end, it really depends on the structure and type of teams I'm dealing with. Sometimes it might need some individual one-on-ones, so I can talk with the senior software engineer independently, aligning on how they view their priorities, what is the outcome they're looking for, the objectives, how they're running their teams.

[00:06:12] Mai: And if I capture leadership alignment within the teams I'm managing, it'll be much easier to grasp this alignment over team wide. Once we get the team wide, the first thing I always like to do is team pledge. And through the team pledge we align on, okay, how would you like to receive feedback? How would you like to align or understand what we're doing or the why?

[00:06:34] Mai: And based on that, I find that I'm more successful into capturing this alignment and addressing different opinions in an open-minded and an active listening way.

[00:06:44] Zach: Team pledge.

[00:06:45] Renee: Yeah, I love that. The team pledge. I couldn't agree more, like it's in product management. That's where we start is alignment and what's the vision?

[00:06:54] Renee: What are we trying to achieve? Who is it for? I love that you mentioned like everyone's trying to solve a problem and you know it's not about us, it's about someone else. When we keep reminding that, no, go back to the problem. Who is this for? Why are we doing this? What could we achieve if we do this together?

[00:07:12] Renee: So, taking ourselves out of the equation, just constantly going back to

“What’s the problem? What are we solving?” really helps to bring this all together. And then I also just wanna do a shout out of using words like stakeholder, just instantly takes everybody into a weird power dynamic. Just everyone's a teammate, everyone's a partner, and everyone can work together to solve this problem.

[00:07:37] Zach: Do any of you have a specific example of a product going off the rails and getting it back on?

[00:07:47] Zach: This is off script.

[00:07:47] Lora: This is why he's the cohost. Zach asks the best questions.

[00:07:54] Renee: Yeah, like how much time we have and how widely will this be published?

[00:08:00] Zach: It's being published on the internet, just so you know.

[00:08:02] Lora: Yeah. Don't use any names. No names.

[00:08:09] Zach: Anecdotally, hypothetically.

[00:08:11] Zach: But not really.

[00:08:16] Mai: I can start because I'll try to keep it as anonymous as possible because privacy. I've always run into clients that, to Emily's point, they feel they know the answer. They know what should be delivered, what should be the implementation and what should the product look like.

[00:08:35] Mai: That leads to project derailing easily because you run that by the end user and it's like what is that? I don't know how to use it. And working in the consulting ecosystem, you cannot blame the client, can you? So, it's about grasping this alignment, going back to the client, and understanding the why.

[00:08:57] Mai: Bringing back actual research and data rather than going into conflict of, I was right, you were wrong. Bringing back research data. So, we used a specific scenario with the client where we brought voice recordings of the frustrations of the users rather than echoing our own selves. So that worked really well into bringing the project back on track.

[00:09:19] Lora: Is it hard for them to hear?

[00:09:22] Mai: It was actually, yeah, I got goosebumps listening to the end users giving negative feedback on both the product and the people working on the product. But everything ran differently once this stage has been addressed.

[00:09:41] Emily: I have an example that I'm ready to share. So, I was working for a company

and the product was all about sending documents, so think creating, sending, and tracking documents. And one of the main ways that we could send documents was by email through the service that was offered by that company. And something that was very firm belief throughout the company was that we can't put our own branding on that email going to these customers because people want it to feel like a very customized experience.

[00:10:11] Emily: They're paying for this product, that would be very bad. It would lead to churn. People would be angry. We don't wanna do any of that. So as designers, of course, we get the opportunity to interview customers, test things out. So, I could have designed a very beautiful template that would've been customized to each brand, which as you're redesigning this whole sharing document experience, that could have been a great solution.

[00:10:32] Emily: But did we really need to do that? And maybe this could actually be an opportunity for us to put some branding on this email that's going out to all of these different companies. So instead of creating this customized one that would be personalized to each brand. We did the opposite and created like a hyper branded email that would be sent from our company, which is generally white labeled once it's a paid for service.

[00:10:51] Emily: And we put it in front of customers to get a reaction, are they angry, frustrated, then that would definitely reiterate the concerns of everybody involved and we wouldn't have to go that route. Low and behold, not a person was angry, frustrated, upset. The vast majority went "Wow, that looks great, I'd love for my email to look like that."

[00:11:10] Emily: Only one person had anything to add, and it was, oh, I would expect my company logo to be somewhere there as well. So amazing what you can uncover just by talking to people. Obviously we had these interviews video recorded, and to get to share that companywide was pretty powerful and very exciting to, I don't know if that's off track necessarily, but like we definitely wouldn't have gone that route without talking to customers and recognizing that we all had the wrong mindset and that wasn't actually the case at all.

[00:11:41] Renee: As a representative of product marketing this time, I think it happens all the time with product marketing. I find like product managers will be invited to speak to users all the time cause then users can make feature requests. Product marketers are not able to build features with teams so often there's so much misalignment that happens just with who's included.

[00:12:06] Renee: So that's the biggest challenge I think I've seen like in product marketing is just not being brought along, not being constantly aligned with, because product managers and product teams own the product, but marketers own the messaging. And that's what customers see. So when I think of misalignment, that's the thing that I have seen over and over and over again within product marketing and what we do to solve it. Actually worked with Vicky on solving this together when we worked together and it's like you become just like best friends, like attached at the hip.

[00:12:42] Lora: Am I allowed to tell a story too?

[00:12:44] Zach: Sure.

[00:12:44] Lora: I'll tell a SAIT story actually.

[00:12:48] Zach: Okay.

[00:12:50] Lora: So, I remember once when I was doing product marketing and we had actually gone to a school with a campaign and with a strategy. And the dean was like, I hate it. And I was like with all due respect you are not the target market. And the conversation was just over.

[00:13:14] Lora: So, I wanted to really talk a little bit about collaboration and what does collaboration mean to you? How do you guys approach collaboration? What are some of the tools that you use, the approaches that you use, the techniques that you use to like to actually get true collaboration? Because I think people in these roles are often quite strong personalities, have quite strong opinions, are all talking to customers.

[00:13:45] Lora: So, what does that look like to co-create something?

[00:13:54] Renee: I think it all starts with psychological safety. I don't think really good collaboration can happen unless everyone within the group feels cared about and cared for by each other. And that comes from actually connecting with people as humans.

[00:14:09] Renee: So, whenever anything is going off the rails, or we're not collaborating, I always go back to who are you as a person? What are your values? What are our values together as a team? I think without that sense of psychological safety, you're not gonna have people speaking up when there's risks that could happen.

[00:14:30] Renee: And that's what a lot of collaboration is, is different perspectives with different ideas and also different risks that we might not be able to see. And it's hard to bring those up when there isn't psychological safety. So that is absolutely number one for me as a product manager or a product marketer.

[00:14:49] Renee: Making sure everyone feels like they can be heard and won't feel repercussion.

[00:14:53] Mai: Yeah, I cannot emphasize this more. Psychological safety, conducting regular team check-ins, getting alignment from leadership. And one thing that I fell into the mistake of, I became so comfortable into working in a remote setting, bringing on my mural boards, my figmas, and yeah, this is the tech ecosystem.

[00:15:12] Mai: That's how we work, that's how we're comfortable. But the more types of projects I've been assigned to, things were different and there are lots of in-person people who

are not familiar with this tech culture. I realized that I am omitting an important voice of people who are comfortable with in-person sessions.

[00:15:29] Mai: I learned the hard way that sometimes I have to be present in person, talking directly with clients, understanding their needs and their wants. In an in-person session, in an in-person workshop has done a great impact in positively getting this collaboration interaction.

[00:15:48] Emily: Yeah. I come from the perspective of working fully remotely. Because I like to wear pajamas and sleep in, and that works really great, but that has its own challenges when you're working remotely, when you wanna collaborate with people. From my perspective, being a little bit younger and more inexperienced in the industry, I collaborate very frequently with product managers and engineers predominantly.

[00:16:09] Emily: And for me, something that's always really important is actually getting to know the people you're working with. Investing time, not just in the project, but a little bit of chit chat here and there will go a long way to helping you connect and just being able to chat about things at a more casual level.

[00:16:24] Emily: Again, working remotely, I'm gonna ask, how do you wanna work together? Maybe you want me to record a Loom video reviewing this file for you instead of me sending a paragraph of notes on Slack. Whatever it is, let's work together in a way that works best for both of us and let's collaborate early.

[00:16:39] Emily: So, another example that comes to mind is working with engineers specifically. If I'm coming up with a design, I never want it to be, okay, it's done. Here you go. That's definitely not how it should work. Hey, I'm thinking about this. What do you think? Oh, that's not feasible in the timeline. Oh, the backend is spaghetti.

[00:16:55] Emily: Oh, I didn't know that. Great. Let's solve these problems before it becomes bigger ones later. So just checking in early and often and just accommodating to what works best for other people as well.

[00:17:09] Zach: I've got a question that's again, off the script, but we talked about this before.

[00:17:15] Zach: So, I'm honored to be sitting here with a bunch of women leaders in tech. What advice would you give to other women or other underrepresented groups who are trying to get into tech and trying to have a voice in tech?

[00:17:33] Renee: I wish I would've got this on an email beforehand. Holy. Yeah.

[00:17:36] Renee: Oh my gosh. I definitely have an answer. It's just like you are enough. That's all we do. Like Chris and I, when we're teaching and coaching, it just feels like we just wish you could see yourself how we see you. So just know that you are worth it.

[00:17:55] Emily: Yeah. Can I double down on that?

[00:17:57] Emily: I do a lot of mentoring sessions with junior designers, aspiring designers, and the common thread that I see through almost everyone is this lack of confidence and this like doubt that, oh, I only have three case studies. Oh, I haven't worked with the real company yet. Oh, I don't have this. And it's Hey, you have 10 years of experience doing that.

[00:18:16] Emily: That's amazing. Do you realize how relevant that is? Make it relevant. If you don't believe it, you have all these other additional skills that if you don't push forward, nobody else is gonna lift you up in that way. And you can do it. I did it. There's no reason you can't do it as well. And it's so sad to see that lack of confidence in people because they have all the skills and it's possible.

[00:18:37] Emily: So yeah, just don't doubt yourself. You can do it if you want to.

[00:18:41] Mai: I'm so passionate about this topic, and I think we talked about it in our podcast. So, I'm a recovering imposter syndrome patient. So, I've been through this and when fellow women, fellow underrepresented humans or fellow immigrants come and ask me "What can I do?"

[00:19:01] Mai: I don't feel like I'm good enough. I cannot get my feet into the Canadian markets. How can I be more visible? How can I let employers trust that I'm skilled?" I always start with, yes, you are enough. You have so many skills, you have so much experience, and you have a different perspective. This is an asset, not a weakness.

[00:19:23] Mai: You bring a different perspective to a market that's emerging. For example, like the Calgary Tech ecosystem, bringing your differences is actually a strength that you have to have confidence leveraging. And there is unfortunately a price that you have to experience that, you have to get your hands dirty for people to recognize you.

[00:19:41] Mai: So, it's a challenge, but having the confidence and the trust and the support system to back you while doing that is, is all that you need.

[00:19:50] Zach: I'll say at Careers in Tech, I would agree that the number one thing that gets in the way is people's self-confidence. And it's just amazing to see someone who joins, who may be struggling and where their confidence is, and we try to support and make sure they don't feel alone.

[00:20:12] Zach: But when they do get that role, three months later, six months later, they're the same person, but they have all that confidence. Nothing has really changed. And I think the one thing when I pivoted into tech, and being in the tech ecosystem versus other ecosystems or different industries is the people are the same.

[00:20:30] Zach: So, you're still gonna see everyone's similar. There's good people, bad people,

differing perspectives, and people are no smarter in the tech industry.

[00:20:43] Lora: Yeah, and I think for me, there's no better way to get a bit of a confidence boost is to engage in community like you've done and figure out how to support others. Because there's always a conversation to be had, somebody's day to be made better, a connection to be made. There's always something.

[00:21:07] Lora: And for me, I know whenever I've going through my imposter syndrome, I know you're recovering. I still do this like all the time. For anybody who's listening, I just made the wavy sign signal. Really it's who can I support? How can I support? Is there somebody's day that I can make better?

[00:21:26] Lora: Because that helps me get past that piece where I feel like I'm not enough.

[00:21:34] Renee: I love that. Cause we all have something to teach. We all have unique lives. Everyone has a story, multiple stories. Everyone has something to bring to the table.

[00:21:44] Lora: That's why the community is so great.

[00:21:46] Lora: So, with that, I was gonna say we have four wonderful people here. If there's any questions that you guys have for the panel, feel free to weigh in.

[00:22:00] Guest: Renee, you were talking about when you're trying to create alignment with the team figuring out how people want to be engaged with and meeting them there, do you run into issues trying to get people to be open and honest on how they'd like to be engaged with?

[00:22:13] Renee: I think it was you actually.

[00:22:16] Emily: Oh no, that's a very good question that I was excited for you to answer.

[00:22:18] Renee: Oh, I get it. Like I did the same thing when you do the team alignments, I find people are normally so surprised when you ask them a question like that, that they're like, wait, what?

[00:22:32] Renee: Oh yeah, actually now that you ask, I like talking this way. So, I find that I haven't run into too many problems with that question specifically. But when it gets harder sometimes, how are you when things get tough? What behaviors do you wanna look out for when things get tough?

[00:22:59] Renee: That's a question we often ask. That can be a bit tough, but if everyone is sharing it or if you're willing to share anonymously in a mural board, or if we're in person like post, once you've set that tone, maybe you've shared a story, a personal story about yourself, you've got to know each other a little bit, people become quite open.

[00:23:20] Renee: But if they're not, I'd say share a story. Ask everyone. Tell your career timeline. Bring an artifact. Show a picture, share your bucket list. Like just going back to those simple things where we connect. Yeah, do you have any negative ones?

[00:23:39] Emily: I've been very fortunate to work at like very open companies that are more casual and it's very friendly, the tones, so I haven't necessarily run into that where people aren't, it's more the opposite where everybody wants to share their ideas and it's hard to pick and move forward.

[00:23:54] Mai: Yeah, I wouldn't call it negative, but it's like it's on me. It's my responsibility to understand different styles of working. And that brings my memory to when we had the applied product management session. Be comfortable with the silence. Not everyone is impulsive, as fast in responding to questions.

[00:24:10] Mai: For example, how would you like to work? Not everyone as comfortable saying that in front of a team. Make sure you have your regular check-ins with every one of your team members. Conduct retros. I send team pulse checks on anonymous surveys and that helps addressing different styles and different personalities unifying their experience without addressing how differences in being a public speaker or being an introvert will affect or impede alignment in any way.

[00:24:38] Guest: From a product standpoint, when you work with teams, engineers, you've got various cross-functional team members and they all have collaborative ideas. What strategies do you have when there are two dynamite ideas and you've got to make a decision between the two and not deflate still motivate and get the right one into play. Do you have any methodology strategies to choose?

[00:24:57] Mai: Yeah, definitely. It depends. So, if this is within the team and it's something that was part of our why, that's something you should always start with. Why are we doing this? Is this part of our roadmap? If this is a part of a requirements, if we're dealing with a specific client, and if it's not and it's an innovation, we have to sit together, look through the data. What's the value? Maybe simplified as something value versus effort of what we're doing. Do we have the time? Do we have the feasibility? Are there risks that we have to align? And I don't think I've reached a hard conflict zone where we don't find an answer eventually.

[00:25:33] Mai: If we're aligned and we have the empathy and the psychological safety. And also actively listening from a product manager's perspective. Your reasoning is not always right, and you have to keep an open mind to that.

[00:25:44] Emily: Yeah. Just like you were saying, my mind goes straight to a priority matrix, like versus the effort we have to put in versus the impact we're gonna have.

[00:25:51] Emily: Can we rate those two that might make it very clear which one we should

start with? And that doesn't mean that we can't necessarily do both. We just have to make an informed decision moving forward.

[00:26:01] Renee: And then if you really can't decide, do a test. Experiment. Do a small prototype. Feasibility test.

[00:26:08] Renee: Yep.

[00:26:08] Mai: Yeah.

[00:26:10] Zach: Did you have a question?

[00:26:12] Guest: So how do you deal with scope creep or a looming backlog or something like that? So, like an example you mentioned before you thought that people wouldn't have the brand, wouldn't like the brand. For that email editing project, say something like that is coming up again. How do you have any processes for dealing with uncertainty or something that you don't know is coming up?

[00:26:44] Emily: The scope creep is real. I've definitely fallen into that a couple times. So, it's good to be aware of that upfront and have a very clear idea of exactly what you're trying to do. The last company I worked for, something that I really liked is before I started any work, we would have a product requirement document, which I'd never seen before.

[00:27:01] Emily: And wow. Was that so helpful! This is the problem, this is the goal, this is the timeline. This is who's gonna be doing this, these are the assets we already have. This is the information and analytics we wanna pull from. Great. And especially the timeline and exactly the deliverables that we're wanting to achieve.

[00:27:17] Emily: It makes it very clear what is included and what is not. And just because it's not included doesn't mean that's something we can't come back to later. But just trying to stay very focused on the task at hand and bank those ideas because that might be beneficial down the line. But yes, scope creep can really be a problem in terms of actually getting anything out the door if you don't take that for what it's worth right off the bat.

[00:27:37] Mai: Yeah, and to touch to Emily's point that brings back the topic of team alignment. Sometimes you are aligning with the business folks and you did not bring in the software engineers and the design folks, and that can lead to scope creep in itself. So, capture alignment early on. When you're capturing those business requirements and the expectations, it really helps a lot.

[00:27:54] Mai: Not like it doesn't happen. Scope creep does happen, and mitigation of it is the skill that you need to acquire.

[00:28:04] Renee: I have a different style. I'm not a fan of requirements. Yeah, because most

really difficult problems, like it's normally really difficult problems, we don't know the right solution.

[00:28:19] Renee: So maybe starting with this is what we think might be, but I find sometimes planning too much upfront, like we don't know what the right answer is, and I'm not gonna pretend we know. The best way to find the right answer is the best solution to a problem. Building small tests, building small tests, building small tests over and over and over.

[00:28:41] Renee: That said, obviously there's parameters like maybe it might just be like terminology.

[00:28:42] Emily: There's some wiggle room there, there's a line.

[00:28:49] Renee: Right? Exactly. Yeah. Yeah, exactly. I've found that a lot, if you really think what's the absolute smallest thing we can do to take one right step towards solving this problem?

[00:29:02] Renee: You'll almost always end up with less scope than you would've if you started with the whole thing planned out from the beginning.

[00:29:09] Emily: Interesting.

[00:29:09] Lora: So, do you get alignment on that approach right from the beginning? We're going to either scope it all out, or we're going to build tests.

[00:29:18] Renee: Yeah, absolutely.

[00:29:20] Renee: And that's what a lot of companies are going through right now with Waterfall to Agile transitions. And even with Agile, there's like a lot of rules and regulations, but it's really like speed to learnings. So, it's taking a company from, okay, we think we can predict everything upfront when we know we can't, versus well, can we demo every week and get feedback, make sure we're going in the right direction.

[00:29:43] Renee: So that's like the biggest thing that we start to do to take people along and just acknowledging like we don't know. What we do know is the problem we wanna solve. We might know quite a bit about our users, we might know quite a bit about what their problems are, what their day-to-day is, but we don't know the right solution.

[00:30:02] Renee: If we knew the right solution, it'd be solved by now. So yeah, it is hard to take people along on that because we just have to acknowledge. And again, when I mentioned fear, that fear gets in the way of so many great products. But what starts to dissipate that fear is if we demo every week what we learned and demo progress every week, and oh, you know how we wanted to go this way, we realize that's completely wrong.

[00:30:28] Renee: We're going this way. And then so it starts to like, people get into the flow, the heartbeat of the learnings, and that brings alignment in this different approach. But you need a little bit of both. You need planning. Yeah.

[00:30:44] Emily: Just guardrails. Yeah.

[00:30:45] Renee: Yeah. Right.

[00:30:56] Guest: How do you align your role with the project management role?

[00:31:00] Mai: That one? Yeah. Working with project management, within the context of a consulting firm, it's interesting because sometimes you're the product manager and the implementation manager at the same time, if it's an end-to-end experience.

[00:31:14] Mai: But project management in the context of consulting is more about the how and when, making sure that you're following the timelines, raising flags, raising escalations, and mitigating risk. Communicating that directly with the product management and the team in general to capture that alignment. So, we're working all closely within that team and capturing that, getting into talking with the client, understanding what's going on, how can we address those timelines and align on them.

[00:31:43] Mai: It's actually like how the work is done. Properly more or less within bigger projects, smaller projects, I find currently, to be honest, and I think this is a struggle where the product management and project management start to overlap within companies who don't distinct job descriptions of what is a product manager.

[00:32:06] Renee: So, in those situations where there's no project manager and there's a product manager, I honestly like to default to the team being the how and when and product is the what and why and who, along with UX. And we collaborate of course, on the how and when, but we're not building it.

[00:32:31] Renee: So how could we be responsible for the timelines? So, I find when you start giving the power and responsibility to the team to set their own timelines it would be like someone, like a development team setting timelines for our strategy. That makes no sense. So, let's empower them to say when they think they can get it done and how they wanna do it, what technology they've just discovered that could solve this problem.

[00:33:01] Renee: I don't need to be in it. If it impacts the who, the what and the why at all, then it involves me. But if not, they can take it on. And I'm not gonna pretend that's easy to do when a lot of technical teams are used to basically honestly being babysat by product people, being secretaries for them. But most technical teams are curious.

[00:33:28] Renee: They wanna solve problems and they wanna solve problems in a way and in a timeline that works for them. So, it can take some time to empower teams to do that, but when

that happens, it's incredible.

[00:33:43] Emily: So, I'm coming at this from the other lens where I've actually never worked with a project manager before.

[00:33:47] Emily: I've just been on smaller teams and we just run the project how we need to. Hey Emily, how long will it take you to get this deliverable? I need like at least two days. Okay, great. How long will it take you to code this? Oh, I need about this much time. Oh, I ran into this error. I'm gonna have to have another 24 hours.

[00:34:04] Emily: Okay. And it just takes as long as it takes, and we just trust that everybody will do their work to the best of their abilities in the fastest time frame that makes sense for them. So yeah, that's just how I've always experienced that.

[00:34:20] Renee: It's funny, like empowered, trusting, psychological safe teams, it becomes not an issue.

[00:34:23] Emily: Works great. Yeah.

[00:34:26] Lora: Who have relationships, right? Yeah. Who have a good relationship.

[00:34:29] Guest: My question is related to what happens when you want to explore your roles, your position and deliver frameworks and all your knowledge, but that company is just not prepared. Respecting regarding the cultural maturity and stuff, which kind of fashion you have implemented to deliver awareness before jumping into the execution?

[00:34:52] Emily: I definitely wouldn't work at a company that wouldn't have good design maturity and wouldn't respect the work that I'm doing to propel the organization forward.

[00:35:00] Emily: That's something that would be important in my due diligence before joining a company. So fortunate to not had to run into that problem yet. If either of you have some advice on how to tackle that, I definitely am out of this one. Yeah.

[00:35:15] Mai: Yeah. I don't think as an immigrant you have the choice early on in your career to select that, but knowing your knowledge of, for example, what a product manager is, what you seek, what are your objectives?

[00:35:30] Mai: You can try a couple of tests. Not always successful though. Depends on like, how is the culture, like you said, within the company, but to Renee's point testing, you are the product test and demo and release. If they recognize your capability and that different perspective, they're open-minded enough.

[00:35:50] Mai: It's worth doing that to be recognized. If not, you put your foot into the Canadian labor market. It's a good start. Move from there. Look for a better opportunity. You

have the product manager and your title, at least for now.

[00:36:05] Lora: And I think believing in yourself and what you know, and continuing to advocate for your ideas and your processes and what you are putting forward your vision is important.

[00:36:17] Lora: Back to the original question is, always believe that what you're doing, and. I think that's critical as well.

[00:36:28] Guest: I think the only question I have for this group is how do you embrace ambiguity as a friend and a partner rather than something that we fear?

[00:36:35] Emily: It's a learning opportunity for me. It's exciting. There's something new that I'm gonna get to try and learn about somebody new I haven't worked with before. That's gonna have a different perspective. For me it's exciting and that's the lens that I try to look at it through. Yeah.

[00:36:50] Mai: Yeah. For me it's a muscle, so I was not always comfortable with ambiguity. I come from a medical field and ambiguity does not, I cannot risk the ambiguity. I have to know everything planned ahead. I hate surprises as a person. I talked about this in the podcast. I create a very small framework for myself. What's the worst that can happen?

[00:37:10] Mai: What are the scenarios? And I walk myself through them independently. And then by experience this muscle grew and I'm actually quite comfortable with the ambiguity. I was like, yeah, let's discover this together. How are we going to go ahead with the discovery? How are we going to test it? How are we going to see if it appeals to the end users? That's at least how I handle ambiguity now.

[00:37:36] Emily: I know I'm like taking notes and this is good information.

[00:37:38] Renee: Yeah. Ambiguity is tough, but yeah.

[00:37:56] Renee: Ambiguity's an old friend now.

[00:37:58] Lora: And I feel like there's also a lens where you could start to look at it as an opportunity. Like this is an opportunity to learn. I might not know, but think about what I'm gonna learn potentially. Which is always where I'm at with ambiguity.

[00:38:14] Guest: So, when we're talking about imposter syndrome, like I find like why I struggle with ambiguity in my own role is just because I always think oh, I should know this.

[00:38:25] Guest: So just circling back to that conversation about self-confidence and everything, just look at ambiguity and just remind yourself it's not me. It's just a difficult problem and it's okay that I don't understand it.

[00:38:38] Renee: Yeah, for sure. Love it.

[00:38:39] Mai: Thank you.

[00:38:43] Emily: I need an extra chair.

[00:38:43] Lora: So, we'll be I think wrapping up?

[00:38:47] Lora: I think well, please, you're welcome to stay, eat some more pizza, grab some cookies. Feel free to connect with our guests and with each other. Thank you all for coming. I feel like a weight has been lifted. We've now used the space for an event and we got over that hump, so now it's gonna be parties every month.

[00:39:18] Zach: Did you say monthly?

[00:39:19] Lora: Sure. Yeah. Only if there's pizza. A big thanks to Mai, Emily, and Renee. Yeah, I've learned a ton and it's been a wonderful conversation. We really appreciate you leaning into this and doing an in-person event for a podcast.

[00:39:42] Lora: Awesome.

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