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TRANSCRIPT

# April Uzarski on Gamification

**SUMMARY KEYWORDS**

gamification, community, impact, engaged, give, challenges, folks, learn, work, reward, biggest, part, inspires, people, community members, piece, honestly, program, leaders, great

**SPEAKERS**

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00:02

Got it? All right. So hi, April, if you would like to introduce yourself, what you do, and the kind of community you work with, and also how many years you've been in community?

00:19

Yeah, absolutely. Hi, I'm April usar. ski, and I am currently the Associate Director of the tech community at Xander. And I work in internal communities. So all of our all of our community members, our employees, there's about 980, some folks right now that are within our community. And I've been in this space for unofficially, five years, officially, just over three years, I did a lot of it kind of as a side project when I was an executive assistant, and I got moved into the position. And then the community is technical in nature. So we have a lot of engineers, data scientists, we have a lot of product folks as well. And we were just merged with our customer success organization as well. So not not as technical but very important to the running of our business. So yeah, that's our community. And they're, they're awesome. And I've been with the company now for almost seven years.

01:12

It's good. We've been in community for quite a quite a bit there. Right. Yeah. Briefly describe to us, you know, what gamification is? And share your story, you know, what are some of the lessons that you've learned and some of the challenges? So let's just start with invocation? What is that?

01:30

Yeah. For me, when I think about gamification, I mean, there's, there's so many parts to it. Sometimes it feels like, oh, the thing that like the carrot, right, that you're gonna put out to get people to follow you and get engaged in your programming. But for us to it's a much, much deeper thing. It's kind of when I think about it, I think about Alright, so when we deal with our community members, and we offer them opportunities, you know, what is the actual impact on them? Right? What is the impact on the community? So how are they getting something out of it as well as us? And then, you know, what is that additional carrot at the end, which sometimes can be a fun thing, like a piece of swag, or, you know, like a gift card in a raffle, right? But what we really, really focus on is the impact on that individual, because we are here, like, we're an employee community, we're here to help them advance their careers. So that's a very, very important piece for us. And I actually, I was thinking about my background in it. And I never even occurred to me, I was a girl scout for 12 years. And I honestly, when I think about gamification, and I think about everything, from like, selling cookies at the, you know, I guess at the age of seven in first grade, all the way to getting my Gold Award when I was in senior in high school, which is the highest award in scouting. equivalent to the I always like to tell people equivalent to the Eagle Scout award. Like I was like, wow, the Girl Scouts like no gamification, right. They know how to teach people, they know how to get you involved and get you excited, but then also give you those life skills along the way. And I think that that's kind of how we set up our community. And it didn't even occur to me that that was how, you know, I figured that out, because I had such a long history with the Girl Scouts. So that's a really, really big thing for us is to make sure that we are giving impact to the people who are also giving us in our community a big amount of impact back.

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Yeah. So um, so, you know, what was some of the lessons I should say, oh, no, let's start with the challenges. What were some of the challenges, you know, that you faced,

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um, definitely, one of the biggest challenges I face is, when I first started, it was just me. And we had a lot of community members, and a lot of people just kind of doing things right. And everyone wanted something more solidified. So I think time was a real issue, we then became a team of three, which was great. And I think that first thing we didn't really know how to go about it, like we knew kind of how to get people excited, and how to get them involved in our programming. But it is the impact piece, we really had to sit down and say, These are the behaviors that we want to encourage for people to give back to the company or get back to the general community in the company, and to progress themselves. And we had to bucket them like and we bucket it into three different places, right? Like, I don't want to say low impact. That sounds terrible, but like low, medium and high impact, right. And then we started kind of focusing on our members and slotting them into those places to see like what we could do to either keep them engaged in that level of bring them to the next level. And then you know, I think the challenge there was finally we actually didn't have a formal rewards program. And that was a huge, huge miss. Like it was just kind of like we were like, Oh, well, the intrinsic reward is that like you can use this to move up in your career, right? You can put this on your resume, which is great. But we weren't really honoring people. And I think the fact that we didn't realize that it's kind of funny in hindsight, and we actually we hemmed and hawed for forever, like, well, now we have these three buckets of people. How do we excuse me? How do we reward them? Right? And it was like a very good quick decision, and we built this like really substantial rewards program in like the in two weeks, and we rolled it out and people were just over the moon. So it was obviously something that we should have thought about first, or like, conjunction with building out these levels for folks. But um, once we did that everything just came together and people are highly engaged. We reward them every six months now, and that not only is that like saying, Hey, you're a champion, but it's letting the entire community know like we list them out. We tell them what, what people have been working on, we tell our leadership team, and then everyone because it isn't levels and we don't tell all of our outsiders this, but everything is monetary base. So like, if your level one, it's an X amount of dollars, they're able to go into our forums and pick a prize worth that amount of money, kind of I call it like that's, to me is the gamification part of like the pure gamification part like Dave and Busters right here might say, What can I get? So we do that every six months, and people get everything from like snack magic. credits, which I don't know, if you are not familiar with snack magic, it's a great company, you should check it out. But like, all the way up to we get custom Air Force ones made for folks. So you know, it's like, there's there's a lot of different things that you can pick from which we know we can, we can send like people a thankful to be thanked, but then they get really excited about the gifts that we give out as well. So I would say the challenge was really going to if I can make this distinctly, like, not only recognizing the impact, but rewarding it physically and like verbally, right, immediately, that's what we should have done. But when we got there, I was just like, that's fine. And I was so glad we had gotten there.

06:35

That's a good thing. Yeah. Cuz I was gonna say, I think that really does help with, you know, encouraging folks to be more engaged, right? Because you didn't realize engagement went up through through gamification, which is fantastic. So what would you do differently now, knowing that those were some of the lessons that you, you know, you learned from it and the challenges and how you implemented or pivoted really quickly into rewards? So what would you do differently if you had to do it all over again?

07:04

If I had to do it all over again, I think it I would say framework like clear frameworks. Everything was so organic. And like, I don't think that if I could go back, I could do it differently, right? Because we were just such a new team. And like, we were trying to figure out what community management was at the same time, the companies like do community management. So but I think if I could go back, it would have been a clear framework for people and not necessarily about the gamification itself. But just like, hey, if you're a leader, in these programs, like this is what is expected of you, this is how we expect you because we sometimes give people budget to spend, like if they're one of our leaders, for whatever they're working on, and just like clear, clear asks of them, or even clearer ways to hold them accountable in a lightweight way. So they're really happy with the results, we're really happy with the results. That's something that we figured out organically that we needed to do and we we constantly fix that part of our this isn't really even gamification, I would say, but it is keeping them engaged, right? It's like that kind of that ground work that you need to do or the level settings. So when you do provide them with great opportunities, and you do get them even more engaged and everything they know exactly what to do. And there's absolutely no question which makes their lives a lot easier. And then they continue to come back. So I think that's like a part that I would change less ambiguity around some of our programming is and how we want our community members to engage with them.

08:32

Mm hmm. So let's say I'm a new community manager, and I'm thinking about gamification, what would be a pro tip that you would you would give me from the start?

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I'm testing, you know, it's like, we even in year five now, right, because I've been doing this unofficially, for five years, it's all about testing. Some, you will come up with the greatest ideas with game for gamification in your try it and no one will show up, no one will care about it. And they're just like, What is this? This is dumb. Like, think like, you know, and that's okay. Like, don't learn from that. Move on. And always ask your community what they want, right? Because they know and they will tell you, but you just like don't be afraid it whether it's like a poll that you do in Slack or reaching out to people individually, knowing what they want is like the biggest help in building out something that's going to have longevity, for sure. Actually, one of the biggest, the most successful programs we have we run once a year as a step program stem challenge, excuse me, I should say, we give out huge prizes and teams form and everyone gets super competitive. And that's something that came out of a community steering committee we had so they came in and they said, This is what we want. And it's one of our longest running programs to just kind of give an example of like, getting their advice is the biggest or giving them getting their feedback is the biggest piece of help you can get

09:49

me to do that because they are your community. You want to ask them what is it that they would like great. Yep. So I'm going to end with this question. What inspires you about you Unity.

10:01

Um, what inspires me honestly, is the amount of creativity and resilience that our community has. And also like pure desire to answer questions help one another make sure like one of our tenants is teach and learn. And it's just like that. It's incredible to watch our employees help each other with that, because we find that the communal learning works way better than just like say, an HR system coming in and saying you must learn these things right? And we find it sticks. And then people become they get to know one another, they network, they start to engage with one another. And this is even, like, you know, during pandemic times when everyone's working virtually so and and honestly the one thing that inspires me the most and like also makes me the most sad if I can say that is some of our biggest leaders in our community have used their experience with us to move on to better opportunities and other companies and even though I'm so sad to lose them, it's so wonderful to see them come into our program, learn the leadership skills they need and like if their manager doesn't want to promote them, they go somewhere else and they get amazing jobs and and I think that that's like just one of the sweetest things ever to see our folks like out there in the world doing amazing things. So I don't know that's what inspires me the most I would say

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thank you so much for sharing April and yeah, I am going to stop the recording now.