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TRANSCRIPT

# Janet Stiles on Unclogging Bottlenecks

**SUMMARY KEYWORDS**

community, wmc, managers, organization, double amc, people, lessons, thought, audience, learned, medical schools, share, resources, constituents, pandemic, staff, run, original, senior leadership team, connections

**SPEAKERS**

Janet Stiles, Anne Mbugua

00:00

put in there. So Hi, Janet, if you would like to briefly describe yourself or introduce your background, what you do, how many years you've worked in community, and the kind of community that you work for?

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Sure. So I'm Janet Stiles, Senior Director of member engagement for the double AMC Association, American Medical Colleges. I've been a double AMC for a little over eight years. But I've been in the association space my whole career. So I'm a membership person from the beginning. And we have an external community at double AMC, and prior to coming to double AMC, I had just started, you know, communities were really taking off prior to me coming to double AMC. And so at my old organization we had migrated from listservs and had launched some communities. So it was kind of familiar with the space when I came to double AMC, but really have gotten more involved since I've been at WMC.

01:09

Thanks, thanks for sharing that. So if you would sort of like briefly briefly describe your background, around executive support, you know, share your story. So we can learn a few lessons and some of the challenges so let's let's go with you know, you briefly describing your experience. Sure.

01:29

Like I said, when I came to double AMC, I had been at a small Association before coming to double AMC and just a little background. WMC is a very large organization, and we run the MCAT. We run the application in medical school, we run the application to residency so we have hundreds of 1000s of prospective physicians coming to WMC. I'm, I'm on the other side, right. I'm on the, on the side where it's our member institutions, medical schools, teaching hospitals, and the people who work at those institutions and a lot of, you know, senior leaders. And so when I came to WMC, I was really excited to see what the organization was doing. They're very mature organization, oh, wow, they're going to have this great program for community. Right. And I got here, I started asking around, and they're like, Oh, we tried that it didn't work. It didn't work. How's that possible. And so I checked around a little bit more, you know, it wasn't in my portfolio. And, you know, kind of started talking to people and trying to understand what had happened, tried to learn what had gone wrong. Because they did have a community, they had tried it, it had gone wrong, and they shut it down. And so then what I discovered was that they really, everybody was kind of doing their own thing. So we have like five different software platforms, different people running different things, different audiences participating on those different platforms. And that, for me was like, kind of the AHA of like, we need to fix this, like, this is not a good customer experience. This is not organized. Some of these technology platforms were not good at all. And they were in a lot of ways just really sort of stood up to meet very niche needs. And and so I kind of started that conversation, you know, with my boss and with other senior leaders in digital communications, and in it, because it's really kind of really large organization, 800 employees, right, this, we've got this going on all over the organization, we really need to get coordinated. And so that's kind of where the conversation started. And then, gosh, probably in 2017, right, I got introduced to the Community Roundtable. And I thought the this is, this is unlike we need help. We needed somebody who was experienced. And I was very impressed with the CRS data and exposure across lots of different types of communities, by large organizations, small organizations, and I thought we don't we don't have any experience here. We really need some help.

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Wow, that's, that's amazing. I'm glad that you know, in the process of you trying to figure this thing out, you came across the car, and we're able to sort of begin the process of figuring it out. Right. So what you did talk about a few challenges there which I heard in terms of, you know, software and it being disorganised, what are some of the things that you faced within the community itself?

05:07

Well, I'll say, you know, one thing that because we had things happening on all these different platforms, there wasn't a centralized strategy. Okay. And what was hopeful for me at the time was that we had another, a survey effort going on about our website, and the vendor who did that survey of our customers. One thing they brought back was that our constituents, they were interested in virtual community. And what they were saying was, they kind of want to double AMC to get out of the way, like they wouldn't be able to talk to each other. Right. So what was helpful for me was to have that data right from that survey effort. And our customers are saying they want to be able to talk to each other they. And at the same time, part of that research was saying, you know, again, WMC is a large organization, right organization. And one of the findings was that we we, as an organization really needed to position ourselves as a part we wanted to be this like, I don't think we thought we, I don't think we thought we were being a bottleneck, right. But we kind of were looking like that we were sort of an authority figure instead of a partner. And so hearing that and that evidence from that survey work, plus hearing that people wanted to be able to talk to each other, and how can WMC be a connector instead of I think, instead of being this reviewer or authority figure, that was helpful for me to take that back up to leadership and say, we've got data that says, folks want this, and I think community could enable that.

07:04

Which is great. Yeah, yeah. That was good. Right? You were able to show value, you know, to leadership as to why, you know, you should be the connectors, right? And what was important about that, that's really great. So what would be some of the lessons that you said in the, in the process that you have learnt? Now, looking back, what would be some of those lessons that you have learned?

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One thing for me was, I think I, I felt it but I didn't quite have the language for what was going on. And I had a colleague who said, Janet, we have no culture here for this. I thought, Oh, wow. Like that's, that's actually a really, like concise and accurate statement we had, I was really the only person that I was able to identify at the organization who had stood up community someplace else. And so we had people who were interested, but they didn't have any practical experience. And so that statement of we didn't have a culture, right, kind of became our problem statement, right? We didn't have a culture of employees didn't know how to do this. And so again, the timing worked out well was that, you know, we got connected with the car, and just slowly started, you know, got executive sponsorship to work with the car to do some workshops with them. And we identified a small group of folks, we had our core team, which was, you know, me and a couple other volunteers working on this. And then we identified a couple of folks across the organization, who, who were willing to be community managers, they had a need. They, either they were on a different platform, or in some cases, they they were really just kind of emailing their audience, right. And so I identified this group of original we call them the pioneers, and they kind of work through this with us and, and you really helped us. We kind of rolled up our sleeves and did it together. And I always laugh because I had some, you have several months, maybe a year or so later, one of those original people said, Gosh, I wish I had, you know, we eventually from all that work created a guidebook and and documentation, right intake forms and guidelines. And we've created a lot of deliverables from those original pilot, Pioneer groups, right. And someone had said, Gosh, I really wish I had had all this when I was going through it and And I think we're, you know, again, it's still our problem statement is trying to build this culture. Of him. We've said, again, because we're a large organization we write, the core teams never going to be the, the managers of these smaller communities don't have the subject matter expertise, right. So it's our job to kind of set the guidelines, and to advocate for the community, up to our senior leadership. And then it's our job to help teach the subject matter experts to become community managers, and bring them together. And so they share and learn from each other. And so there's been a lot of a lot of lessons, but I think that we recognizing that we had no culture, Brent, I think was really, it was very eye opening.

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Yeah, I'm trying to think about so let's say we have a new community manager, you know, they've just started on but the new community, what would be your advice to them now, having learned those lessons and face those challenges? A new community manager

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at double AMC,

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let's say, yeah, let's get that as an ex. Oh,

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yeah, they would a new community manager today, as a lot cheaper, compared to when we, you know, we haven't been at this for very long, right, three years, I guess. But there's a lot more structure, there's a lot more resources. You know, and so what we've gotten good at, I think, is even that very first step, like when someone says, I'm interested in standing up a community, they, you know, help you answer these questions, and then we have a dialogue with them. And one of the things they have to come to the table with is being able to have a community manager, and we talk about what that means. And then we say, okay, you know, you've identified this person, this person has to go through our training this brain has to there's a lot of homework, there's a lot of homework upfront, before, you know, the technology piece is actually the easy piece. Planning, it's the getting ready. It's there's a lot of work and community managers know that there's a lot of work behind the scenes to get ready to launch. And then once you launch, what are your metrics for success? Right. And so we are, we're a lot, a lot more mature today than we were just a couple of years ago. It's I think, so I think new community managers have a lot of resources that if they were coming in today, they've got definitely a leg up. I think the other thing that we have started and it's grown, and I think we're really getting a real rhythm pandemic, we had plans and then the pandemic happens, and right at the pivot. And so our original thought was that we would get folks together quarterly, and who were community managers around our company and have them come together. And you should maybe do a day workshop. Well, because of because of the pandemic, we said, Okay, we can't, we can't get together in person. And let's come up with a different approach. And so we started something called the Community lab. And it's really a chance for community managers. We've tried to figure out the cadence we were doing once a week now, right now we're down to twice a month. And we pick a topic, and the group comes together, and they talk about that topic, right? introduce the topic at the beginning of the month, folks go and focus on that throughout the month, we come back at the end of the month, and people share how they're doing and you know, lessons learned, and, and it's taken a little bit of time. But But what, what I'm seeing is that there's a lot of connections happening. And you know, somebody who's maybe a little more experienced as a community manager, shares an idea with somebody who's newer, or, you know, someone has a great editorial calendar, or a new onboarding practice, and then like, they could share that with everybody else. And so it's, it's, it's that building that culture, and it's we're starting to see, we're starting to see some neat things, you know, connections or relationships take place.

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And I can see hearing from what you're saying, you know, that support has been really vital. Right?

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Yes. Yeah. Yeah. And it's, you know, I think in some ways, I'm kind of the daily that sponsor. But you know, I, there's a layer of senior leadership above me. And so for a very long time I've kind of been that that voice to that senior leadership team about what, why you should be investing in this what, what the value is how, you know, kind of coming way back to those early days when, if that customer research that says, You were WMC. Look, you don't look like you're helping us connect with each other. You're looking like a bottleneck. And so, you know, really bringing it back to that and saying, Hey, have by sponsoring community that WMC is investing in building these connections, right? For our constituents.

15:48

Thank you for sharing that. That's wonderful, because it really is hard sometimes to be able to share, share, and show that value as to why it is important. Right? So, you know, so then I go to this question, what would you do differently now, having looked at, you know, your, your brief description of, you know, how things have gone and the lessons you've learned and the things that you have implemented? If you were to do it a second time around? What would you do differently?

16:17

Hmm. That's kind of a tough one. Yes. Um, because I think, you know, we've we have, we have learned a lot along the way.

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You know, I think a couple of our lessons learned, were we, in the very beginning, I'm not sure we've vetted, we didn't have the skill set to regret the people coming, the volunteers are the people who are being voluntold to come forward. Right. And, and we had, you know, some people saying, Oh, I really want X audience to have a community. And we didn't really have the skill set at the time to say, well, let's talk through that, let's but see if that would be, you know, how valuable that would be? Or do you have the resource, we didn't really have that language, or even a rubric to, to make that decision. And so we were like, Okay, we'll stand up a community for you. And a couple of those didn't go well. And, in fact, you know, again, lesson learned was it they, it was a community, private community for a very busy audience. And they didn't have time to participate, right. And it really wasn't the right channel for what they needed at the time. However, our colleagues, someone thought that it was. And so that was definitely, that is a lesson learned now that I think we are, we're more mature in our ability to talk people through what's needed and people through the reality of being a community manager, and we now have exercises for understanding the audience. And we have also had somebody come forward and say, Oh, we want this group, we want to, we went to community for this niche group over here, right. And as we started going, and we spent a lot of time with them. And as we went through more exercises with them, they pivoted and said, Oh, actually, you know, maybe this isn't really the right audience. A slightly different audience. Okay, let's look at that new audience. And so again, those were sort of our lessons learned. Just we know them now. So I think if you know, any, again, anyone who's coming through the process today, right, is, is experiencing a much more mature operation. I think the other thing too, that, I guess, in the very, very beginning, like I was, I was personally very familiar with community and the power of community. Right. And I think, you know, I was fortunate enough to be able to bring community roundtable into the organization and run some workshops. But when I look back, I really think I should have had that team that to our senior truly, truly to our senior leadership team, because sometimes I think you need an outside voice, right. Telling that story to or reinforcing that story, because I think in some cases that looked, you know, it was us, was the internal team advocating for and we did, we just had to go over and over and over and I think right, you know, if we had had Maybe that presentation to the entire senior leadership team really early on, I think that may have helped reinforce the message and understanding the investment that they were making. Right. We did it over time. But I think if I could have moved it around a little bit, I think I would have done that earlier.

20:23

Right. In the process. Thank you for sharing. I really do appreciate that, Jen. So I'm going to ask you this question. I'm going to end with this question, actually, what inspires you about your community?

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Oh, my gosh, there's so much. Um, well, I'll start with our staff like we, we now have, our core team is still in place, we've been able to expand our core team, we hired a new manager, she's fantastic. So the team has, the core team has a lot of energy around seeing this being a value and success to the organization, right. And then we've been able to train and work with all these subject matter experts, who are now community managers, and they are really passionate about, about what they about supporting their audience and how they can use the community to augment their work, change their work, bring people together. And I'm seeing some really, really

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interesting, exciting connections happening with our community members. So, for example, a couple of months ago, so one of our groups is medical educators, right? And somebody raised up an issue. And then there was this whole kind of chatter around like, Yeah, I'm having that same problem. How do you define this and how, and this would have never happened if this was a conversation over email, or with one or two people. And so somebody finally said, from our staff from WMC says, Oh, let me take that issue over to this other department, not even this department, right? That over here, they're going to work on it. Thanks for raising it up. And it was kind of like a crowdsourced problem, that we as staff would have never recognized that it was a pain point for so many people have we not have the community. And then most recently, so we have an annual meeting. And there's always a call for abstracts or call for papers and things like that, and presentations. And most recently, there was, I think it was in that same audience, but someone said, Hey, does anybody want to work with me on a submission? And it was just like, all these folks and yeah, get let's work together. I I'd be happy to pitch in. And it was a lot of people wanting to like, work together, you know, share, put their presentations together. And I thought, that's the power of community. That's right, that we, we can't do through email, we can do it on our website. Another example to where we have a group that our community communications folks, and at our medical schools, and someone says, Hey, how have you managed your match days, the day that medical students find out where they're going to residency, and there's usually a big, you know, presentation and celebration, and that happens every year. So, typically, that's all done by eat like, hey, you know, how did you do this, and it's all over email, and it's worked with our staff. And last year, the community was there was amazing for them, right? Lots of people posted their resources, we were able to document our staff was able to document the time saved, and the connections made by having that conversation in the community, right. And now this year, when Match Day is about to come up. Now, there's a whole library of resources ready to go to work. And so that's kind of another story that our staff is trying to say that like the community is, because it's now available, it's allowing our constituents to connect with each other. But it's also saving them time. It's saving us time, allowing them to reference libraries of shared resources. And that's just stuff we couldn't do before the community was here. So I just think we've got we've got lots lots of those examples coming. More examples coming

25:00

That is fantastic well thank you so much for sharing your story Janet I really appreciate it and I'm going to stop the recording right