TRANSCRIPT

Ashleigh Brookshaw on DEIB

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

community, people, building, diversity, ib, organizations, relates, initiatives, belonging, absolutely, important, culture, senior leadership, organizational culture, starting, working, piece, strategy, surveys, industry

SPEAKERS

Ashleigh Brookshaw, Anne Mbugua

Anne Mbugua 00:04
All right, Ashley, if you would briefly introduce yourself what you do, and the kind of community work for and specifically, how many years you've worked in community?

Ashleigh Brookshaw 00:16
Yeah, absolutely. Thank you so much. So first of all, hi, again, my name is Ashleigh Brookshaw. And I'm the current Senior Community Manager for nice CX one, where I'm working with building and scaling a technical support community. Prior to that I had been building community for about on and off, I would say about 10 years prior to that my experience was building an exclusive membership community for a membership based Association, where we took a look at their for diversity, equity and inclusion groups, as well as technical communities, really building that online community and building that into a sustainable strategy for the membership. And I have been in all state as well, I actually worked with them. My first job out of college of building and scaling and rebranding their employee only community, so but in the community space for about 10 years, 10 years now. Yeah.

Ashleigh Brookshaw 01:13
Well, that's a really long time, I would say 10 years, you've probably seen all the changes that have happened across the board in community. Is that correct?

Ashleigh Brookshaw 01:22
Yeah, absolutely. And even just with the emergence of social media, I can actually remember writing my senior project, senior capstone for the School of Communication at Loyola University Chicago, on, you know, the emergence of social media and how companies were just beginning to actually use it.

Ashleigh Brookshaw 01:39

Mm hmm. That's really intriguing. So I would really want us to discuss what d e IB is, you know, and what that really means.

Ashleigh Brookshaw 01:53
Yeah, absolutely. So D IB, or diversity, equity inclusion, and one of my favorite portions that is directly related to community is that belonging piece, right. So, as we know, community, the community industry is completely buzzing right now, you know, we've had two years completely with social upheaval as it relates to working from home and you know, shifting target demographics and customer basis. So when you think about diversity, equity inclusion, and like I said, that belonging piece, it's really being about intentional in every foundational aspect of community. So, who is the community for? Why are we building it? What is the sustainability plan for it in terms of engagement? What imagery are we using? How are we leveraging the different user groups? Again, do we even know who those user groups are? That things like that, and my specific strategy as it as it relates to community building is really about taking a look at a community in the context of its organizational culture?

Ashleigh Brookshaw 03:01
Mm hmm. So I am curious if you could share with us a story about you know, your, you know, D AI initiatives, what your experience is, and, and really, we want to dig in sort of like into some of the challenges that you've sort of faced and some of the lessons that you have learned through the experience?

03:23
Yeah, absolutely. So um, you know, as a as a firstborn generation, I'm Jamaican. For my family, I really started taking a look at, you know, diversity, equity and inclusion and belonging, I would say, even from a very young age, my mother was the, you know, first person, first a woman of color, in her leadership position at a manufacturing site. My grandmother came from Jamaica, Kingston, Jamaica, and started working as a nurse at Rush University Medical Center in Chicago. And one of the things that I always remember during our conversations, both my grandmother and currently even still with my mom, is the fact that it is a predominantly homogenous, Caucasian industry, both of those STEM tech, you know, manufacturing, those are predominant industries. As it relates to, you know, diversity. You know, I grew up in a small town, I, where I was the only, you know, person of color, and my schools and classes and everything like that. So I didn't really realize how important it was until I got a little bit older in high school and college specifically because you know, social norms start to change, you start to notice some things. And it's the same in organizations. A lot of organizations will talk about, you know, we're having these diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives, right. But when you dig into it, especially as it relates to community, what is the plan, you know, what are what are the metrics of success, what's the sustainability piece of it? So I'm at a previous role on where I manage diversity, equity and inclusion groups, there was a call for the membership, um, in light of the, of the societal unrest to be like, what are we doing as an organization to advocate for diversity in our profession? Right? So it's, it's not, it's not enough to say, hey, we're gonna make this statement on it, because anybody can make a statement, right? It's about what are you actually doing? What? What plan are you putting into place? Right, not just paying lip service. So I worked with that particular group to really start a diversity, like a Diversity Council, right, and bring that to the internal senior leadership. But it wasn't enough. Um, in my approaches, it's not enough just to say we have the idea. One of the things that I'm particularly good at

is building infrastructure. Right? So right, if you're going to have a council, what are the requirements? What is the time duration? What is the agenda? Right? How are you continue to build that pipeline for sustainability? So I'm worked with the senior leadership of that particular organization where we created job descriptions for the people interested, we created, Oh, pardon me, we created an application form, you know, for people to apply. And it was very, it was very good, because we only had 12 spots, but we had over 80 people sign up and raise their hand saying that they wanted to be a part of that. Right. So as you think about it, so we only have 12 spots, we have 80 people interested over 80 people, how do we select the candidate? What is the criteria, you know, to join this council? Right? Yes. So to and to make that equitable, right, like, it's not just a tap on the shoulder culture. And I've seen that in a lot of different organizations, I have clients where they're saying, you know, Ashley, we're getting the same results. And I said, Well, it's because you're doing the same thing. And you're asking the same people. Mm hmm. Right. So, you know, diversity, equity and inclusion and that belonging piece, it's not just about the physical demographics, including race or gender, it's really about that diversity of thought that diversity of experience and all of those pieces that really help and spear forward, you know, business results, you need to have different types of people in order to have appropriate innovation.

07:21
Right, you know, which I'm wondering, how would you encourage them communities, to, to, to have dei initiatives, you know, like, in terms of a muscle thinking, Is there a designated, would you designate a particular person, you know, for those initiatives? Is that something that is important to do? Obviously, depending on the kind of community that you are, you know, that you have? What are your thoughts on that?

07:50
Yeah, absolutely. So, um, I think some of the challenges that result in an organization or specifically communities when they're trying to get into D IB, is the fact that it's resourcing it could be a resource issue. Right? Hmm. I would also submit that it could be an authenticity issue as well. So So for example, if you're only engaging with your community members doing respective Dei, months, we'll say black history because we're in February, right, women's history for March, pride for June, things of that nature, if those are the only times that you're engaging the users, it's an authentic, right, there's nice and it's no sustainability plan. So what I really do encourage is for community managers, or anyone working into community to get an understanding to have what are your organizational initiatives, 10 times out of 10, I would say marketing is working on something right to have some sort of target audience or some sort of specialized webinars, typically, that's what I've seen. And that's what is so important about the cross collaborative nature of building community. So I would say, Build an authentic strategy from day one, right? If you are just starting community, then in terms of like, you know, we're doing a pilot and we're trying to find people, make sure you're finding a diverse, like diverse groups of people, whether that be tenure age, whether that be physical characteristics, whether that be different departments, it's really about thinking of identifying all the different people that we can touch and get a sense of, because we want to build that equitable experience in making it visible for people to also raise their hand. And now I have heard a little bit of pushback with organizations saying, Well, you know, we can't just have everybody raise their hand, we can't please everyone. And I said, well, that that starts to look at what is your what is your strategy because if you only in the case of the one I mentioned

previously, if you only have 12 spots, but you had over 80 people raise their hand, right to me, those are going to be your champion, so they may serve on future councils. They may be a good pilot group. engage, if you're thinking about launching new products and services, they could be just an ad hoc group just to provide feedback, you could source them for programming. I mean, there's a lot of different things. And I would say that that translates nicely to community as well. There's X amount of asked me anything's AMA's. You, if you have people that have raised their hand, that's your list right there, those are gonna be really the advocates.

10:24

I really like that, you know, especially with those amas. I think that is a really great way to go. Yes. brings me to this question. How? How do you how do you actually measure? I guess, you know, the initiatives? How do you? How do you know that you are successfully implementing this these initiatives? Right? I'm just wondering, what does that look like in a community? And can you actually can you measure it?

10:54

So I would say that all of the measurement piece are going to depend on definitely what platforms you're using and your initial organizational strategy, what I think is, the best way to start getting a cultural poll sign of your community is to ask the community, right? If you're not doing surveys on an annual basis, let's understand why that is, right. But more importantly, you can add questions around culture around, you know, elements of diversity, equity and inclusion belonging, to see if your community users are feeling that, um, I've done that for a few clients and worked on their, you know, some, in some instances, like the first survey, because a lot of people are really focused on is the content helpful, is, you know, how can how can we be delivering better content? You know, what do you think of this platform? You know, what about the leadership positions, because honestly, when you really start looking at the diversity of our industry, the people in the leadership positions are a little bit homogenous, there's not a lot of diversity at the top, really getting an understanding of why that is, from an industry perspective, just from a general community level perspective, I can't tell you how many clients and organizations I've had come to me and say, you know, Hey, Ashley, we don't have you know, enough participation in the community? And my response is, did you ask the community what they wanted to see? Because again, it's not just about race and demographics, it's about maybe the programming that you think they want is not the programming that they actually want? Right? Or are you tailoring your messaging and email campaigns to resonate with the appropriate language of that audience? So that could be you know, if we're talking to, we'll call it safety professionals are using the appropriate language that resonates with them, if we're talking to sewing and trade business associations? Are we talking to and bringing in the relevant trends and content about things that they actually care about? I can't tell you how many times it's been literally a simple disconnect of people being like, well, you know, their survey fatigue, and I'm just like, did you take a current? You know, did you take a look at the success rate of your current surveys, right? You don't need to do any, like, you know, you know, for surveys, instead of, you know, six or something like that. It's really about the quality over the quantity to really get those answers. So to go back to your original question, like, how are you measuring it, it's about the feedback that you're getting from your constituents and of the target audience. And that typically takes the form of surveys, it could take the form of engagement functionality within your specific platforms, whether that's a poll, whether that is a discussion, I would

also submit that not everyone is going to be comfortable having those di B conversations, I've seen it quite a bit. And one of the things that I would like to also submit is make it okay for your individuals to submit feedback anonymously, whether that is, you know, D IB, at company name.org Or something like that. Right. I would also submit that also having a very clear understanding mission, vision and strategy as it relates to D IB. It needs to be situated within your own organizational communications, which includes its own

14:19
webpage. Right. Right. That is a really good strategy. I really love that idea. So let's talk about barriers, you know, these tangible barriers. So some of them, I believe, would be budget and lacking of strategy and probably also cultural barriers. Are these things that you are seeing happening across the board in different organizations and in different communities. Let's talk about more about that.

14:43
Yeah, absolutely. So I would say from an organizational perspective, the barriers include just organizational structure and culture, right. So a lot of organizations, you know, you have your dominant culture that is reinforced by the language You know, the assets and by assets, I mean, like your tangible documents, like policies and procedures, and let fair of that is also important as well. Because if there isn't that that tangibility of a document or a policy or some sort of asset, there's no accountability. Right. So that is the lot. One of the largest barriers I've seen to progress as it relates to di B and an organizational culture is the organization is not ready for it. The organization is working in silos. There could be in some instances, and I know people don't necessarily like to have this conversation, but your executive stakeholder, your senior leadership doesn't see it as a priority. In some cases, they see it sometimes as we're going to make this statement, but we're not going to have any tangible action about it. Because we have other business priorities and strategic things we need to focus on. That is a rock that is not the correct approach, a better approach is to see how can we incorporate the elements of D ib into what we're already doing and enforce accountability? Right,

16:07
right. Right. So let's say I am a you know, it's a new community, and I'm a new community manager, and I'm just starting off with this community. How would you encourage me? Or what pro tips would you give me, so that I could start thinking from the ground running up? How to include DAP initiatives? You know? Yeah,

16:31
absolutely. So um, one of the things that I stress as a wall, I stress a few things as needed skills for community managers, but I cannot say enough good things about the ability to incorporate change, make change management methodologies, and principles into your community building rain. So if you are building a community from the ground up, know that that is a technological change program, you're either launching it, or you're migrating it. So when you're starting to think about I'm a community manager, how do I build this? Who are the people that you're going to need, because it's not just the users, you're going to need to internally leverage those collaborative resources, whether that be it, whether that be marketing and sales. So really having that cross collaborative cross functional team from the get go, is imperative. I would also submit, and I'm very good at this probably because I am a

nerd. The necessity of a documented use case, I think that sometimes individuals and and organizations get so caught up with, you know, moving things and doing things quickly. But they don't take the time to write anything down. Right, right. And this is the same thing as it relates to to community because if you are building a community, it is a wonderful idea to have at least some sort of document as a source of source of truth to get a sense of here's what they're looking to use the community for. Here's the business challenge, here's the business impact. Here's the target audience, you know, that we're reaching, and that could be, you know, a large dominant audience, or it could be a couple smaller ones. But here are the key elements of the community platform that can help measure our goals. So from a DIB perspective, getting that clear understanding of all of the needs and wants from your different areas, as well as the users themselves is going to be, you know, invariable. What I would also say is that when you're starting a community from the ground up, you're going to need to establish the community tone and the culture, I would, I would also recommend taking a look at what is your current organizational tone, and culture, this is an opportunity to refine that for the community or follow suit for the community, right, because they're not two separate entities. I always position communities as an organizational asset that needs to be a reflection of your dominant organizational culture. It is not an entity unto itself, unless you're like building like a community from from a personal standpoint, but specifically like for brand, communities or communities that are, you know, predominantly leveraged for internal collaboration, it should take after the culture of your current organization. So definitely the change management, definitely the project management if you can, because I have been, I've had the good fortune of working on a community team, which I'm doing right now I have a technical partner that's you know, doing a technical build of the Salesforce community. Well, I am focusing on the customer onboarding, all of the touch points, the customer communication, what does just digital empowerment of community look like within this organizational context? And I've also been the community builder where I was that mighty team of one where I was both Community Manager and product owner and engagement, export and change manager. So it's all about leveraging a combination of hard skills, and the softer skills to be able to position your Community for success and make it an inclusive environment for

20:03
all. Oh, that's fantastic. Thank you so much for sharing Ashley, I am learning more about the IB, which, you know, is something that is really important for not even just community, I think also organizations as a whole. Now thinking about that, I'm wondering, now, with the experience that you have had, looking back, what would you do differently?

20:29
Yeah, you know, I'm, I'm a transparent person, I'm a very straight shooter. And I would love to say and share that exercising immense patience with people is going to be it? Well, it will, it is, I mean, speaking very candidly, and honestly, because you, you would think that people would want to create a welcoming environment for all. And that's not always the case, there are some organizational departments and cultures that are very focused and specific amongst their own deliverables. They're not thinking about it from a greater peace. So exercising that immense patience and just knowing going forward, that it's going to be a place of learning for the individuals that you're trying to work with. Right. So, um, sometimes, and I, again, I still can't believe that we're dealing with this in this day and age, but it's very true. Those foundational principles of you know, diversity, equity and inclusion, belonging

things, as, you know, race and gender, even the intersectionality of how that works. Not everybody, not everybody knows that, right? I guess it's different. Everybody brings in their different experiences with community building and community participation, right? Being very transparent as the you know, the child of an immigrant, as a professional of color as a community builder of color, when you're having that conversation with individuals who have not had to really think about their intersectionality of working with community and how they're different identities or playing at base is a little bit of a hard conversation sometimes, because you have to then exercise like I said, immense, you know, patience and understanding on why this is why this is important. Because not everybody thinks that you know, di B is important, creating a space of belonging where people feel, you know, safe to participate in express themselves. It just it kind of kind of baffles me, but that, again, it speaks to the culture. So things I would do differently. Again, just really keep in mind that, that patience, like I said, I would also do a little bit more of it's being a community builder and being an advocate for you know, D IB is a very energy intensive job. So I'm just having someone that you trust, to just kind of bounce ideas with, I suffer from I have to do everything myself and do it, you know, this particular way, right times? Because you're you're afraid to ask the ask questions, and admit you need help some times. So I would say that, just having that open space with someone that you trust, perhaps like a mentor, or trusted colleague, to help you through that, because it's a lot of tough conversations that you have to have.

23:29
Right, right. I do agree with it. I really appreciate your time and you having to share more about de IB initiatives. And I always like to end on this note, what inspires you about your community?

23:45
What inspires me about the community that I'm working on? Or just the community in general? That could be taken a few different ways?

23:53
It could be both you could share on one or the other?

23:57
Yeah, absolutely. So I would say, you know, what inspires me about the current community that I'm working on is that there's just so much opportunity, right? I'm, I'm very excited and lucky to be building community at a senior level in the tech industry. It's been a long term dream of mine. So now I get to actually see what that looks like. So I'm inspired by the new opportunity to just, you know, build infrastructure and provide value, but just I'm inspired by being a part of a community of community professionals has been invaluable. I mean, our industry is doing you know, such great things now and unprecedented things and I'm just inspired by my fellow community managers in different industries and and really what that looks like in their particular context. So I would say by the indomitable spirit of the community profession