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TRANSCRIPT

Jephtah Abu on Getting Started in Community

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

community, manager, people, learn, managers, volunteer, career, company, job, committee, nigeria, space, networking, question, underrepresented group, interested, passionate, management, talk, software developer

SPEAKERS

Anne Mbugua, Jephtah Abu

Anne Mbugua 00:00

So hi, Jeph, if you could introduce yourself, if you could tell me how many years in community you have been, or as a community member also, that's also helpful, and what you do, and the kind of community that you work with.

Jephtah Abu 00:17

Yeah, it's great to be here. My name is Jephtah Abu everyone calls me, Jeph. I, the Community Manager for serum blue. So serum blue is a web three company that sort of has like an SDK SDK. So SDK stands for software developer kits, like basically, to like water it down, they have a way for you to quit your website as an NFT. Artist. So aside, that also worked part time for a company called married stars. So many stars is like a FinTech company based in New York, they have like a committee of people that are interested in investment. So yeah, experience, I have about five years of experience as a community manager. And in terms of being part of community, I'll say, more than 10 years. Yeah, more than 10 years experience. Like I've always been in communities, not necessarily like online communities, like offline. I've always been like, I was on this, like, join things like in school, drama club and drama club. All those clubs are the same as communities in their own sense, right. So yeah, I think that's just me in a nutshell. And yeah, well, I'm passionate about, I'm passionate about diversity, and inclusion in like the commons management space. I think I write about it a lot. I talk about it, I want more opportunities for people in Africa that are community managers get global opportunities as well. I think that's just meaning in a nutshell.

Anne Mbugua 01:41

Well, thanks, Jeph, you have been doing community for quite a while. And it's interesting, because sometimes we don't even realize we are doing community being part of different communities ourselves. So if you can, sort of briefly describe getting started in community, this journey of being a

community manager, what does that look like for you? And this should be able to help someone who's thinking about what are the skills that I would need to become a community manager?

02:10

Okay, that's awesome. That's an awesome question. I really my own personal opinion, based on most community materials I've seen and I've spoken to like there's never one St. Barts NOW Institute is always Rocky, for example, starting up my career as a social media manager, and I moved to like cybersecurity, I have a background in coding, okay, but I wasn't fulfilled. before then. I worked for a lot of nonprofits volunteer. So I was a program director for two or three nonprofit organizations. So I learned actually how to manage people how to plan events. And I love this like for something like I enjoyed planning these events. And this was literally literally coming to manager things I was doing, I didn't realize that I was coming to manager, because like, I used to plan events, I also check who was most active member like check up on them plan on literally things that committee managers to the one that people did, to like, after my career as a cybersecurity person, I scored that these skills are important, like networking people, learning how to be a connector, having empathy, and being like data driven. So these things were things I developed, like when I was volunteering for like no for providing that that's one of the best ways, even like attire to the committee space, if you want to be, for example, where three community manager like volunteer, you learn about it, and you learn tools, because there's literally no quick way to like learn when you have coding career. So I couldn't feel like let's say you want to be a software developer, you can go online, you can learn about it, like six months, three months for Community Manager is a learning, learning on the job. Basically, you have to do what a community manager does. And the best way to do that is by volunteering. And a lot of companies need to volunteer a lot. So I'll say one of the best advice I'll give you is, if you're a community manager, you're looking to enter or not even a community manager, you're looking to enter the space. For one area area you're passionate about. Let's say you're interested in edtech or FinTech, open three, or SAS look for companies that are long your line of interest. High volunteers, a lot of companies now are realizing the power of communities and they need community managers and you learn on the job. And once you have the experience, then you can become a paid experience where you have to take that step back and actually like volunteer online.

Anne Mbugua 04:37

So would you say that volunteering as a moderator would be also one way to get yourself into the community management space? Yeah,

04:46

definitely. Definitely. I will say that basically what you do as a cadet most of what you do as a community manager besides being a community events person, or being in like other fields, you moderate community channels and you need to like learn how to de escalate issues, you need to learn how to have initiatives like community strategies that can gather engagement in your community. And you don't just don't do this by like going up waking up one day and like, Okay, I want to manager, HR you have to express because most what makes most good as community managers are the experience they have had when they have volunteered or when they have like green initiatives. And it's that experience able to take it on into that paid, paid professional setting. So I'll say it one time from being moderators will help out a lot in your career, especially if you're looking to start a career in community

management field, and also networking. When what gets me here is networking. This is a quick hack. My first job I didn't apply. My first job as a community manager is just by networking, meeting people, I got a referral. And in less than 20 minutes, I got the job tryouts when I started off as a community manager, I was applying for roles I wasn't getting it. When I say reaching out to people, and actually providing value in terms of like, I write articles and whatnot. Right, I was talking to people like meeting them. This networking gave me headway, because I'm able to get referred, that's also a good way to like, get a job as a community manager also start, build your network, be known for something, don't just be a community manager, like, you can be a community manager and something. So it's like, also network is a good way to start a career as a community manager like networking, learning as well.

Anne Mbugua 06:33

Right. And networking is important. Because anyway, you know, as you network, you get to meet people within different communities. And community building is really about connecting people and connecting with people. Right? And so and adding value, as you have stated, which is very important. What would you say would be some of the skills that are needed for a community manager?

06:59

That's an awesome question, I'll say the first skill is having a strong boundary setting. And this is key for common challenges, because I've noticed like, once you're a community manager, he tends to take on a lot of emotions, people in your community, see you as your therapist, their friend, and you're doing your job. So having that strong personal boundary setting is key. They are also detailed data driven, because like, you have to show the value of community, you have to know that okay, this is what it looks like to be a healthy community manager from a non healthy community. So a healthy community member from a non healthy community member, and how do you defend that like sea level or executive and show them like the importance of community, and the only way to do that is by having data to prove the fact that, okay, this amount of community members are actually purchasing from our products or whatnot, then having industry industry knowledge, too, because you can't be a Community Manager in an industry you don't know about. So most committed managers actually passionate about the industry, let's say the gaming industry, or the tech industry, they actually have knowledge on what it feels like to be a gamer, and use this knowledge are able to like put themselves in their community members shoes, and also talk to their community members and create strategies around that in terms of being a community manager. And what else life says on communication skills are top notch, we asked them how to communicate effectively. I think it's as close communication in a way that you don't leave room for misunderstanding, because most of what you're doing is communicating with people. And I think that's where inclusive inclusivity comes to play. Because as a community manager, you have to have an inclusive mindset. And how do I talk to community managers from different parts of the world? The way I'll talk to you, as a community member will be different from someone that is probably from the states they might not understand. They might take offense from like little words you say. So having those good communication skills and the ability to relate information that doesn't create distrust or doesn't create harm is key as a community manager, Mike brands bring out like a lot of branding strategies, tactics and offense like a particular subgroup. Let's say you've got a taxi I think Coca Cola so Pepsi did something that was funny. I think during the Black Lives Matter protest, they did hand in a Pepsi to like police and you offended people. They might have had good intentions, right. But did they consult committee members have they consulted before they did that? I think that applies to committee

as well. You have to you can't just live in a particular bar but as a community manager, you have good communication skills with an inclusive mindset. So I think those are like some things what else what else makes a good community manager I think one of the some comps some companies will tell you they need someone that is very good in content writing is someone that is very likely super connectors on the other people's person. But it's so funny that I'm I'm an introvert. Yeah, I'm very even more yet, I talked with a lot. So that doesn't necessarily mean you need to have that super connectome essay. But having extra skills content, writing new knowledge, like right in how to also use of tech to learn how to use tech tools that use a lot of slack discord, zoom, like use all these tools is also key. As a community manager for skill set.

Anne Mbugua 10:23

It's interesting you say that, because he reminded me of a quote that I heard someone say that introverts make one of one of the good community managers, because they are good at listening, they might not come across as bubbly as an extrovert, but they do have that ability or knack to really listen in, and then to speak when things need to be said. And actually, they're good communicators. But I think sometimes what tends to happen, just because you may be introverted, you may be taken as you're the one at the back of the room, and who's always quiet and not really saying much. But that doesn't mean you don't have things to say. Yeah, exactly. So yeah, I have met a number of community managers who are they call themselves introverted, extroverted, and it is amazing. Exactly, to be able to listen to some of the things that they say. So I'm also wondering, in terms of professional development, what are some courses or kind of learnings that you would recommend someone who's thinking of getting into this space?

11:33

That's an easy one, I'll definitely say school exists, is a cohort for Community Manager. So I got a scholarship for that actually, what if you're a community manager, and you have a company that is willing to like help I have a professional budget and whatnot, you can apply for it was Cisco helped us think that Cisco did ours different is that not only they teach us, but they also teach us what it means to be a community manager. But it also connected us to other community managers, and those people that are above us. And so with that connection, I'm also able to learn in a practical approach, we have classes. So Cisco is also can also me so I think C roundtable has the library. Most people like might not like reading, um, the way I learned is like, I'm a visual learner, like I see it sees roundtable as a library, like also check out and see school, like the code for learning. As a community manager. Their CMS also has a blog, because I write a lot. I read like a lot as well, sometimes. I think I've not read in a while, or written more than I've read, which is crazy. But yeah, CMS has the blog as well. So CMS serum table, library, Cisco, like these are some things I did that got me like this professional development at Cisco coms the certificate CMX also has a program for you to do, but I think I loved your blog, because like, they literally have insights on perspectives of different community managers, we are able to learn as well. So these are some resources I like helps, that helps me get to where I am right now. So what

Anne Mbugua 13:07

were some of the lessons that you learned as you were going through this process of becoming a community manager and you know, increasing your knowledge and your experience?

13:19

No, my one lesson I learned, which is so to be transparent is like committee management should be heavily dominated by white people live in the United States. That is literally the first lesson I learned. Because I'm from Nigeria, how do I create a career for myself when there's a space that is heavily dominated by a particular subset or a particular race. So it was just a lot of, like I mentioned, like talking to people, not just people, like people of color, from different places, marginalized groups had to learn that to be a good community manager, you actually have to do the work in terms of like, get these skill sets from, like I mentioned, networking, and also volunteering. And I was able, my past volunteer experiences have helped me, because in Nigeria, or we are looking for a remote role, we traditionally are going to look at your experience, you're definitely going to look at it. So I always ask people this question, why should they hire you? Like why should companies hire you? Like maybe 1000 people that apply for you? What makes you special? Thanks. I think that's why I started writing my blog, because I wanted to have something that I can back my skills of eye contact, like my knowledge, so this blog sort of created a spotlight on me, but also network with other community managers. So I will say as someone from an underrepresented group have something that sales sales you out like have something that is new or different might have a podcast you might have employed may have like something different because it's gives you headway, because you can you can actually use like traditional approach definitely you get the right way will take a while Like I mentioned now, like my first job, I didn't apply. I just tried to talk to someone as I was referred, and they tried to add a job. Right? So coming from an underrepresented group or a subset that is marginalized, I will say, having something that is your selling point help you pivot into a role that is global, as a community manager? How did that make sense?

Anne Mbugua 15:23

No, it does. I really liked that. Because today, just like in any job market, there's a lot of competition. And so how do you stand out from the crowd? And then to add on to that, if you're underrepresented, or over represented, right, you have to find a way to be different to stick out. And I really like that idea. Because, you know, you're talking about the importance of, you know, volunteering, so you're learning that experience, right. And also networking, there's that cliché that says, You're your network. Exactly, right. So so that is definitely important. And anyway, that is part of community building. So I believe you should be good at networking, or at least learn how to network well, and to connect, really connect with people and build those relationships. And then also, what I'm hearing is take a professional development course. And there are a number of courses out there, some of them are not costly, some of them are free. And I'm also learning that, you know, it's important to read, read about the community management space, talk to people get recommendations of what should be read. And what I really also love is, you know, you have a project, you have something that you can show somebody and say, Hey, this is the podcast, this is my blog, and this is what I'm writing about. And you're literally writing about the space. Which brings me to this question. So if you have an individual who's pivoting from another industry, and is not really sure, I mean, they've been reading about the space itself, but they're not really sure what areas to go into. Because community management space is huge. There's so many different roles, there are so many, you know that we're talking about internal communities, external communities, you're talking about global communities. I mean, there's so much to it, how do they be able to focus minus all this noise that's happening around them? What would be one or two pro tips that you would give them?

17:22

It's quite funny, because it's not fun actually, like, it's crazy. Because most people that are pivoting to community money, mentor, they don't realize that they actually like doing what they did before. When a community management space, using myself as an example. I did cybersecurity, I worked for tech companies. So you can see there sort of a line. And it's sort of like a relation. It depends on what you're passionate about before, let's say your previous job was as a teacher, as a Bucha, as like, appraisers, committee manager I've seen. So that was a Bucha that came a community manager for a meat company. Right? So it's like you see the because of the of translation. So I think when you want to pivot into a community manager carrier, you sort of ask yourself question, and I think so as I saw finished, production is very important, like self reflection is key. So what do I love doing? What do I enjoy? What am I interest? Like? You said, committee Management students so wide? And it's so why, and it's so good, because it's like, you can get a commitment there. Can we try anything? Right? Like we try anything. So you have that question about who are focused on tech, because obviously, like tech is like, the most dominant place when it comes to like commitment, but there is also not for profit, there are also different brands that need community managers. So you actually asked your question, you also have that question. So you want people to take the actual self company into I want to work for, for example, if you're passionate about women empowerment, or like advocates, you know, advocating for women empowerment, and whatnot, you can work for a company that actually like pork diced women in it for the honestech, or even a company that provides tools for women to be safe. Because a lot of community manuals are met, they actually work for women led corporations that actually empower women, and they're still in tech. So there's always a translation like, your interests, your hobbies, what you did in the past, a lot of like, chances are you into coming into management, or most committee managers that started off in that career, in a way they sort of do things that they were doing before in comics money, Myspace might not be heavily shown, but they're still a bit of correlation. So it depends on your interest. What are you interested in? The question you asked because I'll my love gaming? There's definitely companies that need community managers for gaming, but don't necessarily be my enjoy it. Right? You actually end up hating it. I'm like, nope. But I think why I enjoy my job is that I have fun talking to people. I love learning. And I love talking. I love learning. I love interacting. So you can also translate that into a career. I can be a community events person now talking to people. So just look for what you're interested in and actually like, talk to people I'm like, Okay, I'm interested in this, this and this. So how do I make it I can Google, it's literally Google, Nigeria, there is a Google is your best friend, like you try Google it. So it's like, okay, I'm interested in sports, I'm interested in tech, I'm interested in talking, there is sports company, like you can't be a community manager for. So your interest is key. Because if you don't focus on your interest, you might end up being minicomics manager for a company you hate, or you end up leaving the carrier. But when you have like a solid passion for something that have wheels, you even if you make the point, once or twice, it's sort of seed keeps you going. So I think that is a good way to start a career as a community manager.

Anne Mbugua 20:44

Excellent. So what I'm wondering is, Jeph, what would you do differently? Now having been on this journey, and looking looking back from you know, how it started to where you are now? What would you do differently? Or would you even do something differently?

21:01

I just wanted to say, I don't think I would do anything differently? Because if not, I think pain, pain in life is part of the process, because it's the pain that pushed me. Like I've walked bad brands that they only understand what community is, or do they appreciate me because I was in Nigeria, I was in Africa. But I wouldn't have learned, okay, this word diversity in this one I'm advocating for if I didn't go to this such bad brands, so I would not adjust. I wouldn't do anything differently. Because imagine if I didn't go through all this, probably won't be having this conversation. I'll probably be in a different space. I don't think I'll do anything differently.

Anne Mbugua 21:39

All right. Well, thank you so much, Jeph, for sharing your time. I usually like to end on this question. So what inspires you about your community?

21:51

What inspires me about my community, I think is the fact that we have people from different parts of the world, we all share a common interest. You have people from South Africa, from Kenya, from United States from Canada, we all talk about the same topic. So there's a sense of leveling, regardless of where we are from this topic that sort of brings us together. I think that a lot likely challenge expires when nobody looks at you like from Nigeria, and well looks like we have conversations about things that we're interested in without like prejudice or bias. So that's what inspires me.

Anne Mbugua 22:28

All right. Well, thank you so much.