

Enduring Play S1 E9: Doing More with Less Doing More with Less for Video Game Art and UI/UX with Tamara Knoss



Transcript



Enduring Play Computer ▶ 0:01

Initializing Enduring Play Podcast Season One Engine.. Decompressing Audio.. Synchronizing Waveforms. Reticulating splines . Launching Podcast Lobby.

Cheryl Platz ▶ 0:16

Welcome back to Enduring Play, the podcast where we explore what it takes to create video games that don't just survive, but thrive. I'm your host Cheryl Platz, video game designer, director and author of the Game Development Strategy Guide from Rosenfeld Media. In this first season of the Enduring Play Podcast, we focus on going deep with some of the folks who were interviewed for my book and get the full story

Enduring Play Computer ▶ 0:42

Loading. Episode Description

Cheryl Platz ▶ 0:44

In this episode I had the joy of reconnecting with incredibly versatile artist, designer and creative leader Tamara Knoss, who I first met when we both worked on the Sims Bustin out for the Game Boy Advance. At the time I was working for Tamara's publisher, so this episode pulls back the veil on the relationship between publisher and developer in a unique way. Through first hand storytelling you'll learn what it was like shipping games on tiny

cartridges measured in megabytes and what we faced is one of the seven launch titles for the Nintendo ds. Tamara is currently a Senior Technical UI Designer at Wizards of the coast, but does not speak on behalf of the company in this episode. Full disclosure her title changed after recording, so some references might not quite line up. This episode also captures that indie game studio life from our time at Griptonite Games.

Cheryl Platz ▶ 1:25

Before we get started, a note: this was recorded before I started at my current role at the Pokemon Company International, which is partially owned by Nintendo. My time working with Tamara was shipping games on the Nintendo platforms, the Game Boy advance and the Nintendo DS. You're going to hear a lot about those platforms today as we discuss our past. This podcast is not endorsed or sponsored by Nintendo. All opinions are my own. Tamara represents the true interdisciplinary curiosity that elevates the best game development and I'm certain everyone will gain something from this conversation. Let's get into the Game.

Enduring Play Computer ▶ 1:57

Player 1: Cheryl Platz. Player 2 Tamara Knoss Podcast Level: Start

Cheryl Platz ▶ 2:04

I'm so excited today to be here with an old friend and former colleague, Tamara Noss. Thank you so much for being here today, Tamara. Tamara has presented herself as UXUI Artist and unicorn, so there's a lot to unpack there.

Enduring Play Computer ▶ 2:22

Loading. Podcast Level 1: A Unicorn's Career Journey.

Cheryl Platz ▶ 2:27

And maybe that's a great place to start. Tamara, you know that's a very unique title. How did you get to be where you are today? Like UX UI Artist slash unicorn?

Tamara Knoss ▶ 2:37

So typically a unicorn is described as someone who has the ability to do a little bit of everything or a lot of everything. I started back in 2000.

November of 2000 was when I started in video games and I had actually gone to school. I went to Vancouver Film School up in Canada to become a classical animator. Like my initial plan was to become a television animator work in movies. I wanted to work on those sidekick characters, you know, that just the really quirky kind of stuff. And when I graduated, that was exactly at the same time that they decided to declare 2D animation dead. And that 3D animation was where everything was.

Tamara Knoss ▶ 3:15

So I ended up looking for jobs and found a listing for a place called at the time it was called no Wonder and ended up getting a job as a character animator on Harry Potter. And the Sorcerer's Stone was my very first job for the Game Boy advance and got to animate Harry potter. Hand drawn 2D pixel animation was a great, great time. And then during production of that game There was an E3 convention and everybody saw Tony Hawk Pro skater on the GBA and oh my God, it looked 3D because they had basically taken all the 3D assets and rendered them out to 2D and stuck them in the game. And everybody's like, oh my God, it's 3D. No, it was fake. But because of that we had to change everything in the game. So all of these really, really charming, beautiful 2D hand animations of all the characters and everything, we had to scrap them. And fortunately we had 3D assets. We animated them, re rendered them out and made the game look a lot less charming, but it looked more cutting edge. So that that's how I got started in the industry.

Enduring Play Computer ▶ 4:18

Loading narrative cutscene: development for the Game Boy Advance.

Cheryl Platz ▶ 4:23

You're going to hear a lot about the GBA or the Game Boy advance during today's conversation. As Tamara and I collaborated on several Game Boy advance games together, I was on the EA or Electronic Arts production team for the Sims Bustin out gba and Tamara was on the art team doing character animation for the urbs. Tamara became lead artist and I was EA's assistant producer in charge of day to day work on the project. The Game Boy advance was released in 2001 and it was a portable 32 bit console with a 2.9 inch unlit color LCD screen. Notably, the system measured its memory in kilobytes, not megabytes. The cartridges, called game packs, could store

from 4 megabytes to 32 megabytes of game code. There was no native hardware support for 3D rendering, so any game that wanted to do 3D either had to pre render it into sprites or render it at runtime using low fidelity software.

E Enduring Play Computer ▶ 5:15

Loading podcast level 2: the Electronic Entertainment Expo

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 5:21

Well, thank you for sharing that story. First of all, like we worked together at Griptonite Games which kind of became Amazing Entertainment, which owned Griptonite. It, it was like a whole family of studios. But I don't think I knew that specific story about the history of Harry Potter going from like pixel art to 3D because of that. That specific incident was at the Electronic Entertainment Expo (RIP) a large video game convention for basically industry people where the games would be demoed, which is now defunct. But it was hugely influential at the time. That's where you went with your demos and your videos to tell people what the next game was. This was also. The Internet wasn't so much of a thing as much at the time or.

T Tamara Knoss ▶ 6:02

More most importantly, E3 was where companies like, like stores like Target and Walmart and whatnot would go and they'd have buyers that would go and preview the games in like private booths back and what not. Yeah, just throwing that out there.

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 6:15

No, that's, that's really great context. I think people kind of forget that even though we don't have the same challenges with digital markets, there were still gatekeepers. You know, like yes, Steam feels like a gatekeeper now, but the gatekeepers then were big box stores or you know, chains. And if, if they didn't like you on one day of the year, then your whole game's history could, could be in question. And so you mentioned this moved to pre rendering 3D assets and years later people still do that in games. You were just at the forefront. You were at the moment you walked so we could run in 3D 2D.

T Tamara Knoss ▶ 6:53

The bleeding edge of killing the hand drawn charm.

E Enduring Play Computer ▶ 6:58

Loading Podcast level three: from animator to lead and UI artist

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 7:06

Now,, what you describe working on characters is different than what you do today.

T Tamara Knoss ▶ 7:11

Yes, very much so.

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 7:12

I'd love to- How does your work today, how is it similar or different from that more character focused artwork that you did earlier in your career?

T Tamara Knoss ▶ 7:22

So when I first started out, I was just an individual contributor artist is typically referred to as IC and I just had to focus on the animation of the characters. That's all I needed to worry about. And then over the course of my career I went from being a character animator to a lead artist. And as a lead artist I had, I had to pay attention to the entire game and I had to communicate a lot more with different disciplines. And then as that grew and evolved and I was a lead artist for many, many years, until I hit a point of burnout and became a UI artist because that was a little more focused. The way that that ended up happening is we were at a very small, It was a small studio and our teams were really small. So UI was just kind of this thing that we didn't have a specialist for and no one really wanted to do because we had a character artist and a background artist maybe. And then like, and then the lead artists, like, they were really small teams. So the UI just ended up falling to me and I just kept doing it and getting into it and getting better at it, and it has become my specialty ever Since.

E Enduring Play Computer ▶ 8:23

Loading podcast level 4: user experience deliverables for Game Design.

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 8:29

What you described really resonates with me because I remember I was. I came from a UI UX background, as you know, and when we were working on Disney Friends was like, this isn't even a thing that we do. Like, we don't

have anybody hired for it. So it's like you and me, just like you're handling the UI side and I'm like, "I'm going to do some flows, you know, for the ui". Because that seems like a good idea, right?

T Tamara Knoss ▶ 8:49

Yeah.

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 8:51

Any other games we're doing, but, like, we're going to make this work. We're going to like, put time into it.

T Tamara Knoss ▶ 8:56

I think that was actually the first time I'd ever seen a flowchart or a menu system. It was just. Just really sad looking back at it. But. But yeah, I mean, you got to learn somewhere, so thank you for that.

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 9:07

Oh, you're. You're welcome. And I'm glad it has been so useful over the years. But. And, and I mean, it just.

T Tamara Knoss ▶ 9:13

You invented flowcharts! <laughter>

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 9:16

You know, it's funny, I did not, but I. More than once in my career, people have acted like I have. This is a little bit of a side note, but like, when I was working at Amazon on like the Echo look, I would bring flowcharts when we're doing user experience design. Flowcharts are a player or a customer's movement through time with the software. Right. And as you know, screens are a sort of slice, and then the flow helps us move through time. But it's so easy for teams to forget that it's important to do both, not just the slice, but the through part, because that's where a lot of the bugs happen when you're moving between things. I. It's just been burned into me when I did my education, like, that's part of what we did so I would. I brought my flow diagrams to the engineering team on the Echo look and they're like, "Can I marry you? Like, what is that? What, what, what is this? Is this real? Are you going to do more of them?" Like, "Yeah, I could do as many as you want. We could like, we could do this all day." And that was

really educational for me, like seeing the, the way that the engineering teams reacted to it. I still keep making them, even as a shared understanding tool. Even if we're not talking about UIs.

E Enduring Play Computer ▶ 10:24

Loading podcast level 5: How user experience improves teams and process.

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 10:31

I think it also speaks to how user experience and UI can be a clue that connects the understanding of a game. Have you seen that in your work?

T Tamara Knoss ▶ 10:42

So what you just said reminded me of a thing that when I first started really getting into like academic UX and reading more about it and learning more, I started to realize that what I was doing wasn't just the UX UI for the product, but also for the team. Because as the lead and as the person focused on UX ui, I had a lot. I felt like I had a lot more information, a lot more of.

T Tamara Knoss ▶ 11:08

Oh God, the word.

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 11:09

Well, there's like service design elements to it. Process holistic. Holistic.

T Tamara Knoss ▶ 11:14

The holistic view of everything and how everything interacted with each other. And because of that like kind of catbird seat that I, I'm a lot. I'm able to see a lot of plot holes and like, oh, we didn't think about this edge case or those kinds of things. Hit me pretty hard when I first realized it. Of I'm having to make sure that I'm helping the team understand what the problem is and how to fix it in addition to the games issue itself. So okay, cool.

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 11:41

Really deeply resonates with me. I feel myself going back to that over and over again, not just doing user experience or UI but like helping with process, helping troubleshoot things in the organization. But then I kept being like, well, why, why me? Why ux? But it like- And so I feel very seen that you're saying this because it's like... think about what are the basic

skills that a UI or a UX professional applies. It's like we're going to focus on human beings, their relationship with each other or software over time and look for the places where that might be difficult or where there might be friction. And then you abstract that. You're like, oh, when your brain starts seeing things like that. Yeah, I could see how that would help with organizational design. And so that's kind of why in many organizations I've been in the UX team is like, hey, do you want to run a workshop? You know, just, just I noticed your process over there is on fire. Do you want, I mean we could, we could workshop that if you want.

E Enduring Play Computer ▶ 12:39

Loading podcast Level 6: Stakeholder alignment through prototyping

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 12:45

Can you think of a specific situation where that happened to you in gaming where that, like that not necessarily your current job, but in the past where you were kind of helping the process with your skills.

T Tamara Knoss ▶ 12:58

There was a game that I was working on that does break my heart because it never got released, but it was a mobile game that we. There was just this unending debate of do we want to be portrait or landscape? Portrait or landscape? Because it was a physics based game, there's lots of movement and stuff and they could not agree at all. Upper management wanted a portrait game. The developers, the lead designer wanted a landscape game. And I ended up just taking the entire game and okay, here's the worst case boss fight in this game on landscape. And here it is in portrait. And here's how much floor space there is because it was like a rolling marbles kind of game. Here's how much floor space there is to compete against the boss if we go vertical. Here's how much floor space there is in the physics game if it's a landscape. And I went through this whole exhaustive list of measuring out everything and showing them because nobody would just believe me that I was like, no, portrait's best. No one would believe me. So I had to prove it out on with hardcore documentation, pixel sizes, all this crap. And then they were like, oh well, yeah, that's that real simple. Like yeah, that we should go portrait. And that, that solved that problem. But it was really exhausting because I knew the answer. I knew the answer was portrait, but I

had to go through all the busy work to prove it. Yeah, that made it so that people would believe me a little bit easier the next time maybe.

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 14:26

Yeah. And what I love about that is, you know, one thing I talk with my folks about is understanding your internal audience, understanding what problems that you're trying to solve, how they're motivated, what they're being rewarded for. And at some point, how did you know that that floor space was going to be a convincing factor for your, for your audience, your stakeholders?

T Tamara Knoss ▶ 14:51

Because of it, because it was a physics game, the amount of space for the characters to move around in was critical. It was just with it being horizontally landscape, the floor space for the physics game to take place in was just this really tiny gutter, just like a bowling alley's worth of. It was just really tight because the characters were high enough. Right. So you need to have clearance for the boss to fully be on screen. And if the boss is on the very back of the background, their heads off screen. If you go this way or like, if you want more floor space, they're going to be off screen. So maintaining vertical gave them enough headspace so that the entire boss should show up, would show up on screen if they were at the very top of the background. And then just the square footage of the full book was all that was needed to prove it.

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 15:36

What I love about it is you're doing your job well, but you're also exhibiting a really nuanced understanding of the goals of the game and how the game design work. So that discipline your. Okay. The game designers, they're trying to optimize for a battle that is of an appropriate length. And our core game loop involves this movement on this physical plane. And the size of the physical plane matters. So you know all of these things. And you know, it also demonstrates that like, you knew that what the stakeholders were trying to figure out was what was going to be most fun and as opposed to like what was most cheap.

T Tamara Knoss ▶ 16:10

With like mobile games, executives tend to want portrait because that is the most comfortable way to hold a phone. Yeah, I'm not working on that game anymore and that game never shipped, so.

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 16:21

But it demonstrates this. You kind of saw a blip in the process, but not only did you kind of get people past the blip in the process, but you innately demonstrated how to communicate across disciplines in a way that created alignment. And that is one of the most challenging things about making video games is that, is that cross disciplinary awareness that like, all right, I see the stakeholders as human beings and not people trying to randomize my life. They're probably solving a specific goal. I'll go understand the goal and then I'll talk. I'm so sorry the game didn't ship, but thank you for sharing the story because at least we get to learn from that specific moment.

T Tamara Knoss ▶ 17:00

It was the most effort I'd ever put into documentation to persuade people up to that point in my career. And it was, it took a lot out of me. That whole thing of grinding to prove something that you already know can be exhausting.

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 17:11

And sometimes it's also because that knowledge, when you just know something, your brain isn't always telling you why, you just know it. And it's annoying to have to be like, oh, you're going to have to walk back through all the things that happened in my head before. I just knew it. I don't know if I can do that.

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 17:26

But you did and so you ended up going in the portrait direction. So the vertical orientation because of your work.

T Tamara Knoss ▶ 17:32

Yeah.

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 17:33

Well done.

T Tamara Knoss ▶ 17:33

It was a good victory.

E Enduring Play Computer ▶ 17:36

Podcast level paused. Begin Host commentary

E Enduring Play Computer ▶ 17:41

I want to reinforce the point I just made. This is a great example of Tamara demonstrating cross disciplinary insight. She's a UX UI artist, but she's making arguments rooted firmly in game design. This case study is exactly why I wrote the Game Development Strategy Guide. The most effective game developers are those like Tamara, who seemingly effortlessly couch their ideas not just in what works for them, but context that matters to the many disciplines they work with. That's why the book covers game design, user experience, design art, platform fundamentals, business fundamentals, because it gives you just enough to ask smart questions and work across those disciplinary lines. This is the kind of problem solving video game developers encounter all the time. Subjective, messy and heavy on the soft skills.

E Enduring Play Computer ▶ 18:28

Loading podcast level seven: The people problem.

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 18:32

What's the biggest challenge someone in your role faces? Faces.

T Tamara Knoss ▶ 18:36

Humans. Humans. I will say that because I'm at Wizards of the coast now and I have learned a lot about humans in coming here. I can say that no one thing is going to be right for everyone. The audiences are so widely disparate and have so many, like they have different priorities, they have different things that they care about. Like you're never going to get everyone with one thing ever. Persuading people, getting buy off. Like that whole thing of you know the answer but you got to prove it. That's where it gets to be really good to be on a team where you've got established rapport, where there's trust, because then you can usually, sometimes you can bypass a lot of that because if you have that trust, people will just know that you know what you're talking about. But if you don't have that, then that

harder. That becomes an even harder problem. Having trust with your coworkers is paramount to getting things done.

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 19:25

Makes total sense and it really resonates not just with me, but with other folks I'm talking to. Yeah, the perception from the outside is there's some sort of technical wizardry. Yeah, there's, there's sentence and there's bits, but it's such an interdisciplinary, collaborative and deeply human focused art because in the end, players aren't just playing it for a couple hours. These are deep relationships with software,

T Tamara Knoss ▶ 19:49

Lifestyle. It Is a Lifestyle.

E Enduring Play Computer ▶ 19:52

Loading podcast level 8: Finding the fun

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 19:56

In all the games you've worked on, what do you think really distinguishes the games that went from survival to thriving?

T Tamara Knoss ▶ 20:03

So the games I've worked on over 20, and some of those have had staying power far beyond the rest of them. And there is one consistent truth on the games that have had staying power above and beyond the others, and that is that the people who are working on them were having fun while we made them. There was trust, there was rapport, there was crunch. Like it. Like trauma bonding. Lots of trauma bonding. But when the games were a grind to make, they were a grind to play. And when we have fun making them or, you know, those three hour slap happy sessions were, let's make the cows tip over and make milkshakes like woo. And the engineer sitting next to you like woo. And we just. That was on Sims 2. Sims 2DS version.

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 20:44

I did voices for it.

T Tamara Knoss ▶ 20:45

Right on. I think I did too.

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 20:47

You probably did. A lot of us did.

T Tamara Knoss ▶ 20:49

Oh, simlish. Those times when people get into it and have fun and forget that it's work and just enjoy the process and the craft. That's the huge thing, enjoying the craft. Because there's so much not good that comes with it, that when you can really get into the good stuff and the fun stuff, it really. It comes through in the game. It really. I honestly believe that with all my heart. Yeah, just night and day difference on those things. The games that we loved to make and the games that we grinded through.

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 21:17

There's something to that. There was a very playful element to the old school maxis.

T Tamara Knoss ▶ 21:21

Oh, yeah.

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 21:22

Elvis shrines and beanbag pirate forts and pinball machines. The Bachman wood bar. But then at Griptonite, where you and I both worked, you don't need pranks to have fun. But my goodness, they were certainly a symptom of the fun we were having.

T Tamara Knoss ▶ 21:38

Like the Gollum cutout that kept appearing in people's office cubes.

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 21:43

Yep.

T Tamara Knoss ▶ 21:43

Because we actually had cubicle farm at that point. And there were a Gollum cut out and a Smeagol cutout and they just kept hopping around.

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 21:49

The amount of swag lying around video game studio can be excellent. But there was also the time we filled our executive producer's office full of

balloons.

T Tamara Knoss ▶ 21:58

It was his 50th birthday.

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 22:00

It was his 50th birthday. Now, when we say office, it's probably the size of an average person's kitchen. Like this was like a corner office. It took a lot of doing and we filled it desk height. And then when we were done with that big reveal, we moved all the balloons to a second person's office who was out on vacation. And then that second person, one of the my fellow lead producers, came in, saw the balloons, forgot that he had furniture in his office, and just crowd dived into the balloons and broke the.

T Tamara Knoss ▶ 22:28

Table that was under the balloon. I missed or forgot that. Oh my goodness.

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 22:34

Brian.

T Tamara Knoss ▶ 22:35

Yeah. Yeah.

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 22:37

And so there was that. And then I, I went out on, on a vacation. I came back and y' all had papered my office with Pokemon crepe paper, all of my Stitch doll and everything else, which I was 100% on board for. I still have that crepe paper, by the way. Yeah, those were, those were good memories.

E Enduring Play Computer ▶ 22:55

Podcast level paused. Begin Host Commentary.

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 22:59

While Griptonite Games and their parent company Amaze Entertainment no longer exist, they were one of the big players in the handheld development scene during the heyday of the Game Boy advance or GBA and Nintendo ds. Griptonite's success shipping the Sims Bustin out got them the contract for the Urbz: Sims In The City on both the Game Boy Advance and as one of

the seven launch titles for the Nintendo DS. Today's guest Tamara was my lead artist alongside episode three guest lead designer Amy Kalson.

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 23:28

Loading: Podcast Level 9 Coping with the Short Shipping Timelines

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 23:34

We tried hard on Disney Friends not to crunch, but a lot of times there are things you can't control in video games. The silliness can help you get you through difficult times.

T Tamara Knoss ▶ 23:43

Yeah, yeah. The time in the trenches for sure.

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 23:46

Working on the Urbz for the DS and Game Boy were that was crunchy because of things not necessarily that we didn't control because a lot of people don't understand that those games were made on like a nine month timeline.

T Tamara Knoss ▶ 23:58

I remember one of my, the favorite, my favorite Sim stories that I love to tell over and over again because it's just brutal as I was the art lead on that and I was putting together the asset list and, and combing through the design doc and reading between the lines of like "oh this paragraph, you actually called for 100 new assets. Did you realize that?" Stuff like that. So I put together the whole asset list and put the time estimates on it and went to the producer and was like "hey, this is going to require 536 days of artwork. We have like two months and we have like three artists. What do you want to do?" And his answer, I swear to God was just "make the art take less time." I loved that Answer. I stayed totally calm and cool in response to that answer. We cut a lot of stuff. We crunched, we crunched, we crunched, we cut more. A lot of things ended up getting. Rather than having animation, they had one frame. We cut every single corner we could and somehow we managed to get it done. But man, oh, man, that was brutal. It was brutal.

E Enduring Play Computer ▶ 25:00

Podcast level paused. Begin Host commentary.

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 25:08

Before we start talking about console launch title experience, a note. The trials of working on a launch title are not specific to the Nintendo ds. They're used as an example. Any launch title is new hardware and is equally challenging.

E Enduring Play Computer ▶ 25:22

Loading podcast level 10: The challenges of shipping a console launch title

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 25:28

In this situation. We're talking about the Urbz for the Game Boy Advance and Nintendo ds. Yes? The Urbz would have been the one with the most compressed timeline, because you and I work together. And Urbz. But Urbz had the added situation where we had just come off Sims busting out on Game Boy Advance. It had done well, but the Game Boy advance was dying. They wanted to get a sequel out. And then we signed on as a launch title for the Nintendo ds, which had a very hard ship date.

T Tamara Knoss ▶ 25:54

I was not the lead on that one. Kevin Chung was the lead on the DS version. I was the lead on the GBA version. Yeah.

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 25:59

But a lot of the art assets went over to the DS version. There was like a plus of content that was on the DS because it had a bigger cartridge. But, like, the core of the game was the same. But. So that was a very aggressive ship timeline. And also it was a new platform.

T Tamara Knoss ▶ 26:14

Yes. We didn't know what the hell we were doing.

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 26:16

<simultaneous> Nobody did.

T Tamara Knoss ▶ 26:20

Oh, and the time spent trying to figure out how many pixels is the gap between the screens, I can't figure out.

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 26:26

And no one knew because, like, you wanted to create these immersive scrolling effects and things, and that looks so simple to players. It required information that didn't exist. And what a blessing it was for us being early career to get to learn all that. But also, boy, it was intense. That was.

T Tamara Knoss ▶ 26:43

Yeah, it was.

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 26:44

That was crunchy crunch. And, you know, sometimes things are out of your control when you're on, like, launch platform. You're like, oh, the requirements changed, or, oh, we don't understand why the build's performing this way. "We gotta wait till Japan wakes up so they can reply to a question about this very strange bug we're seeing."

E Enduring Play Computer ▶ 27:03

Loading podcast level 11 minimum lovable games.

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 27:08

Thank you for the example of going through the Game design document and identify finances, because that's a big part of the art life, right, is going through and taking this big concept and making it reality. Like, that's so great. "I love your vision. There's a lot of individual bits in this vision that we need to talk about." You had a producer say, make it take less time. I was on the EA side at that time, so that was probably partially our fault. I don't know. Everybody had big dreams for that game. But you mentioned some pretty hard cuts that were made. And what's important to note was all of those cuts were made and people are still playing that game now. And mind you, they don't sell the Game Boy advance of the DS anymore. You have to jump through some significant hoops to play that game. And you sent to a bunch of us who had worked on the game just a couple weeks ago, like a new playthrough video that had come out and was very like, warm and fuzzy about the game.

T Tamara Knoss ▶ 28:01

And the comment section on YouTube was all full of love. It was so like to be able to swim in the comments on YouTube and just feel warm fuzzies was so great.

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 28:12

It was very healing in a way I didn't expect.

T Tamara Knoss ▶ 28:15

But there's also the aspect of: It was our sequel. To us, it was a sequel because we had just gotten done with There's a Sims Bustin' Out, then Urbz came after that, which is why for me, it all blurs together because it was just several years of Sims. Every time that you make a game, when you finish it, you're like, ah, I wish we'd done that better. Or that kind of. So we'd been through, when we got to the Urbz, we've been through the Sims license, so we knew what. We knew the basics, right? So it was that kind of like. And every single time you do it, you want to do it better because you've learned.

E Enduring Play Computer ▶ 28:45

Podcast level paused. Begin host commentary.

E Enduring Play Computer ▶ 28:50

Going to hear the terms publisher and developer thrown around a lot. If you're a fan of the industry or new and need some context, the game developer is the team that's actually building and coding the game. The publisher distributes the game. They don't always build the game. In the case of the Sims and the City, Griptonite Games was the developer and Electronic Arts was the publisher.

E Enduring Play Computer ▶ 29:15

Loading. Podcast level 12: between publisher and developer.

T Tamara Knoss ▶ 29:21

So there we are in a launch title.

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 29:24

Sims Bustin' Out was only GBA.

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 29:26

Urbz was GBA and DS and it was a launch title. And then Griptonite also shipped Sims 2, which was your second Sims title on the DS. But Urbz was the moment in time where you dual shipped on both platforms and was a launch title Nintendo DS. I remember this very clearly because I had to go up on stage and present the game for 20 minutes at the Nintendo Press event launch.

T Tamara Knoss ▶ 29:46

You were still the enemy at that point. The publisher.

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 29:49

Yeah, that was - a thing...

T Tamara Knoss ▶ 29:50

Coming in and living at the studio with us. <laughter>

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 29:52

I don't know if we have time to unpack all of that, but if we're just getting into our relationship for a second. I was the publisher producer. I was an assistant producer at EA. You know, my manager was often called away. So often I was the person people had to deal with when like we were getting builds. And then eventually I decided I did not want to work at EA anymore for various reasons including the 80 hour weeks. But also I loved the time I spent with y' all when I would go on business trips. I was- Virginia would let me stay out here for like three weeks at a time. I loved it. I loved being directly on the games and I. I felt like I could help more. But then when I went to go interview, Tamara asks me in the middle a panel interview: "How do we know you're not just a spy for EA?"

T Tamara Knoss ▶ 30:33

Well, were you?

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 30:34

I don't know. You tell me. <laughter>

T Tamara Knoss ▶ 30:36

No. That's hilarious. I don't remember that at all.

E Enduring Play Computer ▶ 30:41

Loading podcast Level 13: Grandpa Game Boy.

T Tamara Knoss ▶ 30:47

To what you're saying. I do want to shout out to Steve Ettinger, who was our, our studio papa. Grandpa. Grandpa Game Boy was his name. He's still with us. He was the heart of that place. I want to say. He handpicked all the employees. I'm not completely sure that's true, but it felt like it did. Like he would come in and tell.

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 31:04

Us sometimes, like, I just hired this person who I think you're really going to get along with for this and.

T Tamara Knoss ▶ 31:07

That reason, yeah, he did such a good job of staffing and keeping that studio running. I am, I will just forever love that man.

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 31:14

Both Steve and J.C. connors, they created an environment in which good games could thrive. And I think that's part of what I tell my students. I teach at Carnegie Mellon, the Masters of Entertainment Industry management. It's like 12 hours of class. I'm like, I can't teach you how to make games in 12 hours, but what I can talk to you about is how to think about making environments in which good games can be created to that point.

T Tamara Knoss ▶ 31:38

Steve had a background in psychology and that was just there. I never questioned like that is why he knows what he's doing in building this team. Yeah. All that kind of information can help you.

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 31:48

And with that great power, he chose great responsibility and used it wisely. Like, you know, people can use that in other ways, especially in the video game industry, which was known for being abusive. But that studio took as good care of us as they possibly could.

E Enduring Play Computer ▶ 32:03

Podcast level paused. Begin Host commentary.

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 32:07

You heard psychology come up when Tamara described the background of our revered Griptonite studio head Steve Ettinger. Our guest in week one, Celia Hodent, also has a psychology background, and my training in human computer interaction at Carnegie Mellon also included psychology. If you're looking for a discipline that sets you apart and helps helps you with soft skills, in addition to making better player informed choices, consider expanding your horizons with some psychology training. It's a common thread amongst many successful designers and leaders.

E Enduring Play Computer ▶ 32:37

Loading. Podcast Level 14: Navigating crunch culture

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 32:42

When I was like, "I want to build a team and I want to see if I can't crunch. I'm going to build my schedule so that there's time in there" they were like, "Sure, great, sounds good. We'd like not to burn people out."

T Tamara Knoss ▶ 32:50

It was bragging rights. It was, if you weren't there constantly, you were a slacker. It was, the culture was very crunchy at times, which was not necessarily good.

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 33:01

But they were open to change. And I helped some other employees through some coaching challenges there too, where they were being judged for the hours they were there. And it was like, that's your only complaint about their work? We need to talk. That's not a quality issue, that's a wake up issue. Now the one thing I will say is I had a team that I was asked to join as lead producer because the previous producer had left midstream and the artists were getting up at 7 and leaving at like 2 and the developers were pretty much joining at like 11 and staying until like 10. And so that, that was probably the reason why none of the art assets compiled. So like you do need to have some kind of communication collaboration.

T Tamara Knoss ▶ 33:40

But I just want to know what artists can get up at 7am

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 33:42

I don't know, but it was like a whole team. I was like, I didn't- I had no frame of reference for this because 9 times out of 10 of video games, it's been a very slow roll, like 10am kind of thing. I think it's with kids and stuff, which is great, you know, like, hey, this is demonstrating the importance of flex hours. They're just a little too two flags because nobody was talking. And so I had to get like, "I don't know that these are a thing yet. But I think we need some core hours", which eventually came up. It's like we should- "the hours when we all agree that we will be available to talk to each other" and we were able to fix things because I don't want people overworking. We can't prevent: "Oh my God, we're on a lunch and there's a new requirement for the DS and we're all going to be working a little" but we can prevent, like, "Oh, it didn't occur to us that our client would ask for changes that we didn't account for" that - at the time, like so much of crunch was "EA's going to ask for changes?"

T Tamara Knoss ▶ 34:29

But Cheryl, always expect them to ask for changes! Always.

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 34:32

I know! But we were like, it was so. It was like such a basic thing for me. "I would like to put a week in each milestone for the changes that will be requested for the milestone." And that was like, <explosion sound effect>.

E Enduring Play Computer ▶ 34:42

Loading podcast level 15. The power of no.

T Tamara Knoss ▶ 34:47

But there was also the whole thing of like, "We already have a contract!" They're trying to like, the contract says we have- Like, I remember there being some stuff like that. I don't remember details, but I remember there being like, "They can't have that because the contract doesn't say that they get that." Like those kinds of like having to be a hard ass with the client.

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 35:02

Well, you're probably remembering Disney Friends

T Tamara Knoss ▶ 35:04

Yeah, that was. Yeah, that was- That was one of the things where I was like, Cheryl is the best producer I have ever seen because I had never, ever seen anyone tell the client no until you. And it was just like, my God. And like, everyone's like, the. The courage of telling Disney no. Like, they loved that is my recollection. They were like, thankful that someone actually finally had the courage to put the priority of the game over, like, making sure that the game was good over whatever, some. Something, somebody. I don't remember details, but.

E Enduring Play Computer ▶ 35:37

Podcast level paused. Begin Host commentary.

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 35:41

In the interest of time, I've cut a little bit of my conversation with Tamra that duplicates some of the things you learn in episode 3. In my conversation with our fellow co worker Amy Kalcin, who was also on Disney friends. But TLDR: Tamara and I talked about how I learned through my time working as a producer with Disney that it was important to get to the root problems we were trying to solve as opposed to the symptom I was getting, which was a list of requests or solutions. And once we got to that route, we were able to get much more productive. And in this case Get a new extension to the existing project.

E Enduring Play Computer ▶ 36:13

Loading podcast Level 16 the Pain of exclusion and Prescriptive Solutions

E Enduring Play Computer ▶ 36:21

One of the things I have struggled with a lot in my career is getting involved in, getting included in meetings. There have been times where I wasn't the lead and was doing UX UI design and they would go have leads meetings without me and be like I kind of need that information because like, because what you're describing like Disney gave us prescriptive answers. When I'm trying to problem solve, giving me prescriptive answers doesn't help me problem solve. At least all I want as much data as you can give me. I want all the problems that you can give me. But give me solutions. Yes, please. But don't give me prescriptive answers and don't keep me out of the conversation. Like I as UX ui I might not understand all of the moving parts like certainly like just. But having access to that knowledge will help come at

it from a different angle a lot of times just what exactly what you're describing. But that is, that is definitely one of the biggest problems I've come across is people getting prescription. Like they want to help, they want to offer solutions. Like that's the whole thing, people- and they're in the right that their heart's in the right place-

 Cheryl Platz

Most of the time.

 Enduring Play Computer ▶ 37:18

...Give you answers. But yeah, don't be so prescriptive because there might be something else out there that's a better answer is definitely a thing I have encountered many a time.

 Cheryl Platz ▶ 37:26

So true. Especially when the problem is occurring in a high stress, high stakes moment-

 Tamara Knoss ▶ 37:34

Millions of dollars on the line!

 Cheryl Platz ▶ 37:35

Ist that when you come in with solutions and you don't show your work, give people options like it cuts off discussion. It doesn't encourage us to be better than the sum of our parts. And it took me a while to understand that my value was not always having the right answer, but starting the right conversations.

 Tamara Knoss ▶ 37:52

Absolutely.

 Enduring Play Computer ▶ 37:54

Loading Podcast Level 17: the Simple Gift of Stupid questions

 Tamara Knoss ▶ 38:00

I have also found it is incredibly beneficial to be the dumbest person in the room. I've heard that said many a time for UX designers. But I've lost my fear of asking the stupid questions because usually the stupid questions will

either spark another idea for someone in the room or open up a whole new line of dialogue or just, you know, completely outright that's not feasible or whatever. But it is very scary, especially when you're trying to establish yourself and like when you're in a new company and everything and come in and you just keep asking a bunch of stupid questions. There are going to be people who might think you're stupid. That's just going to happen. But over time they'll see that there's method to the madness. One would hope.

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 38:37

Asking questions is so important because, you know, if I hadn't asked questions of Disney about how did we get to these solutions, we never would have got that contract extension. And you mentioned courage, right? You're demonstrating it in those situations when you're asking a question. For me, I had to develop this the second I noticed my brain jumping to a conclusion, stopping and saying like, hey, can I just ask a clarifying question? When you say blank, what do you mean by blank? Like that one interrupt

T Tamara Knoss ▶ 39:06

What a kind way to ask it, too! Like, you're so- You're so sophisticated with that where I'm very much just like "WHAT?" Like, well, this is why you're higher elevated in the career!

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 39:19

Loading podcast level 18: the variability of UI UX titles.

T Tamara Knoss ▶ 39:24

My official job title is Senior UI Artist, which is not what I do, but it's the job title I have. Oh, that's another thing in the- for UX UI people, I have found that, that the, the definition of what your job is changes from studio to studio. Whether you're doing purely UI design or if you're actually doing UX design like those, it can change a lot. And so I just kind of have gotten to the point where I don't really give a flying F about what my job title is. I'm doing the job, I'm doing the work that I love to do as I get into a team and they start to understand my skillset.

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 39:59

I totally hear you. Because UX ui, this definition for, for my team, we, we had to come to that like it was very blurry. Just within my own team of seven full timers, we actually needed to meet and talk about our different responsibilities and help us figure out what we wanted to be for each other. And when we hand off to each other.

E Enduring Play Computer ▶ 40:19

Loading podcast level 19 Building teams around unique skill sets.

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 40:26

If it makes you feel any better, producers are exactly the same way. Job is different. Every single studio, even sometimes within the same studio. Edie and Griptonite, very different things. But what I did at EA as an assistant producer was very different than what my friends on other teams were doing as assistant producers.

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 40:45

Like I was doing whole game stuff and other people were very focused on single features.

T Tamara Knoss ▶ 40:49

It's actually what people bring to it too though, right? The people that you were talking about that only got to focus on one thing and didn't get to do all the stuff, I'm guessing that there were other people on the team were taking care of those things and so they didn't have to pick up that slack. Not necessarily that you as an individual bring to your job what you bring. Because I was the only UI designer on the team for the longest time and then we got the budget to add another person. And so when we were looking for another another person, we were looking for someone to complement my skillset. So each team is kind of a homebrew of building skill sets based on what you already have for a. For a well built team. Although there's been numerous jokes of gosh, we wish we could clone Tamara, I would argue nobody really wants that. But the fact that back to that whole unicorn thing of I can do animation, I can do design, I can build the prefabs, I exclusively work in Unity for game development. I have gotten to the point where I don't know if I ever want to learn. Unreal. I love Unity as a product. I know it really well. I'm just an expert on making UI in Unity and that's. That's who I am. And I'm really, really happy with that. It took me a

while to get there, but knowing what my strengths are and what I bring to the table helps me be a better team member as well.

E Enduring Play Computer ▶ 42:09

Loading podcast level 20: Unlocking the power of video game engines.

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 42:16

You mentioned that you are very comfortable with Unity and a lot of UI artist job listings request specialty in a specific engine. Can you help our listeners understand why specialization in an engine might be helpful for an artist? Like, what does it help you do that you wouldn't be able to do otherwise?

T Tamara Knoss ▶ 42:38

That's a great question. Thank you. The thing that I have found is the longer you've worked with a tool, the more you know it inside and out, the more you can break it. By that I mean this is not actually a Unity example. I think it's actually a Disney Friends example. There was a point where as the lead, I went to every single engineer on the team to try and understand how did VRAM work, which was the video memory. I wanted to understand how the VRAM worked so that I could manipulate it to suit my purposes. By being an expert in something, you know what the rules are and you can't break the rules unless you know them. And that was something that we learned throughout our time at Griptonite too, because we had been making GBA games for so long that by the end of the GBA's life cycle our last GBA game was. It was a Spyro game. I can't remember the full title of it, but it was one where everyone was like, oh, my God, I can't believe the GBA is doing all of these things. And that was because we had been specializing in the GBA and we had been building our engine for so long that we knew how to manipulate the device to do things that maybe it shouldn't. So this is where expertise is a really, really good thing.

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 43:49

I remember Urbz GBA you had mentioned. Oh, well, we had done this a couple of times. And so we knew what we wanted to do or what we wanted to improve. And I remember being the EA side publisher when we visited Griptonite to talk about what the plan was for Urbz GBA. And y' all presented to us for the first time the Uberchar system.

And this was a new Griptonite technology. Up until this point on our Game Boy games, there were loading screens. You know, you'd have a map and then you'd have to load the next map. But Griptonite had to come up with a way to gradually load graphics over time. And chars were the smallest unit of 8 by 8. It's the smallest unit of graphical loading that we could do. And so the Obrachar system would load just chunks of chars as you walked, so that the player would very rarely perceive map loading and usually only when we wanted them to because it was moving indoors from outdoors. So we had these expansive outdoor spaces in the Herbs that we never could have done in Bustin Out. And that's why Unity and Unreal have become so valuable for so many developers, is because Unity and Unreal solve many of the problems that these systems we describe. You know, the. This Uberchar system, the internal tools we had at Griptonite, we created those things because there was no commercially available way to render worlds, to do isometric gaming, to do the 3D rendered, all those things.

Podcast level 21: wobbly tools.

I don't want to mislead people because there are still. Even working in Unity, you're still going to have homebrew stuff, especially if you're working on a big enough project? The tools suck. It's just a fact. In games, sometimes the tools suck. There are so many times where I'm working one on one with an engineer. Engineers are so. They don't hold back. I love them for that. But they just. This, this tool is crap. This is crap. We made it ourselves. We could- we could make it better, but it's just no one has time like the, the tools. Tools unfortunately don't get enough love at a lot of places because it really requires a big budget and even then the big budget doesn't always go to tools. It's a painful fact of life in game development that you're always going to have to work, well, almost always going to have to work with tools that are not as ideal as they could or should be. Because time management is a thing and getting the game out is always more important than making our lives easier.

As someone who's worked on a platform team whose job was to make tools to make game teams lives easier, the problem often was that we couldn't get game teams to give us the time of day. We're like, hi, we would like to work with you to make it a little bit easier to do the thing over time. But it does require some time from you to tell us what you need or to beta test this thing with us. The game teams would continue limping on with what they knew because it was a known quantity. It's so hard because when you start out, you're making your first game. Why would you build it reusably? Because that takes more time, it takes more energy, just. And a lot of decisions get made that are not in the best interest of a game that's lasting for 10 years. And the worst consequence of success is, oh my God, we're still here with this engine. Nobody ever expected us to be here making these decisions. And it's very difficult to unroll the longer you get there. That's why I talked in my first book. Design Beyond Devices is about this opti-pessimism. Like, what's the worst consequence of success? Like maybe some of the decisions you make in your first game. Okay, sure, cut a couple corners. But what happens if you do hit it? Is this the decision you're going to be regretting for 10 years? We used to talk at Amazon about one way doors and two way doors. Like is this a one way door that you can't go back through or is this a two way door?

T Tamara Knoss ▶ 47:34

That's a great tactic. I have not encountered that tactic yet. That is really good.

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 47:37

And sometimes that mental model is helpful. Like, oh, you're right, we can't ever undo this decision once we make it. And then we will be burdened with this for the entirety of this game engine. And Lord, I have lived that. And to your point, everybody, like from the outside, the industry people perceive it as like, oh, unreal exists. So everything that unreal does, everybody should get no no, no, no, no, no, no. Basically you're a time capsule. You ship your first game and whatever engine you chose, whatever version it was in the moment you shipped, is the version you have forever because you probably customized that version and you made some hacks and things that you needed to get it out the door. And then that's just, that's your forever version.

T Tamara Knoss ▶ 48:13

Unless you have the budget to go, hey, we're gonna do an upgrade. And everybody goes, oh God. And you do the upgrade and then you have to go through the game and figure out what broke because you gotta. Yeah, yeah.

E Enduring Play Computer ▶ 48:24

Loading: Podcast Boss level. Waste not WI FI not.

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 48:29

It's a love hate thing with engines. But to your point, knowing what they can do means, means we can push them to their limit. And what I've also seen is that also helps us understand how not to break them when we don't want to break them, which is on low spec devices when we want the largest audiences possible. You've probably seen this, but I know I've seen this. "Well, we would like to keep this game running on a phone with one gig or two gigs of RAM." You're like, that's cool. That's gonna take some creativity to not use this engine to its fullest and still keep the visuals running.

T Tamara Knoss ▶ 49:01

What you're saying is bringing up so much stuff. For me as someone who started on GBA, the whole game has to fit in a two megabyte cart. Have fun!

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 49:08

We did that. We did ship on like megabytes-

T Tamara Knoss ▶ 49:11

Huge like 10 hour games on a 2 megabyte cart. Amazing. But it's that whole aspect of - because I grew up in the industry in that very. Keeping things small and tight and limited and then moving to AAA and it's just, look at all this waste. Artists making art that is like 10 times the size it needs to be and like that's taking up space on the person's device. It's okay for when they're working on console or like desktop, like when it's a PC, but we're talking about somebody's phone and you like keeping in mind that the amount of inefficiency in desktop games and then porting them to mobile is mind boggling and painful. And it's a debate that I've had with people where they're like, oh, but phones are updating all the time. But it's also about how much when people are trying to download over WI Fi, it is reaching a point

where it's not going to matter as much anymore. But it was One of the things as I made the shift from going from GBA to desktop or console is just how extravagantly wasteful with the resources people tend to be. I don't know if it's worth telling people who are new to the industry to worry about efficiency, but it seems like it's a good thing to worry about efficiency.

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 50:19

No, it is.

T Tamara Knoss ▶ 50:20

In terms of like, memory now compared to what it was then. Doesn't mean as much.

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 50:24

No, it does, though. And you and I were raised in the same environment. We were shipping Game Boy games on like 16 megabyte cartridges and loving it, like, figuring it out. And I had developed this perception that, oh, file size just doesn't even seem to even matter anymore. But working on AAA live service games, they still want to address the largest market possible. Mobile developers are still operating in a place where they want to ship stuff on devices that maybe the processors are a little bit faster. So we have that going for us. But it's space on the phones. You're competing with someone's entire life, all their kids videos, all their kids photos. So you might as well have 12 megabytes half the time. And people will check those download sizes. There's cell phone plans that max out. There's cell phone plans that incentivize you to stay under a certain amount to save money. There are so many things that will drive someone to keep put your game down because it's too. It's too greedy. In mobile especially. What struck me over the last couple years is how much it still matters. It's such a dying art that we keep confronting it like, "We were not conservative with what textures we used, how big these models were. And now we've done this big feature release and it's not working on devices we used to be able to support. Oh, no." And that makes your audience smaller. And so it's- It matters. It does matter. So I'm glad it matters to you. Matters to me. It's a dying art. But if you can take the challenge, that Tamara and I are giving you that, "Hey, we did go uphill both ways and ship games in 32 megabytes. You might be able to ship games that work within a gigabyte or two of memory or have smaller footprints. It expands your audience. What's the worst thing

that happens?" It works for more people and works better when WI fi is crappy.

T Tamara Knoss ▶ 52:11

What we were just talking about opened the door for dark practices. The anecdote I can give is there was one place that I worked where the CEO came to us and said, "We want you to make your game as big as possible because we want to take up as much room as possible on people's phones so that there's no room for anybody else." There's a lot of really weird thoughts that comes from people. The good news was that after the CEO left, we were all kind of like, yeah, right, buddy requests from time to time. They aren't always ethical. That is a thing I didn't anticipate. Being mobile games and free to play and microtransactions really does open that door in ways that I was not prepared for and did not expect. So making sure that you are have a strong footing of good business ethics and just ethical behavior can be a thing.

E Enduring Play Computer ▶ 52:59

Loading Bonus Level: the Importance of Networking.

T Tamara Knoss ▶ 53:03

The other thing that I wanted to hit on for people who are new to the industry, one of the biggest learnings or regrets that I've had perhaps is maintaining your networks better. I've had some people tell me that they didn't think school was worthwhile. They didn't think that going to school for game development or any of that was was a worthy expenditure. And you know, if you can figure out how to do it on your own, at the end of the day, the proof is in the pudding. For uxui, for art, what will get you the job is your portfolio. So if you can manage to make yourself a really strong portfolio without going to school, do it. But the benefit going to school is that you're building a network of people. Like, yes, you're learning the basics of how to make a game and you're getting a safe place to play to try and like, hone your skills and figure out what you're good at. One of the most important things about going to those schools is developing the network. Because as horrible as it is, nepotism isn't going anywhere. And a lot of jobs will come down to there's a couple of people that we're tossing up between. Does anybody know any of these people? And if someone goes, yeah, I know that person, then they can vouch for them, you're golden, right? So the more

people you know in the industry, the more likely you're able to stay in the industry. That I think is a huge, a huge learning that I wish I had taken better care of at the beginning, but I know it now.

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 54:22

So many ways to network now. Being in Twitch communities with other game creators or being at the or if there's infinite numbers of discord communities where you could go find a smaller group of enthusiasts. Maybe it's people who are all trying to break in. Maybe you can find a community where it's people who are. You're already in the industry and you're finding other people who were in there. When I was laid off was the networking in the community that helped me keep my sanity and also just helped me help other people. They helped me like it was just, it was so important to like my response to the layoff

T Tamara Knoss ▶ 54:57

And then the other, the other feedback. If I had known then what I knew now kind of thing. My start in the industry was at Griptonite. Griptonite was an unusual place in that it stayed running. There weren't layoffs- like I was there for 12 years. That's a very long time to be at one place. There are very few places where you can have that kind of longevity. But when the layoff hit, I wasn't prepared for it and my husband was working at the same place. He got hit by the layoff. We were not prepared. Layoffs are a fact of life. They're horrible and sad. But be financially prepared. Keep yourself as financially prepared for that as you can, which I know is just really hard this day and age. But that was really important because that, that, that was a very, very scary time. But like I, I had started off going with the intention of going into television, animation and the layoffs, like they don't call it layoffs there. It's just seasonal work. So in television it's you have the season, then you don't have a job and then you have a season, then you don't have a job. Whereas in games, if you're lucky, you can land somewhere where you can stay for 12 years or longer. But being mentally prepared for a layoff is an unfortunate reality of working in games.

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 56:04

I'm so sorry that the layoffs eventually hit you at GRIP tonight, but it was a good run and that seasonality. I saw the EA2 even way back then when I worked there. Early 2000s.

E Enduring Play Computer ▶ 56:15

Loading Final podcast level: links and follow up.

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 56:19

Is there anywhere that people can find you online that like socials or anything you'd like to point people towards?

T Tamara Knoss ▶ 56:26

I have cultivated a low profile in games. Yeah, I'm available on LinkedIn. I was interviewed by Jason Bay for his book on game development career and I get pings every once in a while for people looking for advice and sometimes I'll hit the right mood to respond to them when people just use the automatic. I'd like to get to know you like you're not getting to know me. If you're gonna use autofill, I'm completely there with you. If you want to reach out to someone through LinkedIn, we have a lot of their plate. If they're going to take the time. If you want someone on LinkedIn to take the time to respond to you thoughtfully, ask them thoughtfully, because those are, those are the people who I actually take the time to respond to. But LinkedIn is the best way to get a hold.

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 57:07

It's really good advice. I know I too struggle with how to respond, who to respond to, and LinkedIn is there. But ask good questions and often say why you're reaching out to that specific person. Make it count. Like, did you, did you just like run a script and reach out to 20 people and hope it mattered? Or did you reach out to Tamara because you listened to this podcast and you really loved her perspective on X, Y or Z? That's a much different introduction. Yeah, very good advice.

T Tamara Knoss ▶ 57:35

Absolutely.

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 57:36

Thank you so much for joining me.

T Tamara Knoss ▶ 57:38

Thank you, Cheryl.

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 57:38

Tamara, it has been a joy to reconnect. I treasure all my memories working at Griptonite with you in that special time. And, and I really appreciate you sharing your perspective today on your journey, which is super interesting to me, that unicorn space. And I hope that it will shed a lot of light for folks in the industry, not just in UX and ui, but a lot of this advice is very general across different disciplines because you're a leader too when you see that.

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 58:04

So thank you so much.

T Tamara Knoss ▶ 58:05

Different career types too. Like different industries as well. Like it. It.

T Tamara Knoss ▶ 58:08

That's yeah it all. It all applies.

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 58:11

Hope our paths in gaming will cross again, but thank you so much for your time.

T Tamara Knoss ▶ 58:15

All right, thank you.

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 58:16

If you enjoyed hearing from Tamara, don't forget to check out how her thoughts were featured in context in the Game Development Strategy Guide.

C Cheryl Platz ▶ 58:23

My new book from Rosenfeld Media, Tamara is featured alongside 14 other industry experts in a guide that will help people of all experience levels and disciplines level up their game development expertise. The Game Development Strategy Guide is now available from your favorite online bookseller or [rosenfeld media.com](https://rosenfeldmedia.com) enduring play Listeners can get 15% off at [rosenfeld media.com](https://rosenfeldmedia.com) through November 30th using the code

enduringplay S1. Join me next time for another conversation with one of the experts featured in my book as we explore what it takes to create video games that don't just survive, but thrive.

E Enduring Play Computer ▶ 59:00

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E Enduring Play Computer ▶ 59:14

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