

Enduring Play S2 E4 Cristina Amaya

Sun, Mar 22, 2026 9:41AM 58:57

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

Game development, community building, video game launches, event management, Latinx in Gaming, third spaces, career transitions, inclusivity, ADA compliance, nonprofit organizations, industry support, job hunting, pro social gaming, mental health, networking.

SPEAKERS

Cheryl Platz, Enduring Play Computer, Cristina Amaya

E Enduring Play Computer 00:00

Initializing enduring play podcast season two engine. Decompressing audio. Synchronizing waveforms. Reticulating splines. Launching podcast lobby.

C Cheryl Platz 00:16

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. Enduring Play Season two is about scaling our game development ideas beyond the individual. A common thread through most of our conversations is the collective through communities of game developers, through game education, through games research, and through the events and systems that support the releases and people making our games. Few games are released in a vacuum. So how do we scale together? We are truly greater than the sum of our parts. So let's explore these themes together. Today's guest, Cristina Amaya is a seasoned event professional who has managed events for new product launches like Riot's 2xkO and Google Stadia, eSports events for Team Liquid, developer events for Unity, and conferences like DreamHack. She's also a prolific community organizer who founded Latinx in Gaming and has contributed meaningfully to the International Game Developers Association. She is one of the many helpers behind the scenes, connecting folks experiencing layoffs over and over again, building community when we need it most. Today's candid conversation covers topics like the role events play in successful video game launches, first hand stories from a community organizer's perspective, lived experience growing up as a gamer and getting into the industry and shared real life stories about the coping strategies we've developed to get through our own video game layoff stories and much more.

E Enduring Play Computer 01:56

Loading episode preview

C Cristina Amaya 01:57

We're missing the in person connection, and I'm not saying this is a return office kind of thing. More like we're missing the ability to connect outside of the workplace, outside of a marriage. We're missing this third space. I think there's such an important starting point I really want companies to invest in them. You're taking away from your audience when you cut events, I think you're taking away from building outside of just the box and the Internet and really building something that will last.

C Cheryl Platz 02:26

Let's get into the game.

E Enduring Play Computer 02:28

Player one, Cheryl Platz, pronouns, she her. Player Two, Cristina Amaya, pronouns, she her. Podcast level. Start.

C Cheryl Platz 02:39

Welcome to Season Two of enduring play. I am so thrilled to have Cristina Amaya, event specialist in the gaming industry here, and we have crossed paths in a number of contexts. One of the things we share is that we're both ex-Rioters, but we've also shared a couple of different communities, and I'm so thrilled that you're here and sharing your time with me today. Thank you so much.

C Cristina Amaya 03:03

Thank you. Thank you for having me on

C Cheryl Platz 03:04

We are going to cover a wide variety of topics today, communities, event organization, but also running nonprofits and experiencing disruptions in our careers. So do you want to start by introducing yourself to folks who might not be familiar with your work?

C Cristina Amaya 03:22

Absolutely. Hi. I'm Christina Amaya. I am currently, as of last Friday, unemployed, but I have about a decade of experience in the gaming industry from companies such as Riot, Google, unity, DreamHack and even twitch back in the day. I am the chairman of the board for a nonprofit I started called Latinx in Gaming, and I'm currently on the IGDA ethics committee and shine a light gaming board of directors as well.

E Enduring Play Computer 03:51

Loading podcast level one: Finding strength in community.

C Cheryl Platz 03:56

That is so much giving back to the community. You mentioned IGDA and you mentioned Latinx in Gaming. How do you choose where to spend your time? Because, because it's already a lot to work in games, games rarely like hit the 40 hour mark, but how have you sort of chosen where to spend that precious energy?

C Cristina Amaya 04:19

Actually, I think about it a lot, because, you know, there's so much going on in the world right now, and when I started becoming part of the gaming industry in my college years, it was actually during kind of the start of GamerGate. So for me, I felt pretty lonely, and I think that it was important that I built a community for myself. And I'm so lucky to have met some really great people back then that helped kind of put this community together for me, and then through that, I decided to work in gaming. And for me, having people around you who support you and uplift you, or have had the shared experiences is always important. What I'm saying is that building community spaces or "Third space" - that has always been kind of important to me, even since I was a kid, and that's kind of what I build around, is finding places where people can rest and be themselves.

E

Enduring Play Computer 05:14

Loading narrative cutscene: GamerGate.

C

Cheryl Platz 05:18

GamerGate was an online harassment campaign in 2014 so disruptive that it has an Encyclopedia Britannica entry, and its wider reaching impact is far beyond the scope of this podcast. But there are some supporting links in the show notes. Should you wish to investigate further. For the purposes of this podcast, the world's fastest summary: game developer Zoe Quinn launched a game called Depression Quest to critical praise, but the game became a flashpoint for some community members, driven by some personal accusations by an individual that were later proven false. When that original story fell apart, a larger narrative of ethics in video game journalism ironically became a self fulfilling prophecy the vitriolic communities threatening physical harm to primarily female game developers and critics ended up cooling journalistic and more importantly, advertising support for video games, with major companies like Intel temporarily pulling advertising campaigns to say nothing of the harm caused to the many people targeted directly. This is actually a story that rings too true for many women and non binary people in otherwise male dominated industries. There is sometimes an anger that comes with your success. Those who do not believe your gender has merit will certainly not believe your accomplishments are legitimate at first blush. But the deepest irony is that railing at inclusion is at its core, fundamentally anti capitalist, if you want your games to be more successful, making them in a way that allows more people to see themselves in them and play them makes better financial sense. If you choose not to make games for a particular market segment, that doesn't mean it's invalid for someone else to do so - and it shouldn't be surprising when they do well when they explore uncontested spaces. But the beauty of games is that they are also art, not just a market expression. And so if you don't feel seen in games, you can make a game that makes you feel seen, and you don't have to include other people, but you also don't have to get mad if other people are included in other games, one thing to understand about the game industry 10 years ago is that there were just many fewer games. It's not so much a problem anymore, with 10s of 1000s of games every year.

E

Enduring Play Computer 07:35

Loading podcast level two, growing up in guilds.

C

Cheryl Platz 07:41

You mentioned, when we were getting ready for this broadcast, that community building runs in your blood. Can you talk about some of those earlier community building experiences that kind of led you to that point where you mentioned you chose to work in the gaming industry?

C Cristina Amaya 07:56

It started way back. We used - I'm from Florida, and we used to have a festival called St Petersburg International folk fair. And at that festival, every country, if they wanted to, obviously, would have a representative delegation, which would have their own little booth, and they could bring food, and they could bring, you know, they could do dancing, and they could do a lot of little things to show off their culture and their country. And we kind of grew up planning that since I was a kid. So that, to me, was always so cool to have a space where I knew for at least four to five days I would be surrounded by people that wanted to celebrate their cultures. And I thought that that was really great. Gaming wise, though my first community, like officially, where I kind of had a leadership role: I was playing World of Warcraft, and I had my own guild called the Furious Kittens. And we co kind of raided with another guild because we were small. There was like 12 of us. There was another guild we joined partnership with called parental advisory. So I think we were like 16 to 18 year olds hanging out with like 25 to 30 year olds who definitely thought we were weird, but whatever, like they played with us.

C Cheryl Platz 09:04

Oh, I love it. There's so much to unpack there. I love - thank you for sharing, First of all, because like, World of Warcraft is so impactful for so many people, and I think people underestimate how many of the life skills adults have right now, just percentage wise, traced back to like, World of Warcraft guilds, just just like, raw. How did you end up in that situation where there was, like, youth versus adult kind of, like, collaboration? Because there's - that's, that's intense.

C Cristina Amaya 09:33

It's so funny now that I think about it, so furious. Kittens was mostly my high school friends, and then some random friend I made from, like, I don't know, I was, like, questing by myself all the time. Everybody else was just, like, on a different level than me, and by that, I mean better than me. So I was always just a little bit behind. So I met somebody who was like, Do you need help with this dungeon? And I was like, Oh, my god, yeah. And his name was Tyler. I still remember him. He's out of Canada. I don't know. I've always been looking for him ever since. Since that time, I've never found him. So we were all pretty young, but the rest of the guild was really good, and my heals weren't too bad. I mean, I was doing it off a Dell laptop and with like, 2000 and like seven or eight or six, but we were pretty good, and people wanted to raid more when we were online from the Parental Advisory Guild. And so their leadership, which I think were like 20-30 year olds were like, "oh my god, you guys are trying to steal our people." And I was like, "it is not that serious. I'm like, on between homework, like, please, please chill." But it was definitely a time.

C Cheryl Platz 10:30

Oh, my goodness, thank you for sharing that. When I talked to Carlos Figueredo in his first season about like prosocial gaming, that that like desire to help other people and like building structures to encourage the help is one of the big game design patterns they're trying to encourage now in current games, but back when you were gaming, it was just sort of something that happened in sort of random caves.

E Enduring Play Computer 10:54

Loading tutorial level pro social gaming patterns.

C Cheryl Platz 10:59

Not only is the story of Tyler here very compelling, but it mimics some of the patterns we heard about from Carlos Figueredo in season one, episode two of enduring play. Prosocial gaming is about creating experiences that bring out the best in us, that encourage positive social experiences between gamers. And if you go to the digitalthrivingplaybook.org You can find examples of games that build this into their game design now. For example, Wild Hearts allows players to explicitly request assistance from strangers when facing particularly challenging monsters. So if you'd like to learn more about how to encourage these types of interactions, check out the digitalthrivingplaybook.org or check out chapter nine in my book, The Game Development Strategy Guide, where I provide an overview of pro social gaming.

E Enduring Play Computer 11:49

Loading, podcast matchmaking lobby, searching for Tyler.

C Cheryl Platz 11:56

But if Tyler, if you're listening, please, please, do reach out Tyler.

C Cristina Amaya 11:59

Tyler tyler tyler. Please.

C Cheryl Platz 12:02
Yes, we want to go full circle, and thank you for your influence.

E Enduring Play Computer 12:06
Loading podcast level three, becoming the helpers,

C Cheryl Platz 12:10
Because look for the helpers, right? Like such a powerful thing, to help another gamer in these moments, and that leads to these communities. Now you're one of the helpers that's reaching out and helping other folks. You're helping me or helping you. Had a games industry job hunt board that was around when I got laid off from Riot back in 2024 and kind of like, if we just sort of do the diddle loop, sort of fast forward, that's that's how our paths sort of started crossing in earnest. Was when things really got intense in the games industry decades later, and both of us had been accomplishing things, but also it was hard, and all we had was community.

C Cristina Amaya 12:48
Yeah, yeah. I am I remember those layoffs because those were, like, one of many layoffs in that time period, if I recall correctly, I hope the space helped. Yeah.

C Cheryl Platz 12:58
It did. It did. I mean, we were 530 but there was also a blizzard layoff that hit pretty quickly after, I think, and so that January was very intense in general. We certainly weren't the only intense period. This month appears to be another intense month. Unfortunately, we aren't quite done with all of that yet, but this space did help, right? But just feeling seen, feeling not alone. It's those, those moments of you need to hear it when you go, especially for like it was my first layoff, and being able to talk to other people and be reminded of the fact that like it is not you. You have value. People survive these things. I am grateful for that. I hope that it's paying forward now that you are going through your transitions as well.

C Cristina Amaya 13:43
Yes, yes. 100%

C Cheryl Platz 13:45

Important lesson I learned during that period that I didn't know I had learned before, that I'm reminding everyone about now is: build your community when you don't need it.

E Enduring Play Computer 13:58

Podcast level paused, begin host commentary.

C Cheryl Platz 14:03

The space that Cristina refers to is the Games Industry Job Hunt Slack, a community that Christina created, which cites itself as a community focusing on providing job hunting resources to those impacted by a layoff or reduction in workforce within the games industry. So you know, not for folks just getting into the games industry, but folks specifically between jobs.

E Enduring Play Computer 14:28

Loading tutorial level, third space theory.

C Cheryl Platz 14:32

In a moment, Cristina is going to mention the concept of third space for the second time during this recording. Homi Bhabha, the Anne Rothenberg professor of the humanities at Harvard University, is credited by some as defining the sociolinguistic theory of third spaces. The theory is applied in wildly different ways, but one popular adaptation paints the first space as one's home, the second space as one. Daily civic life, work, school and other forms of duty, which leaves the concept of a third space to be whatever physical or virtual space is free from the norms of the first and second spaces, allowing the individual to be their truest self and connect with others. That is the most relevant interpretation for this conversation. When we refer to third spaces, we refer to spaces that are not work and are not family. Many of those spaces are gone post pandemic, bars, restaurants, theaters and other social gatherings lost momentum and faded away. What's left for someone trying to define themselves outside the daily grind. It's no surprise then that one of the three Modern Motivators of Play I describe in chapter one of the game development strategy guide is companionship. If we have no natural places to find companions, we will go to games to seek that companionship out, and we are doing so in ever increasing numbers.

E Enduring Play Computer 15:56

Loading, podcast, level 4. Third spaces of all sizes.

C Cristina Amaya 16:03

I think something that you know, speaking of third spaces, again, just to throw it back to that in like, American society, specifically, we're kind of taught, you know, find your one true love and your partner and that's your best friend. People say it in their vows and everything, that's your everything. And I think we're sometimes forgetting that we also need friends to fall back on for other things, people to rely on when things are tough, people who understand the kind of work that we do, people who have our hobbies. And for me, I'm always on the lookout for like people that I can surround myself with that fit in some of these boxes for me in different ways, and that's kind of why I'm always making spaces like that, like I made that layoff job board Game Industry Job Hunt, which still has some active members. I made that because I knew what it felt like to go through a layoff. My role in the industry is not most stable, so I think it was important to find a space and create it, not just for me, but of course, but for other folks that might need it.

C Cheryl Platz 17:02

And I think you know, you mentioned some active members, I know we had talked about like there's other game job communities that propped up around the same time, a mirror Stop bots community is one of them. But I think also one of the things I've learned, and maybe you've seen this too, is it's not always the size of the community that's important. Big communities are helpful, but also small communities can be super helpful. Like, you can be more seen, like, if you have social anxiety, like that can be more appropriate. So, like, there's room for big communities and small communities and medium sized communities out there. So it's, like, it's okay if it's small or medium or not massive, like, it's good that they're all sizes. So I'm grateful that it's there regardless of what size it is.

C Cristina Amaya 17:43

Oh, thank you. That's true. Good point. Good point.

E Enduring Play Computer 17:49

Loading podcast level five, discovering events as a video game profession.

C Cheryl Platz 17:55

Well, let's talk about some of your game industry work, specifically like, what are you most proud of from the time you've spent as an event professional?

C Cristina Amaya 18:09

You know, I really like when you have this moment where a fan looks at the product that you've made and is so excited to be there and to share their story and to share how what you're working on is impactful, right to them like I think, you know, we all do work for various reasons, and for me, work has always existed because, obviously I need to pay my bills, but I also want to make an impact on the people around me, a positive one, I hope. And I think that it is so cool to put on an event where someone can experience that kind of that level of joy. And actually, one of my first events that made me realize I wanted to work in gaming was at PAX East in 2010 when I was still in college. And during that time, I met the riot. Had a huge booth right at PAX, and I met writers who encouraged me actually to work in the gaming industry, because I had always thought life was on a bit of a conveyor belt. You're on a set path the entire time. And there I discovered that I could do things joyfully because I wanted to, and I had never been hit so hard in the face with that kind of reality, and it was cool. It's changed the whole trajectory of my life. It's one of many little moments, right? And I want to make moments for people, and it doesn't have to be career wise, right? It can be like I love gaming, and I'm going to be proud and open about it, or, dang it, you know what? Like? I really want to be out in public more. I want to be around more people, or whatever the case may be, I want people to have moments where they really feel truly and genuinely part of a community and themselves.

E Enduring Play Computer 19:49

Podcast level, paused, begin host commentary.

C Cheryl Platz 19:54

We first heard about the Penny Arcade Expo or Pax in season one, episode 10. Of enduring play. So head to that episode if you'd like to hear a little bit more of that with Yesenia Cisneros,

C Cheryl Platz 20:05

That's beautiful, and thank you for sharing that specifically about that Pax. I hope maybe one of those those organizers, has heard that story and can take take pride in that moment, and it speaks to the power of representation, and that, like, why there are so many panels, there are so many things trying to, like, send that story to people like, you can do the thing. So, yes, you specifically, you individual person at this event, and did packs at this moment. You can do the thing.

C Cristina Amaya 20:39

Right, Right, exactly. I think it's cool that there was so much variety of things that people could do for the you know, within packs, it was great.

E Enduring Play Computer 20:51

Loading podcast level six, how to survive gaming layoffs.

C Cheryl Platz 20:57

Maybe we should get into this a little bit, because you were willing to talk about layoffs, because there's this cognitive dissonance. There's this you can do the thing and and follow the joy. And also there's almost this like, danger going into games like, the industry is risky. There are layoffs. And every one of us who's like trying to encourage people also has to navigate the ethics of like, do you tell people to go into it? And I know what my perspective is, but I wonder, like, what? How are you navigating that reality right now?

C

Cristina Amaya 21:29

You know, so my very first real, big and official layoff was in 2020, when I worked at Google and I was working on Google stadia, I was a contractor there, and I got laid off, you know, early on in the year, because we just, they our events, budget went from really big numbers to zero, and there was no need for me, right? And I remember I used to be so defined by my career, right? I used to be like, Oh, my God, this is, you know, this is who I am. Like, if I don't work at these big, huge companies, I'm nobody, like, I really, genuinely thought that about myself and each layoff, because I've been through a couple again, my career is just, you know, events isn't stable. Marketing itself is usually the first cut, right? And people don't necessarily sometimes see the value of events. So always the first gone. And having just gone through a layoff last week, I can tell you, it's it's stressful, but now, as time has gone on and I've aged, I feel stressed because I need to make money, right? But I'm no longer like will people still think of me as important in the industry? Will people still talk to me? There are people, by the way, who will not even acknowledge me still, right? But that's fine, right? Because ultimately, like, I decide my value, and I decide, You know what I'm bringing to the table, and sure they you know, and I can also remember, and I do if somebody is rude to me and doesn't want to treat me well. So I think I have wrapped up and gone through therapy for a lot of like, the sort of emotional attachment I had to the jobs and the roles, and have taken a step back and thought about, what do I want next? Right at this last job that I just had, while I was looking I was like, I really need to feel connected to the team, to the people, and I'm really proud to say that I got exactly what I wanted. I liked every single person I was talking to like I haven't left on bad terms. I miss them. You know, starting Monday was weird not having a bunch of emails from them. But I I'm glad I did it, and I don't regret it, so I'm really grateful for that.

C

Cheryl Platz 23:35

Thank you so much for the candor, I mean, and there's this deep, well, hard, earned confidence in the way you talk about it. And you know, one thing I tell people about going to places like Amazon is, like, know what you want to get out of it, right? Because, like, you can't control the things going around you, but you can know what you want to get. And like, you going in and knowing, like, I want to connect the people. And so that you can... It's like having a quest log. You had your quest log. You check the quest off, so even if the thing ends, you know what you got and you achieved it. And that took such self awareness and and you got to define success instead of somebody else defining success for you. And and you're so much more grounded as a result. You sharing, like, the transparency of that whole journey from like stadia and the like, "oh gosh, where did identity go to? I am choosing what this role gets me, and this is how it's going to affect me," Is is such a gift to people who are maybe earlier on the journey. Maybe you can help the maybe that will help some of them squish the timeline or realize "maybe it's time to talk to therapist" or something, right? Because there's also like, these are, these are intense things to go through. There's no shame in talking to someone when you are going through something like this.

E Enduring Play Computer 24:55
Loading, bonus level, Cheryl's layoff story.

C Cheryl Platz 25:02
I got laid off in a therapy call.

C Cristina Amaya 25:04
Oh, wow, that sucks. I'm sorry.

C Cheryl Platz 25:07
It's fine. We've got, I mean, boy, everything's narratively interesting with me. It was like I had, I finally had time at Riot to see a therapist, and so I had just, I was in the intake call, and it started at 3pm and that's when they sent the emails out. And so we're talking and it was like, she's like, "why are you doing this?" I'm like, "Well, you know, it's been really stressful, but I'm really, finally starting to find my place. But since I never know where the next stressful stimuli is going to come from. And then the slack dinged because it made an error, because it logged out, and then the Google made a ding. And she's like, "Oh, that's really well adjusted." I'm like, I'm like, "I'm so sorry. I'm gonna have to cut you off. I think, I just think, I just got laid off." My email was the only thing left. And it was like, Yeah, I'm like, "Wow..., you're... this..." Then this woman I had never met watched my ego death in real time. But, you know, and she didn't actually know how to deal with that, because that was a lot. But I did go back and talk to, like someone they with. When I went to my next job, they had a different therapy platform. It was like, I'm gonna start with a different person. And that was much better. Like it that was very helpful, is to talk through like "That was weird, right? Like, why don't we..."

C Cristina Amaya 26:17
Oh god. Well I'm glad you're okay. And obviously now you can laugh about it, but I feel like in the moment you must have been I have never heard a good layoff story, like a story where you're like, "oh, they handled that so well." It's always like, "holy shit."

C Cheryl Platz 26:29

Right? I- you think we would have it figured out by now, because it does happen every five seconds or something, but we still, you know that "up in the air" movie, like they just... it is that way. I knew it would happen eventually, and I'd watched friends go through it, and I knew, like, intellectually: keep work identity separate from personal identity. But no matter how much you think you know intellectually, it's going to hit you...

C Cristina Amaya 26:53

yeah, yeah

C Cheryl Platz 26:53

...In the moment and so. But we are both here to tell our listeners that your value like what you said earlier. You were like, I forget the specific way you worded it, but you were like, "I know my value, and it doesn't matter if other people don't see it", and that's so important for people to hear it. Like, other people's failure to see your value does not change your value. It just means that they don't get the chance to go on that ride and but it takes you having that confidence to like it does. It can make it annoying in the moment, because you're like, "I would really like to partner with you right now, and you're not seeing that" but, but if you, if you continue to know your value, and you're like, "Okay, fine, I will continue on knowing my value and you do not get to participate." Your story is just so resonant and so thank you for sharing that.

E Enduring Play Computer 27:51

loading podcast level seven, the power of events in video gaming.

C Cheryl Platz 27:57

You mentioned that events are the first to be laid off, and that people don't always see the value. Let's talk about that, because I would love for us, as a result of this conversation, to change that perception a little bit. Let's start with this. What role does good event design and good event management play in the games industry, or what role should it play?

C Cristina Amaya 28:23

I try to be like very real about this. I think events are such a great way for you to plant the seeds, for the community to grow and foster, for you to plant what the brand looks like in a 3d way, right? I think it's so cool that you can bring something to life in a tangible way. We work in gaming, and so often the results aren't physical, right? Often we don't have person to person contact, you know, like I said, I played games with this guy named Tyler, and I was 16 until I was like 22 or 23. Never met him. Don't know what he looks like. Have never seen him again since, right? But there's so many other people that, like, I only know online and events are just so physical, and they're so in person, and we are missing that as like, as a society, sorry to say that as a society, it's so hard. We're missing the in person connection... the real. And I'm not saying this as a return-to-office kind of thing, more like a we're missing the ability to connect. And outside of a workplace, outside of a marriage, we're missing this third space, and I think they're such an important starting point. I really want companies to invest in them. I understand why and why they do not. I understand expenses, and I understand when you're looking at the budget and the bottom line that you haven't hit you need to cut where you need to cut, right? But I think you're taking away from your audience when you cut events. So I think you're taking away from building outside of just the box and the Internet and really building something that will last a lifetime. Why? I mean, why do you think so many people return to WoW, like some sort of crazy drug, like there's a Community on there when a lot of us didn't really have one like, I know I played because I wasn't allowed out late, but I was allowed to play video games till midnight. So that's kind of how I got to hang out with a lot of my friends.

E Enduring Play Computer 30:12

loading podcast level eight. What comes after Return to office.

C Cheryl Platz 30:18

You know, you talk about the third space. And I think, you know, looking at one of Riot's newest games, 2xko, right? It speaks to the power of third spaces, because two xko tried to capture the thing that makes fighting game communities unique, which is the third space, which is the like, go it and be at a physical like arcade cabinet or a tournament. And you know, if you look at their social lobbies, it creates that third space digitally, it's it's so interesting that companies don't see the value in differentiating and creating that permanent connection between people in a space where everything else is digital. Why wouldn't you want to have that lasting impact, that thing that people are thirsty for in a post pandemic world?

C Cristina Amaya 31:05

But I've talked to a lot of people who are on RTO, and they're like, "I don't get a lot of work done, but it's really nice to hang out with my co workers." And like, I can see it right. Like, when you're on campus with somebody, you just want to, like, go get some boba, or maybe you just want to, like, hang and chill. Like, I have crazy ADHD, so, like, open office, like concepts, I mean, you're gonna lose me, like I'm gonna be hanging out, because it's just so easy to get distracted. And when I'm working from home, though, like I kind of got nothing else to do but stare at my screen and work on this stuff. But there is a loneliness to it, right? And I think we can see that loneliness in a lot of like gaming communities as well. So yeah, I don't know I want them to make the connection, but I do know that business sense versus community focused sense might not always align.

C Cheryl Platz 31:52

It's just so funny. It feels like we've got it all backwards. So like pretty much to come into office during work day when it's going to be less productive, but when you're having fun, it's all digital. No People. Like, wait, wait, that doesn't I don't think the math is mathing, but okay,

C Cristina Amaya 32:11

Right, right. No. Different priorities, man, different priorities.

C Cheryl Platz 32:16

Sure, sure, sure.

E Enduring Play Computer 32:21

Loading podcast level nine, the spectrum of gaming events.

C Cheryl Platz 32:26

Are there different archetypes of gaming events, or are they kind of one big monolith to you like, I mean, there's like, eSports, you know, we've talked about guilds and more community events. How do you see that, spectrum of event organization?

C Cristina Amaya 32:42

You're right. It isn't necessarily a monolith, right? I think events have variances. You mentioned 2XKO earlier, which is actually what I was at Riot for. I was a WOARior, which, for those who don't know, it means you're a contractor. But with riot, I worked on those events specifically to, like, build the community. And I think something that was really cool is that the two people that were in charge on the inside, from Riot, Tom and Tony Cannon grew up in the arcade scene. Those two were high schoolers playing with arcade tokens, and they really had such a passion. And if you don't know a lot about the FGC community, it is all about those in person events. And I personally think EVO, which is a huge conference, one of the coolest events I've attended, and it is because the community is loud, is proud, and is very, very, very much there and very present.

E Enduring Play Computer 33:33

Loading tutorial level, the fighting game community,

C Cheryl Platz 33:39

FGC, in this context refers to fighting game community, and that is the collective of all small, medium and large fighting game events, usually in the real world. And EVO, in this context is the evolution Championship Series, which bills itself as the ultimate fighting gaming tournament 2025 tournament reportedly boasted around 9000 competitors as part of 20,000 total attendees in Las Vegas. Evo actually currently exists as a worldwide series of three events, which also take place in Japan and France. EVO revolves around a large tournament floor, but is supported by a thriving series of side events, arcades, an artist alley and a vendor village stocked with rare fighting sticks. But as beloved as EVO has been for decades, as evidenced by Cristina's comments, even Evo is not without controversy. Growth brings change, as we pointed out earlier in this recording. Evo seems to have hit the limit on global events, and in 2027 plans to go head to head with local events, much like Walmarts eventually started branching into local grocery markets. A really interesting point made by Patrick Miller on Medium about EVO's growth is that scale makes the experience worse. The shared trust built in a grassroots environment where everyone is competing is stronger than an asymmetric environment where a large number of voyeurs are watching competitors, and that speaks to some of the principles we talk about when we talk about prosocial gaming. In the end, scale is not always compatible with a great experience without a lot of intentional design.

C Cristina Amaya 35:24

But yes, all the way back to the main point, there are so many different types of events, so many different types of ways to engage with your community, and you have to decide how you want to make a splash. Right? Are you going to Gamescom, which is a huge gaming conference in Cologne, Germany, with over close to half a million people attending, right? You might not get all those people to see your game, but there might be some internet presence afterwards that will get people buzzing. The people who see it in person might be an important influencer. You could also do a party at big conferences, especially if you're like, on the B2B side, where you care more about getting devs really interested in working with you. I've done those as well. I'm definitely more on the like trade show slash party route of things. But there's Riot cool doing these cool concerts right now, for arcane they're like raves with, like, small warehouses. So that's pretty cool. And that actually is kind of a combination of everything I like, which is third spaces, which are raves, meeting the video games,

E Enduring Play Computer 36:19

loading, podcast, level 10: events through an indie lens

C Cheryl Platz 36:25

Those are amazing AAA sort of event management experiences. What advice would you have for, say, an up and coming indie studio when trying to figure out if events and event management should play a role in their portfolio of experiences.

C Cristina Amaya 36:44

You know, I've worked with a couple of Indies before, actually, to put on events. Mostly when indies come to me for the budget that they're working with, it's to get funding. But if they want to do something within their community, I'm going to use there's a bunch of games similar like Palia, like gardens, a couple of things where it's, like, this free world, and you're kind of wandering around and you're, you're doing fun stuff within the game, building a community in person. Could be really, you know, as simple as, like, where are the most of our players based? You know, most games obviously have access to that data. Could we do a small coffee shop meetup, a Boba meetup, something that fits kind of the image and brand of our game? Like, I love cozy games, right? And I think it'd be really cool to, you know, maybe go to a nearby local coffee shop and work with them closely, to, like, for one or two days, have a cool drink on site and have a couple of like, your devs just available to chat. That doesn't have to cost you more than, like, maybe four to 5k total, and you're doing something cool and local and interesting. And you could also, like, there's so many different ways to activate within the event space, which is also kind of the experiential space that gets people interested and engaged. So I love indies. I know they can get scared from the marketing and the event side, but I want them to know it's like, it's so cool to work with Indies in those spaces. They're some of my favorite clients whenever I do freelance.

E Enduring Play Computer 38:05

Loading podcast level 11, partnering with product teams on events

C Cheryl Platz 38:12

You mentioned the devs being present at this hypothetical cozy gamer Cafe moment. Can you talk a little bit more about your partnership with the folks, like engineers and the game designers and artists and stuff. What role do those folks play in your work as an event organizer? When things are really successful,

C Cristina Amaya 38:31

they are often devs are with me from the beginning, right? If it's a bigger game, like two xko, I might be like, I need an asset that kind of looks like this, and somebody on the QA team will have to go, just like position around and get me the asset or the art we have isn't necessarily working here. So then somebody you know on the art team will have to go grab something so that we can get it ready and get it going for print, right? And then, when we're actually on the show floor or at a party, they're the people that know the game best, right? Like they've been working on it for hours. They know the lore. They know the story. They've been playing it. They understand why they like it. They're the best representatives of their game. And you know, the people who want to talk to the most are star struck fans. Like, when I saw riot, and it was still like, what, like, a year max out of beta, at that point, I was still such a huge fan, and I was star struck, like I was as starstruck, as if I had met, like, Jeff Goldblum, right? Like it was like, Oh my God. Like, I remember there's an artist who helped design and create Leona. His name was Michael marito. I loved Leona because I was a support man, and for me, having this strong, really cool palette and female presence, and getting to meet with him and learn what he thought and why he made it that was just so transcendent,

E Enduring Play Computer 39:43

loading, narrative cutscene: Leona in League of Legends.

C Cheryl Platz 39:48

Leona was, at the time, fairly groundbreaking. She was introduced as evidence of Riot Games' then commitment to quote, unquote, "equal opportunity tanking", where tanking refers to a type of combat character that boasts high HP and defensive capabilities. Leona, aka the Radiant Dawn, launched in mid 2011 created by Michael "ironstylus" Marino, and described as "a defender of all that is good and light and a strong, independent woman." Well, I'm glad we clarified that last bit. But a few years later, you can find Michael on Reddit trying to reach out to marginalized communities, which was fairly uncommon at the time, and I'll link one of those Reddit threads in the show notes if you want to take a look at those conversations. When you look at those conversations, it's easy to see why Christina was so inspired.

E Enduring Play Computer 40:38

podcast level 12, finding your path in video game development.

C Cheryl Platz 40:44

You had been star struck when you got to talk to Riot Games early in their history, when they were still kind of an indie studio, and you talked specifically about meeting the creator of Leona.

C Cristina Amaya 40:58

Oh, it was crazy cool. That's one of the main reasons having devs like involved really makes such an impact and such a difference. It's, it's cool to see, and also what I was 2019, 20 years old, it was cool for me to see. Like, "wow, there are different career paths and different ways in." Because I think back then a lot less now probably there's probably like, oh, career paths are game developer or YouTuber, right? But back then, it was like, you could just do programming and develop the game. And I really didn't know in my scope that there was more outside of it, of course, again, now there's like, whole career paths. You can get a degree in gaming at multiple accredited universities. You can even get out a career in eSports, like they have a ton for kids now, but I think back then, nobody really thought this was a career.

C Cheryl Platz 41:44

And then I got to the games industry, and they're like, "what's a user experience designer?" You're like, "that's fine. I'll make I'll do some, I'll do production. It's it's fine." Did you ever end up taking any, like, game development related classes, or were you self taught? Or, like, how did you approach your entrance into the industry?

C Cristina Amaya 42:02

I approached it like I approach everything mildly on fire, which I think is kind of why I am really good at events. At this point. I had a degree in political science, and I was still studying poli sci at that time. And even though he was like, Yeah, you can work in gaming, no part of me was like, All right, time to switch my career and my degree. I was like, Yeah, I really want to. I don't know what I'm gonna do next. And two years later, after I graduated, I went into marketing. So I started in social media marketing in New York City for some random small company. Then I worked for an ad agency. So I did agency work for about two years. That was intense, good, but intense, if anybody from there sees that. And I think after that, I realized I really don't like social media management. I'm decent at it, but I think that writing copy was just not something I really enjoyed. Community Management was fun, but it could be really draining, especially at that time period. But I knew I liked events, and I knew I liked putting things together and seeing that physical and tangible results. I really love that.

C Cheryl Platz 42:56

It's an important insight, the "good at it, but it's draining", which, you know, I think is important for a lot of early game folks to reflect on, because I know there were several things I encountered where I was good at it, but it did not resonate. And I had to sort of unpack all of that was like, Oh, I'm good at localization, but it did not resonate with me as something I wanted to do long term. I was good at sort of what is now, live ops, release management, that was draining for me. It's good that you were so like you very quickly were like, This is not for me. That is for me. Self awareness can be very valuable and save a lot of pain later on. And it's tough when it's a career, when it's an industry that people want to work on, because sometimes you can force yourself past that self awareness point. Be like, No, I'm just gonna keep doing it, even though my soul is telling me not to do it.

E Enduring Play Computer 43:49

Podcast level 13, creating safe and inclusive events.

C Cheryl Platz 43:56

You've made a couple references about like, oh, "community management was hard at that time." Can you talk a little bit about what makes a safe and inclusive event?

C Cristina Amaya 44:05

Ooh, there's a lot of differences here. I think always important is ADA compliance. That's a lesson I had to learn myself. Is that I was an ADA compliant in various ways and after meeting folks, and it's a shame that, like that's how I learned, right? I want to acknowledge that I event managers should all kind of have some sort of guidebook somewhere. Guidebook somewhere that's like, you need to have, like, something for folks that are blind or deaf, or people who are in chairs, or people who have limited mobility and will need seating. Like, there definitely should be something like that, making sure that we're making comfortable spaces where people feel able to approach, you know, some sort of that person and be like, hey, there are problems here, making sure we cut things off before they even start. Like, I think about drink covers at certain parties. If you're throwing a party, thinking about making sure that you don't leave drinks out. And people can like, you know, come over and grab rather have it made directly by a bartender. Sure it's more expensive, but I think it's better, you know, especially if there might be some concerns with drink. Getting tampered with. There's something happening. Not that this happens often at the type of events you throw in gaming, but like having Narcan available in case people, do you know, partake in drugs and might overdose. Safety doesn't necessarily mean we punish people for doing things we might not enjoy to themselves, but that we should instead be able to help them if the situation goes too far in a certain direction, knowing where the local, you know hospital is, knowing where, like, emergency services are. And then, if you're working a big event where there's a lot of staff, having them informed as well. It's so important that everyone in your event is armed with the information to make things safer. I've definitely been at events where they're not and things kind of fall to the wayside, and things fall apart pretty quickly.

C Cheryl Platz 45:41

I know like it can feel like a drain for people who want to have a good time to think about those things, but when I talk about, like, Opti-pessimism in my books, I'm like, be prepared to... even if you don't know what's going to go poorly, having a plan for how you respond to unexpected things can make you so much more confident in the moment, and can allow the good things to be better. You know, we don't know what's going to go wrong, but we can take some some basic steps we and we can look at who we might exclude and make sure that's not going to happen, like we won't be our own worst enemy. And here's the list of numbers in case something really does jump the rails. Those are great examples. Thank you.

E Enduring Play Computer 46:28

Podcast level paused, begin. Host commentary.

C Cheryl Platz 46:34

In this context, Ada refers to the Americans with Disabilities Act, which is legislation in the United States which dictates physical access for people with disabilities and equal treatment for people with disabilities. If you live in a different region. There's probably some other local legislation that dictates how you provide equity for people with disabilities. So if you are an events professional look into what your local legislation tells you, and start there.

E Enduring Play Computer 47:10

Loading podcast level 14, the practical side of passion.

C Cheryl Platz 47:16

What's one thing you wish you knew when you were starting out?

C Cristina Amaya 47:19

Gosh, I was very hungry when I was younger, right? And I was like, I need to have stuff done now. Like, I need to, everything needs to kind of fall into place. I think that's... I'm just laughing at myself, sorry. I think of that song Vienna by Billy Joel. It's like, "slow down. You're doing fine." I really wish I had listened to that slow down, like, enjoy like, you know, I was always this could probably be partially attributed to anxiety, but I was always, like, in a rush to just get the work done, get this done, get that done. And I wish I had taken just a little bit more time to just settle into the roles I was in, to just relax and remember that, yes, I'm doing something because I am passionate about it, but ultimately, like being very brass tacks, here it is still career, right? Like I still have friends, I still I'm going to have a family, I'm still going to have loved ones and people I you know, there is a balance to everything that you do. And I think that when I think about the time when I worked at Twitch, there was a phrase called bleed purple, you know. And it was part of the ethos of the company. You cared so much about Twitch that your blood would literally drip out purple, right? And I, I understand, and it was very cool at the time, but I also think maybe I should just bleed normal blood colors, right? Like, maybe I should, you know, I should be able to, like, be my own person outside of work, and that's on me too. I was young. I had moved there alone, or I relocated from the East Coast, played a couple friends there at the time, not really anybody I was super close to, and so I think I kind of came in and folded myself into the company to make sure that I was, like, super happy and comfortable, and was there all the time. And then when I eventually lost the company, sure, I've kept some incredible friends from there. But ultimately, it was a job, right? Ultimately, like, you move on,

C Cheryl Platz 49:09

My first full time jobs being at EA like, and all the meals - all those cultures where you're like, either eating at the place, or there's the bleed purple piece, it's so easy to just forget to invest in yourself really, really is and then the company goes away, and you're like, "oh, I have to spend time with me now."

C Cristina Amaya 49:31

I don't even know what I like outside of work, where am I supposed to turn to if there's no slack to chat, right?

E Enduring Play Computer 49:40

Podcast, level 15. You level 15, the founding of Latinx in gaming.

C Cheryl Platz 49:45

We talked a little bit about nonprofits, and you are chairman of the board for Latinx in gaming, and that is a nonprofit that you created. Can you talk a little bit about, about that experience, because that's a really unique and powerful journey, and also one I think people don't have enough appreciation for.

C Cristina Amaya 50:07

Oh, thank you. I started Latinx in 2018 because I noticed that there wasn't any spaces for Latinos that weren't directly attached to Xbox. And there's nothing wrong with Microsoft or Xbox in this context, but if you couldn't get invited in which you had to be invited by Microsoft, then there's just no spaces, right? And I don't think I was invited that year, right? So I was like, "Oh, okay. Like, I want, I want to be able to gather and just be able to join, just by being Latino." And I knew there were spaces where women were gathering, and they were a little bit smaller back then, but I know there was, like, women in games ambassadors. So I started this nonprofit, and I don't say it as an and then this nonprofit appeared. Oh my god, yay. It started off as a Facebook group where I dragged in the like, six Latinos I knew in the industry. It started with me tweeting at people. It started with, like, very small grassroots efforts of like, okay, we'll try to make it work. And it eventually took somebody at Niantic, her name's Trinidad Hermida, that to like, be like, "I'll give you guys the money that you need to become an official nonprofit", and then we became a nonprofit. But it took a lot of work. A lot of people were involved. Like, a lot of people put blood, sweat and tears to this. You know, we always say we're the founders. There's six of us, and six of us really made this happen. But it wasn't just six of us alone. So many other people helped in that that was cool.

C Cheryl Platz 51:24

What role does Latinx play for you now, and what role does it play in the industry?

C Cristina Amaya 51:29

At the time we're in right now, it's hard to be Latino, right? I think more than ever, it is important that this community still exists, and it does. I, you know, I started it as president, but I'm no longer president. It now is run by Elaine Gomez and Diana Rodriguez, our president and vice president, and a couple of other great folks are staff as well. And I think it's really cool to see where they're going to take it. You know, they're focusing. I was an events person, so I was always like, what's the next event we can do? What's the next event we can do? They're focusing more on the more kind of career oriented stuff, which I think is great, right? And I think that that maybe could be another angle that it's going in. So it's cool to see the way that they're growing the organization. It's cool to see where it might go. And I'm hoping that now, more than ever, Latinos and allies of our communities are coming in and helping us where they can.

E Enduring Play Computer 52:22

Podcast level 16, growing your career through compassionate networking.

C Cheryl Platz 52:30

Well, thank you for all of your community facing work. I mean, even twitch, right like Twitch, has created so much support for communities of all shapes and sizes, and that work was not easy. And this work for Latinx in gaming. And as you say, like creating that space right now, that work is hard work. As we kind of wrap up our conversation, what's one piece of advice you have for people navigating these cross company, cross organizational relationships, like because you've talked about across platforms, across publishers, cross cultural relationships. That's that takes a lot of nuance and, like, emotional intelligence. What would you want people to take away to help prepare them for that?

C Cristina Amaya 53:12

Gosh, I am very, that's very kind of you. I did not have any of that, and I was a bit of a bitch when I was younger. I'ma be real. I'm like, keep it 100 right? And I'm lucky that there were people that were still willing to keep me around, coach me, or give me the feedback when things weren't great, right? With that said, to get to where you need to be in this industry, be as kind as you possibly can to everyone. It doesn't matter if they are nobody in the industry, right? Like, even if you don't have time for them, be like, Look, I'm sorry, it's busy, you know, whatever you need to say, right? Be you might be busy, right? When you relay that information to other people, keep in mind that they also have stuff going on. We don't know everyone's what's going on in their lives, behind the scenes, and we should treat everybody with the generosity and kindness that we hope to get back so that, I guess, would be my my word of advice.

C Cheryl Platz 54:08

Thank you for that. It is tough, right? Like that. There's the boundaries are. A thing I'm always struggling with is like, I want to help people, but it's difficult and like, I often like verbal vomit at people, like, "I'm so sorry I can't help you right now. Here's the 18 reasons why, but here are some resources that I have that might help you" and people probably feel like they open Pandora's box. But I, you know, I thank you for your candor, because I think you know, one thing that people early career do is they go straight for people late career, and they're like, "I want to go talk to that person. I want to go learn from them," and that deprives them of the chance to see people earlier career who are still marinating, still working on it, still maybe not as polished at the interpersonal stuff. Like I was not. I did not have everything figured out. I learned a lot. Lot of hard lessons along the way, but I had lots of teams where I did not like fit in as well. It did not. I was not a podcaster. I did not do the things. And so you sharing like, yeah, it was not always 100 is helpful for people to hear.

C Cristina Amaya 55:12

You have to grow like you're never going to start this industry perfect or being able to do what a senior person does, but you can. You can at least try to, like, get little baby steps to get you there.

C Cheryl Platz 55:26

And what do you most hope to get out of the next year?

C Cristina Amaya 55:31
Stability? Stability would be great.

C Cheryl Platz 55:35
That's fair. That's fair.

E Enduring Play Computer 55:38
Loading final podcast level links and follow up.

C Cheryl Platz 55:42
How can people follow your work? Where would you like them to find you on the vast internets?

C Cristina Amaya 55:48
Oh, my goodness. So they are welcome to add me on LinkedIn. Cristina Amaya, just say where you're adding me from. I do get added a lot, and I get confused. And then if you really want to follow me on social, you can. LinkedIn is the only one I'm a professional on, but you're welcome to find me. SilCris88 on Instagram, I kind of post bullshit on there, but it is what it is.

C Cheryl Platz 56:11
It's so funny how, like, we all have our metrics for, like, what goes on each platform, and it's different for all of us, but it is different. My Instagram is very different than my LinkedIn was very different from my Tiktok, even though, like, we're not going to talk about Tiktok right now, but I hear you different groups for different people, but Well, thank you so much for your time today. It was so much fun to get the chance to talk to you, and like your candor is so refreshing and energizing, and I'm really looking forward to getting a chance to share your story with everyone and our paths crossing. And I hope people listening will appreciate how important it is to create spaces for people to connect. If we have to go back to the office, why can't we go back to the party?

C Cristina Amaya 56:58
I agree, important question. We need to have both spaces. It can't just be one like really.

C Cheryl Platz 57:06
Thank you so much. Cristina

C Cristina Amaya 57:08
thank you. Have a good one.

C Cheryl Platz 57:11
Continue exploring the craft of game development with my book that inspired this podcast, The Game Development Strategy Guide available worldwide from your favorite online bookseller or from my publisher, rosenfeldmedia.com enduring play. Listeners can get 15% off@rosenfeldmedia.com through July 31 2026 using the code enduring play. S2 check out season one of this podcast for the interviews that helped inspire the book or tune in next time for interviews that help expand our understanding of what it takes to create games that don't just survive but thrive. I'm your host, Cheryl Platz, until next time, keep thriving,

E Enduring Play Computer 57:58
initiating final credit sequence podcast, enduring play.

E Enduring Play Computer 58:05
Created and produced by Cheryl Platz. Copyright IdeaPlatz LLC, All Rights Reserved.

E Enduring Play Computer 58:13
Explore the podcast at enduringplay.com.

E Enduring Play Computer 58:18
Podcast theme composed by Cheryl Platz.

E Enduring Play Computer 58:21
To learn more about Cheryl's books, visit Rosenfeldmedia.com

E Enduring Play Computer 58:26
Follow idea Platz on Instagram, Youtube or blue sky, I, D, E, A, P, L, A, T, Z

E Enduring Play Computer 58:36
To learn more about ideaPlatz, the design education consultancy, visit ideaplatz.com

E Enduring Play Computer 58:45
Thank you to David DEMA for episode quality assurance.

E Enduring Play Computer 58:49
For book and podcast merch. Go to ideaplatz.dashery.com.