

Enduring Play_ S2 E1 Joanie Kraut

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SPEAKERS

Joanie Kraut, Cheryl Platz, Enduring Play Computer

E Enduring Play Computer 00:00

Initializing enduring play podcast season two, engine decompressing, audio, synchronizing waveforms, articulating 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 and during 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. We kick things off this season with Joni kraut, whose journey through the games industry is both inspiring and relatable. She started as a World of Warcraft fan, and her passion drove her down the street to start at steel series as an accounting coordinator, and took her all the way to roles in eSports, as a finance advisor for Game Studios, as an angel investor with playcap, but she's best known for her role as chief executive officer for women in games International. But this episode is not just for women. The work of women in games international features workshops and content for people of all genders. It's a really compelling, inclusive, hopeful talk, a journey that I'm really excited for you to go on with us,

E Enduring Play Computer 01:49
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J Joanie Kraut 01:51

Again, it's not creating a room full of people who look just like me saying there should be change. It's bringing everyone to the table. It's bringing men, women, non binary. It's bringing every single person to the table to say, we want to see this change, and we want to be part of this change, and this is what we're doing to enact that change. And now that you're here, what would you like to see? How would you like to approach this? Shouldn't we talk about your identity and what it is that you are seeing and we help you and support you? Let's get into the game.

E Enduring Play Computer 02:20

Player One. Cheryl Platz pronouns, she, her player two. Joanie Kraut pronouns, she, her. Podcast level start.

C Cheryl Platz 02:34

Welcome to Season Two of enduring play, the podcast where we discuss what it takes to create games that don't just survive but thrive. I am your host, Cheryl Platz, and I am thrilled to be here today with Joanie Kraut, who is CEO of women in games International. And it is such an honor to have you here today. Joanie, you lift up the community every day. Thank you for your time.

J Joanie Kraut 02:57

Thank you for having me. No, this is really exciting.

C Cheryl Platz 03:00

I'd love it if you could give our guests a tour of who you are in your own words, what's important to you and what are you doing in this moment?

J Joanie Kraut 03:07

I am the CEO at women in games International, or WIGI. We are a nonprofit focused on supporting professionals in the games industry. So we really focus on women, non binary, femme, identifying just underserved and underrepresented people, and we work together with our allies to create a safe space to continue conversations and to really drive change. We have really quality professional development programs, we have workshops, we have actionable allyship workshops, and it's really just focused on changing the conversation to there is a problem, to how do we solve the problem? How do we create immediate impact and continue to move forward.

E Enduring Play Computer 03:44

Podcast level one, the state of the video game industry

C Cheryl Platz 03:48

The constructive part of the conversation is so important. I'm sure you've seen this, but just to kind of set the tone, because when you start to engage in a topic like this, there's always folks who are like, Is there a problem? And you know, we have made progress. Yes, certainly you and I are here today. I am deeply grateful to every ally who has helped or is helping me. And yet, there are still some moments that kind of gobsmacked me, for lack of a better word, where we're like, oh, we're we're still having this conversation. Do you have any context for folks who might be coming into this conversation and saying like, Oh, isn't that a solved problem? Are there any examples you give people to help ground the importance of the work right now?

J

Joanie Kraut 04:27

We started in 2005 officially, we were in 2003 we were panel discussion at GDC, and it was women navigating their careers in the industry, and it was pitched as women were just first now entering the industry in 2003 No, that's not true. We've been here. It was that conversation around we've been here. We just aren't maybe taking up enough space to kind of get certain names recognized. And in 2004 you know, 2000 threes panel was very, very successful, and we had a lot of people interested in joining 2004 it was a bigger space, and we still. Had standing room in 2005 it was main stage, and we still had standing room. And it was, it was so many people were interested in talking about what people were doing to kind of navigate the space, how we can make change, what we were doing differently. And three women just went, what are we doing at this point? We're just kind of complaining. We're not really moving the needle forward. So wiki was formed to bring together all the wig cigs and ERGs, so women and games, special interest groups and employee resource groups on an international basis, and we were created to be that one cohesive community on an international basis, around the world, and we wanted to focus on resources. So what are we doing? What is somebody else doing that we can point you in that direction. It doesn't necessarily have to be our programming or our grant or our whatever we want to just let people know that there are resources available. And so it was creating that space for opportunities to share. What are you doing? How are you showing up in different spaces and just kind of empowering each other through networking and community.

C

Cheryl Platz 05:54

So what does that empowerment look like in practice today?

J

Joanie Kraut 05:58

Today, we run over 60 programs a year. We have everything from workshops, you know, we have men coming to us saying, I want to be a better ally, but I don't know how. Or, you know, see something say something is huge. Like, who do I say it to, how do I say it? What do I say? What is the actual approach? How do I do this without looking like I'm just being performative? How do I actually make an impact and support the person who's being affected? And so we have actionable allyship workshops, we have mentorship programs, we have our get in the game program, where we actually bring people to conferences. And so it's it's finding ways to kind of change the conversation, change the narrative. And when we look at our get in the game program, and we see so many people who are in leadership positions, who are women, who aren't being funded to go to these conferences, to continue to network, it's stopping their progress in the industry. It's kind of stopping installing where they can go. So we're helping sometimes VPS get to a conference who that the company is not going to pay for them to go to. We're also seeing just a discrepancy in pay. We're seeing discrepancy in upward mobility.

C Cheryl Platz 06:57

Those are hard problems to solve. How do you tackle something like that?

J Joanie Kraut 07:03

The biggest thing that we're trying to do is, when we do see a problem, how do we solve it or create immediate impact, whether it's hiring teams or, you know, hiring the same people that look just like them, or if it's somebody who's already in the industry who's trying to work their way up from mid manager to executive leadership position, and just seeing how few women are at the top unless they have their own studio. And I think that's, that's a huge thing that we're really trying to combat right now. And we are seeing a lot of traction. As you said, there's a lot of movement. There's a lot more excitement. There's also what I like to call revenge Studios, which is, you know, just women just going, I'm tired of doing it this way. I'm just do it my own way, and then kind of starting their own thing. And so it's great opportunity. And there's, there's so much potential across the industry and across so many different countries now as well that, yeah, we've definitely seen a huge tick in the right direction, and we're just excited to be part of continuing to move forward.

E Enduring Play Computer 07:57

Voting podcast level two. Unique value of allies in mentoring relationships,

C Cheryl Platz 08:05

a major component of many programs like this is mentoring. What role does mentoring play in the work that wiki does, and do you have any unique insights on how mentoring plays out for your community? There is

J

Joanie Kraut 08:20

a mentorship that happens that it's a bit more candid, it seems, when it's a certain gender versus, you know, it might be a little bit more focused on, you know, if I want, I want another woman to be my mentor, she might not have the same experience as a man who is in a higher position. So, how do we make sure that the right mentorship is happening for everyone. How do we make sure the right accessibility points is happening for everyone? I will say, when I was working in different Esports organizations, having a white male tell me why aren't you having that conversation was a lot more powerful than having another female say to me why you should be having these conversations, or why? How do we approach these conversations? Or what can we say differently in these conversations? And having a guy just be like, Why aren't you having these conversations? Why wouldn't you ask about your salary? Why wouldn't you negotiate a higher pay? And it's everything from how you introduce yourself, we always say, we want to remove the just and the butts. Like, stop saying, I'm just doing this. Or I, you know, but I did that or sorry. Stop saying sorry. Oh my gosh. Are you having conversation? But it's everything, even when we talk about salaries, you know, it's a man might say, I'm going to go renegotiate my salary because you're not paying me correctly, and you're welcome for showing you this problem. And here's the pay that I should be getting, versus someone who is underserved or underrepresented, who maybe is being told they should be grateful to even have a job, or that they're even in the room. We approach it as a conversation and a question. So I want to ask about a salary increase versus negotiating the salary increase or correcting the problem. And so it's just changing the approach and how we talk about the problem, how we. In our minds, set ourselves up for solving or taking a step forward. I think a lot of it is, it's just based on that mentorship and that guidance, which we are seeing a lot less of that opportunity to have that mentorship, because there's not as much water cooler talk when we're all virtual. And so how do we get exposure to those conversations? How do we kind of see how other people are navigating the space, and how do we continue those conversations,

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Enduring Play Computer 10:27

launching podcast level three, pre and post pandemic policy.

C

Cheryl Platz 10:33

You know, some things I want to call out, because as we move through time, things change. And one of the important things that has changed is the pandemic, right? It's a huge inflection point. And you pointed out the loss of third spaces, and we talk about that in some other episodes later in this season, from a gaming context, but also that has an impact from a professional context. There's less weird, you know, work events where you're going to come across people, there's, as you say, there's like, less water cooler stuff there's, and you mentioned funding for conference visits. If there's, the more constraint there is, the more likelihood it is the bias is going to get introduced. You know, often the bias is unconscious or, like, feels really justified at the time. Well, it's like, well, that person has a really good explanation, and this person doesn't. Is like, right? But was that systemic? Did that come from 10 years of propping that person up to have the thing, and is it just gonna keep happening because we did that? And so this pandemic moment has made everything that existed more intense in my experience, any process issue we had, any issue we had with management, any issue we had with career development, it just got a little bit harder, not unsolvable, but certainly more challenging. I don't know if that resonates with you.

J

Joanie Kraut 11:48

Yeah, definitely. I mean, and even prior to the pandemic, I remember there was a conference I really wanted to go to, and I had another woman who didn't have kids, but was starting to try to have a family, and she specifically blocked me from going to the conference, and she said, Well, she wouldn't want to go. She's got kids. Can't imagine having kids and leaving them behind. And I was like, Excuse me, I can do both. That should not be a determining factor on whether or not I'm qualified to attend the conference. So it's like you're saying with the biases as well.

E

Enduring Play Computer 12:20

Podcast level, paused, begin host commentary.

C

Cheryl Platz 12:24

I know that some listeners will be listening to that last conversation and say, Wait, that pronoun was she? The manager that blocked Joni was a she, and that speaks to one of the themes here, which is that, yes, work for inclusion does lift up underrepresented genders, but it also helps us shine light on employment practices that are harming us regardless of gender, that interaction actually happened within gender. Now you can get into conversations about upholding gender norms. The fact is that the standard we want is allowing people to have access to these professional experiences, women, men, non binary. People, regardless of what gender their manager is, regardless of what gender they are, that's what equity is. The Oxford language's definition of equity is the quality of being fair and just, especially in a way that takes account of and seeks to address existing inequalities. It's interesting that the breakdown of gender in game development continues to lag behind the breakdown of gender in gaming itself, which has reached gender parity. The entertainment software Association's 2025 global power of play report, which surveyed over 24,000 global gamers across six continents, found that there are more women players than men players in 10 of the 21 countries, and two more countries have a 5050, split, but the global average sits just under an even split, with 48% of gamers reporting As women. But for game developers, 34% are women and non binary developers. According to the 2025 Game Developers Conference state of the industry report, the greater the disparity between groups, the easier it is for bias to sneak in. Women can harm women. Men can harm men. It's just more likely that a majority gender harms a minority gender, when done right, groups like wiki try to address these patterns of harm in ways that will help everyone.

J

Joanie Kraut 14:28

I can't say, you know, covid, obviously horrible pandemic, but it did also kind of help with some of the process changes, or just really seeing processes for what they are, having people really evaluate their HR policies and how they support their team. I know there's been a lot of companies that have even come up with new like mental health programming, just just seeing people, kind of forcing you to see every employee on screen, and some of them being recorded, some of them, you know, like, let's record for notes. And then looking through your notes, going, what did I say? There is a lot of. Process improvements, I would say, with regards to just HR policy and trying to create that space and time. But again, if every time I want to just, I can't just walk by your desk and be like, hey Cheryl, how's your weekend? Or, hey, Cheryl, what's going on? Do you want to go to lunch? Or, now, it's a very intentional we have to schedule a meeting and have it on a record and have a video conference and and so it's, it's less of that human interaction. And there are companies who have, you know, the virtual office spaces, where you can kind of create that fake like environment, but then it kind of also requires you to be at your computer or have an explanation every time you're not so you have to tell somebody every time you go get coffee, or you have to tell somebody every time you get to the bathroom, or your mailman came and you have to answer the door, whatever it is. And I think it's definitely an interesting shift to see people working very well remotely, but also having maybe a little bit less interaction. And we have seen a huge spike in content creators because of that, as well having a community, having people to reach out to and to talk to and to interact with and just kind of show their interests beyond, you know, their spreadsheet or their their work that they're doing in their day to day life as well.

E

Enduring Play Computer 16:09

Launching podcast level four, equity for everyone.

C

Cheryl Platz 16:14

Let's broaden the conversation a little bit, because I know some people are going to be like, Well, I don't know how to apply this to my work immediately, or, like, what about equity? And so I want to address some things up front, right? Because, having been in my own advocacy efforts for years, sometimes it's like, well, if you get a job, does that mean I don't get a job or something like that, right? As a woman in leadership, like, it's about equity, not like replacement, right? And so what I love about this conversation is that a lot of what we end up talking about is, how do we make things better for everyone, not just better for women, but how do we make a more functional employment environment? And when it helps women, it also helps any other gender in the workplace, it's just that the fact that the workplace allowed it to be weird for women was not great, but that, you know, it was also potentially making it not great for people of even smaller groups that we weren't talking about. And so if we lift everybody up with these improvements, everybody wins. A lot of these the things we talk about are, actually, it's women in games, but it's everybody together, is that? Does that resonate with you?

 J

Joanie Kraut 17:23

Yeah, and that's and that's so important, because there's, there a lot of different organizations around the world, and we are really focused on bringing everyone to the table, and it's not as useful to have an echo chamber. So if I just have a room full of women who look just like me, and I yell into the void, here's my problem, and everybody echoes back. Yeah, I have that same problem. Okay, so now you all feel supported, cool in that it's up. That's not really doing anything. I don't. I don't need an echo chamber. I want people who don't look like me. I want people who have had way different experiences than me. And I want everyone to come together and say, this is a problem. This is a problem. This is a problem. Here's what I've been doing to address this problem. Wow, I never thought about that problem. How do we tackle that problem? It's bringing everybody together, bringing everybody to the table, having different conversations, because there are so many different perspectives. And you know, you even said, like, how do I apply this to me? Or, why does this matter to me? 46% or I want to say it's even higher. Now, of gamers are women. So if you look at the breakdown of gamers who are women gamers who are FEM identifying, gamers who are bipoc, gamers who are have a disability, gamers who are LGBTQ. Plus, if you're not bringing all of those people to the table when you're making your game, you're making your your controller or your peripheral, or you're making whatever it is that you're doing to to bring into the games industry, you're not bringing all those perspectives. You're not going to sell to those crowds. So if you want to keep selling to the same crowd, keep doing the same thing, that's fine, but you're missing out on a huge market. And so I mean, it's just constantly bringing new people to the table to say, what do we need to be doing next? And I think that's so important we do have. You know, it's not just women supporting women, although that's incredibly important. It's also ally supporting women and Ally supporting conversations, and everyone's supporting change. And I think that's the biggest thing that we kind of do differently than some of the other organizations, is we have this actionable allyship workshop that is focused on men coming to us and saying, Well, I don't feel comfortable coming to the women in games networking event. Why not? Well, because it's for women. No, no, it's for everyone. The whole point is that we're trying to support and uplift the women. But everyone being part of that conversation, everyone being in that same room,

 E

Enduring Play Computer 19:33

podcast level, paused, begin host commentary.

C

Cheryl Platz 19:37

We learned earlier that in 2025 the worldwide proportion of gamers was approximately 48% women. But in game development, only 34% were women or non binary developers. In the eSports world, the numbers are drastically different. Well, most major eSports leagues are open gender. The disproportionate environment leads to incredibly low. Observed female participation in most leagues, but a study published by Bastian Kordaka et al, in Computers in Human Behavior in December 2023 actually shows that women in eSports environments can actually be more competitive than their male counterparts. It's not about skill or drive, it's about closing cultural gaps and dispelling stereotypes, the kind of work Joni goes on to describe here

E

Enduring Play Computer 20:27

loading podcast level five, a case study in eSports.

C

Cheryl Platz 20:32

You mentioned your own background to eSports and Wiki also works in the eSports environment. Let's talk a little bit about one of your lived experiences with advocacy in changing people's minds about women in eSports.

J

Joanie Kraut 20:51

When we did our esports mentorship program, which was it was powered by Riot, and it was a focus on different pathways into eSports beyond a pro player, we had the most male applicants to be mentors, because that who was in eSports leadership roles at the time, and so it was, it was really powerful, because it wasn't just women who wanted to see more women in eSports, it was everyone. And that, to me, was just such a huge milestone, just to see how many men were like, yes, thank you. We also want this. How do we help the conversation? How do we continue to move this forward? And I think that's really powerful, and it's, it's something that was definitely, I mean, I started in tech and gaming, and my first introduction to the gaming world was through eSports, and there was a lot of men, and I still remember going to my first conference and having somebody say, Are you a girlfriend, a daughter or a sister? Like, there's no reason I could possibly be there as a fan. I was I had to use it attached to a man, you know. Like, how are you attached to and I'm like, actually, I'm looking here, thank you. Like, I'm a fan. I would say there's a lot of progress there. It's much more different going to an Esports conference now, or an Esports tournament, and having somebody say, you know, what do you play? What's your main instead of who are you attached to? And I think that's definitely part of the progress we're trying to create. But it was through, you know, when somebody asked me, the guys that I was there with laughed, and they made it a joke, but they made it into a conversation as well, and it created that space for this person to learn that's not really an acceptable question. Like, just because I'm there and not a guy doesn't mean I'm not, yeah, I'm there on my own. So it's definitely creating those spaces for like, like I said, those conversations, but for that learning, for that opportunity to to see how maybe silly a comment was, or to see where is the progress? Where is the point that we can kind of continue to have conversations that are meaningful and impactful and that create that sustainable change, where you're not going to ask that question again because you see a woman in a tournament and just moving things forward, and now I don't have to go through that now that next person doesn't have to go through that. So it's left as you climb and then finding what is it that spoke to you when we had that conversation? What is it that changed your mind to realize that maybe that wasn't the right approach to speaking to someone in and how do we make sure that it gets spread around? How do we how do we make sure everybody's having a better experience and within every industry,

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Enduring Play Computer 23:25

loading podcast level six, changing minds together.

C

Cheryl Platz 23:30

That's a great story of collaborative change, where people of multiple genders work to break down boundaries. Do you see that a lot with your work in WIGI?

J Joanie Kraut 23:40

sometimes when I say something and a guy next to me repeats almost verbatim when I just said, it's more powerful and it's more well received. And if I need to do that to move a conversation forward, then let me find a buddy that will come with me to help me move a conversation forward so that we can create that change and move it forward. There's been a lot of really great conversations around, you know, just from my perspective, and just having a conversation where it starts with from my perspective, and it's like, Thank you for sharing your perspective, because it's totally different than mine. And men are part of this. I mean, there's a huge opportunity to working with men and stop making them the bad guy, because they have more power. That's not that doesn't make sense to me. Why wouldn't we come together and use that power to support each other and continue the conversations that we want to be having? So we have that. We have an allyship committee on our advisory board, and the whole focus is changing minds, making conversations and creating so how do we bring everyone to the table to continue to move things in the right direction?

C Cheryl Platz 24:45

One of the great gifts that a program like the ally program you're talking about gives is that it removes some of the emotional labor that others might have to do in those moments, right? Because that's a lot. It's a lot in the moment when your limbic system is activated and something happens. And you're like, oh, they just assumed I'm I'm not capable to, like, calm that down and go back to your best practices and be like, I'm going to talk to you in a respectful way and engage with you, because there's so much navigating that moment, because that other person is also vulnerable, and you could accidentally make them feel bad about themselves in a way that they're going to shut down. That is a lot of emotional labor to get to the point where two people can learn, especially if they're strangers, and get to the point where you have a positive experience, it's possible. Like, I've had one or two moments on Twitter, that's a lot to expect every individual to do. So having your program create the space where people can go and not judge, non judgmentally, like talk about what things might happen and reduce the likelihood that those raw moments happen in real life. And I love that, because there's so many people who do want the right thing and wander around in fear in the workplace or in at tournaments or whatever, that they're going to say the wrong thing or do the wrong thing. There's so many people who are well intentioned but don't know, and it starts to create the space where failure is a little bit safer, where the magnitude of the failure is going to be less. So I'm grateful that programs like that are there,

E Enduring Play Computer 26:09

loading podcast level seven trust, creating space for failure and growth.

C

Cheryl Platz 26:18

One thing I want to say, as a senior leader in games, one of the biggest signs of trust I've had was when men have come to me like the See Something, Say Something, moment, and talk to me about things that other they've seen with other men, and those other men being open minded to engage with me and you know, and I try to leave with curiosity, like, can you tell me about what happened in this moment that I have heard about, can you explain to me the context? Because here's the other context I'm getting, and here's how it's maybe landing. How can we work through the next time it happens? That's the Holy Grail. Is creating spaces where, even if we do fall because people trip, right? People have decades of experience ingrained socially. Your program, the allyship program, things like that, can get us to a place where we can fail together and grow together. And that's amazing.

J

Joanie Kraut 27:07

Yeah, and just creating that safe space, like you were saying, to have those conversations, and that that emotional labor that you touched on, like, if you're trans, you shouldn't have to explain or answer all of the questions about being trans, or answer for the entire trans community on on different approaches or ideas or ideals, and so having a safe space to say, I don't understand why, when I said this, the other person got so offended, having a space to say, well, here's here's what you just said, here's what you you know, like having having those conversations and a place where Maybe you didn't need to say that, or maybe when you said it, you meant this as a positive thing, but it was perceived as a negative thing. How do you then pivot so it's not even just that one comment. It's taking that learning into the next conversation. It's taking that hindsight into how could I have done this differently? But also, if I do again, where I put my my foot in my mouth again. How do I, you know, acknowledge it and apologize and move forward and creating those safe spaces for your employees, as you said, in the leadership position, is so powerful and so important. And when they when people see that there is a safe space to ask questions, to learn and to grow. You know, they always say to assume ignorance over malice. So how do you i When you identify ignorance over malice, a teaching moment is great, but when you can find and identify pure malice, then a bigger teaching moment is also important.

E

Enduring Play Computer 28:38

Podcast level, paused, begin host commentary.

C

Cheryl Platz 28:43

So what the heck does all of this have to do with the video game industry? Some of these may sound like generic concerns or concerns that apply more to tech than gaming, but there are a couple of things about the video game industry that make a lot of the things we're discussing more prevalent, more risky, more pronounced. One of them is the gender and racial disparity in the industry. Another is the higher stakes involved in an industry where there are so many people fighting for each individual job in a condition like that, employers can often abuse employees more because there's such high competition for the roles, they could just move on to the next person. And so it takes all of us demanding higher quality employment environments. Just because people want to do the job doesn't mean they should be treated poorly while doing it, and we don't have the benefit of all having clearly defined roles. Video games are messy, interdisciplinary, and every team I've ever worked with struggles just to get their roles clearly defined, much less navigate societal norms. And for whatever reason, from my experience, many video game companies don't put a lot of time into training their managers, the less support a manager has for dealing with these. Complex topics, the easier it is to get into trouble, and so it's incumbent on us to have these difficult conversations,

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Enduring Play Computer 30:08

launching podcast level eight, giving allies answers.

C

Cheryl Platz 30:14

So let's talk about those teaching moments. How do we teach in the workplace, or if you're not being taught in the workplace, how do you get those answers?

J Joanie Kraut 30:25

I think there's a lot of concern around, you know, there's, there's so many isms, from sexism to racism to ageism, if there's not a conversation about how that's going to be dealt with, or just saying, you know, harassment and bullying are completely not acceptable in our organization, but then microaggressions are bullying. So how do we find ways to to identify and have conversations about these uncomfortable or difficult topics and things that need to be addressed and are very, very serious and changing people's lives and approaches to doing their best work when they're at work. We have a program that is power leveling. The entire program is focused on having difficult or uncomfortable conversations, and nothing is recorded. It's a very safe environment. There's a lot of interaction. There's a lot of opportunities to ask questions, to give examples of your own personal life. We've had, you know, the community reach out and say, Hey, can we bring in somebody to talk about? I just told my boss I was pregnant, and I got fired for being pregnant because now I can't travel as much. And we brought in a labor lawyer, and we talked about our rights, and we talked about things that you can do if that were to happen to you. And it's making sure people understand that the person they're bringing to the table, and how much it affects not just themselves in their own personal branding, but how much it affects the people around them to make sure that we're all bringing our best selves to every conversation and every table. And you know, we even say things like, if you're not sure, ask a question, but then people get a hard time for asking the wrong question. So how do we make sure that there is a place for people to ask questions that's not going to infringe on, you know, the next person's best self. So I think the actual allyship is is a huge opportunity for for that to happen.

E Enduring Play Computer 32:13

Launching podcast level nine, evolving representation in narrative.

C Cheryl Platz 32:20

Let's shift gears a little bit to talk about the trends you've seen in how gender or other elements of identity have been represented in video games over the years.

J Joanie Kraut 32:33

Yeah, I very beginning of my career in games was working with a studio, and they just kept saying, you know, games for girls don't do well. And I was like, Are they for girls, or are they for women? Because there's a difference. And if they're for girls, then we are seeing a decline in the number of girls who are gaming at that time. And so what they what was your approach? How did you how did you create this game for for girls? Well, we had a bunch of the guys, because it was an all male team, read young adult books and try to get an understanding of how girls think. And I was like, Can you feel like young adult books is the best way to figure out how girls think? And then they made a game based off of that, and no wonder all of your girl games are failing, bringing the right people to the table, having a woman led studio create games specifically for women, having an LGBTQ plus led studio creating content for the LGBTQ plus community, we are seeing a much larger impact when it comes to to The stories and the narratives. And there's such a diverse range of people within each of those spaces. You can't just say women. It's every woman has a different their story. You can't just say bipoc people. And there's, there's so many people within each of these just, you know, one month categories,

E Enduring Play Computer 34:02

podcast level, paused, begin host commentary.

C Cheryl Platz 34:06

So why doesn't it work to read a bunch of young adult novels to figure out how to design a game for girls? Well, one of the reasons is because it that doesn't necessarily get to what motivates girls or women, depending on who you're targeting to play modern games. And in the first chapter of the game development strategy guide, we talk about the motivators of play. Some gamers claim they're playing for immersion or to escape, but if you're playing to escape, and the game you're playing doesn't feel authentic, it ruins the illusion. So whether you're looking for narrative consistency on the representation of gender, or in joanie's next example, on the representation of a city, consistency and authenticity are important to keep players in the game.

J Joanie Kraut 34:54

Then we talked about when you show up, you show up as your whole self, so me showing up as a white. Woman who grew up in poverty and who had limited access to technology until I was in college and beyond, is a very different story. Me coming from a finance background. I look at data analytics. Me coming from different ways of looking at the world. I notice emotions. I notice people and how they react to situations before other people do sometimes, and everybody shows up in their own identity, which is so different from the person standing next to them, even if the person standing next to them looks different, and we talk about that a lot, but it's everybody showing up to that table, everybody showing up to to have those conversations and and feeling like a game truly represents you, or where you grew up, or, I know there was a game that was supposed to be set in Chicago, but you could tell it was a bunch of people that lived in LA, because I was like, that's not Chicago. That's not how we would have done no no. Or there was some wind and a no no in Chicago, there was wind. There's wind in the rest of the world, but in Chicago, there's

E Enduring Play Computer 36:01

launching podcast level 10, the infinite context of identity.

C Cheryl Platz 36:07

Let's shift a little bit to the why, to kind of cross references to some of the things earlier. But let's put like the right thing to do aside your market's changing. There's a lot of people out there. One of the things I talk about in the first chapter of my book is the motivators of play. There's these nine things that motivate people to pick up games, but one of the modern motivators is self expression. A lot of people want to feel safe, to be seen safe, to be themselves. Part of that is gender expression. But if you don't understand how to make that safe in your game, then that whole element of game motivation is unavailable to you as a game director, designer, producer. Do you have any advice or training or folks for people to help them understand, like, how a more well rounded team helps them make more sustainable or more well rounded games?

J

Joanie Kraut 36:59

having people from these different areas, or who can speak to so, you know, there's there's geography people who are very specifically focused on making sure that the cultural representation of one specific region is in the game. And you can talk to people from that region, you can bring in people from that region, and you can ask questions, but at the end of the day, they're not necessarily subject matter specialists. When it comes to again, we're talking about that emotional labor. Are you asking one person to speak for all of the people and that one identity and that one identity? Are you asking one person to bring the entire community of thought to that one specific identity that they're showing up as, and that's that's not going to be the same as if you had an entire team with that background, with those those ideals, and who wants that story to be told, to help create and cultivate a story that is meaningful and impactful. And it's not just saying, Okay, this is, this is the gay character. Let's have all the people in this room create whatever the story is for that one character. It's having everyone come to the table and say, this individual identifies in this way. How do we make this a meaningful and impactful story? How would someone respond in this situation? How would you react? And so having those stories, having those opportunities to create more meaningful and more impactful characters, or, you know, even designs on on the skins in the game. You know, having, I'm tired of boob armor, like having actual armor, even though you also have boobs, is is important. And having the intelligence or, you know, I'm so having the intelligence behind the characters, not despite their who they are, but because of who they are, and because of the things that they've had to endure, and because of the ways that these stories can unfold in a much more impactful way.

E

Enduring Play Computer 38:59

Launching podcast level 11, the economics of self expression.

C

Cheryl Platz 39:05

You're hitting on another one of the motivators of play I talk about in the game development strategy guide, which is self expression. And self expression also ties to the spectrum of game monetization. I talk about in Chapter 11, because games like League of Legends are almost entirely funded by the concept of self expression, but for people to pay for self expression, they need to feel like they can express themselves adequately. Do you have any examples of self expression done right or wrong?

J

Joanie Kraut 39:33

I think there's, there's so many amazing games right now that that showcase that, or even RPGs where you can create your own character and you can make it look exactly how you want it to look, from skin tone to the size of your head to the size of your arms, and you know, like how making somebody your character represent you, or how you are feeling, or how you even want to be perceived, I think, is a really. Powerful way to tell a story and to be really just immersed into that extra world of who you are and what you can do when it comes to games, specifically, because you're asking for, like, specific examples playing Call of Duty, there was only ever one, but not one, but there was only ever a male skin. And so there was actually research done, and I have to find it. When I first started in eSports, there was a huge aggression towards women who were playing Call of Duty, and it was determined that at least a portion of that aggression came from men who were playing a male character, then realizing that the other male character they've been playing with was actually a woman, and you're lying to me because I thought you were a man. I thought you were a guy playing this game. How could I possibly show up as a woman character? If there's no women characters, how could I possibly create that truth for you? Or I'm not intentionally lying to I'm playing a video game in the character skin that is available. It was, it was interesting just to see that, like people saying, oh, it's because you're, you're creating this like false identity. Well, game that doesn't have a long character, and why do I have to show up as the female in the game for you to acknowledge me as an equal player. And so I think there's just a lot of space and opportunities for additional I mean, it's a game. Why? Why do you have to look a specific way within, you know, this fictional world, and they think like valorant and Fortnite, creating so many different opportunities for representation, having, having that be part of the game has really increased the player base. Has really increased the opportunity for people to show up themselves but still play, you know that that strategy, first person shooter, and so it does. There's, there's a lot of examples, I would say, of showcasing that, you know, bringing different identities to the table within the game and within game development does create a huge opportunity for for additional revenue, For sure.

C

Cheryl Platz 42:07

What a great example. I was not aware that Call of Duty situation, the gender cut off was was happening. And what a powerful example of like, intentionally or not, right, constricting your audience. And because one point I have made in other contexts. I have worked on games that I'm not going to name the specific game, but I worked on a game where I logged in and immediately encountered discussion of sexual abuse in chat. They were like, Oh, well, it's not really a high priority. And here's the thing, if it doesn't happen a lot, if you don't see it, there are people bouncing off of those experiences that will never engage with your game, will never pay you money, and will tell other people to stay away. And those are silent failures that never show up in your numbers. You they you cannot. They're like elusive, right? And and it creates this confirmation bias where you're designing for the people who's still there without understanding all of the lost opportunity because they're not those people don't feel safe talking to you. They're not going to be like that was not okay. They're just going to go to one of the 10,000 other games they have to choose from to release this year. They don't have to deal with you anymore like they did 1020, years ago. They're just going to move on. And then we have these thriving examples, like you said, Fortnite, these other places where you don't have the constraints, or they've put more intention into allowing space for people to exist and play and pursue the self expression motivator of play. And they really thrive. And you also speak to this. So the motivator of immersion, people want to be immersed in a game. And if you create situations where people can be pulled out of the immersion, then you create tension points and people are no longer having fun. What a great example

E

Enduring Play Computer 43:48

launching podcast level 12 WIGI at the Game Developers Conference.

C

Cheryl Platz 43:54

You're doing a ton of great work for the Game Developers Conference. So let's talk about the role that your organization plays now at the Game Developers Conference, because you mentioned that initial panel at the time of this recording, the Game Developers Conference is coming up, and it at the time we released, it'll be about a week. You know, of course, podcasts are forever, so you could be listening to, you know, years later, but we'll, we'll be talking about this, both in the very immediate sense, but also, you know, you show up every year. This is something you do all the time. So let's talk about how you show up at GDC, what you're excited about this year, what you're excited about every year.

J

Joanie Kraut 44:28

Oh gosh, we are doing so much at GDC, and GDC is it feels like going home. So it is one of the bigger conferences that we really interact with, for sure, every year. So we have our women in games International Leadership Summit on the Monday of GDC, which is bringing together about 200 industry executives to create immediate impact. And we have two keynote speakers. We have a Quinn over at the ESA we have Laura stir over at AWS, and we have roundtable discussions. So it's identifying where the industry is. It's identifying current issues and stances and problems and ways that we can move forward. But the biggest thing is it's creating immediate impact. So what can I do today? What can I walk out this door and immediately change one life? And if we have 200 people changing one life that day over the course of a couple years, we're going to have the industry we can affect millions of lives in a positive way. And it's everything from hiring practices to creating those safe spaces to, you know, we'll talk about our allyship workshops and in ways that you can implement some of those learnings at your organization. It's, it's roundtable discussions with people who are doing the thing to talk about how they did the thing and their learnings from doing the thing and or trying to, you know, make that impact. And, and then it's bringing people together to say, well, here's what I've done, it did or didn't work. And, and just kind of building on each other's ideas and creating kind of that industry standard of, if you want to be the change, be the change and, and here's what I've done to be the change, and making sure that people have those tools and those resources, but also those connections and that networking is so powerful and so important, and it's kind of shocking to see how few women leaders there are in the industry, you know, and like, how few there are, but how many of them still don't even have that interaction or that connection with each other. So we're trying to bridge that gap. We're trying to create that connection. We're trying to just improve those conversations and create opportunities for sustainable career growth. And how do we do that? How do we remove those barriers? And a lot of it is through just identifying mentors and allies. And so we bring them all together in one room, and we have these conversations, and then we also have our networking event on Thursday, and then we have a few different networking events throughout some of those mentorship sessions are actually accessible to the public. So we have, if you're part of our newsletter, or if you're part of our advisory board, we can make sure that you're getting invited to some of these events as well. So So yeah, so we are showing up in a very big and very impactful way, and GDC is one of our favorites, just again, because, because we were founder there. So it does it very much does like just kind of going home and being part of it again,

E

Enduring Play Computer 47:03

launching podcast level 13, getting into game dev.

E

Enduring Play Computer 47:08

When you and I first met, it was at a party at the Game Developers Conference 2024 which speaks to the power of networking, but I had the chance to meet several of the early career folks that you and WIGI had brought to the conference. Can you talk more about that program in particular, I remember they all seemed so prepared, and you seemed so proud of them, and this was at a major studio party, so it was a pretty intense environment.

J

Joanie Kraut 47:32

We're also doing a get in the game program. When I was younger, my mom was offered free tickets to take us to the circus, and she was like, oh my god, I can't afford free tickets. Can you just sit with that for a minute? I can't afford free tickets, because it's not just a ticket, it's the gas, it's the food, it's it was Chicago winter making sure we all have boots and coats and parking money, and it was so many things beyond a free ticket. And when I first started at wigi, I noticed some of these conferences were handing out free tickets, which is great if you can afford to be in San Francisco for a week, but a lot of people who need a free ticket can't. And so how do we create a more sustainable experience focused on not just getting a ticket, but actually getting there and being there, and not just being there physically, but being there in the best way you can possibly show up. And so we create a virtual orientation where we have a Discord server. We chat about, you know, what to pack, how to pack. For some people, it's their first time ever on an airplane. We talk about everything from the 311, packing rule to to don't put your laptop on your checked bag, to just all the things that maybe you wouldn't know if you if you didn't travel as much. We talked about what to wear, especially San Francisco. Good luck figuring out the weather, you know, making sure you just have one of everything we talk about, we attend night to unite. We're lucky enough to partner with the ESA Foundation, and we have access to attend night to unite with all of our scholars, so making sure they have the right outfit for night to unite, so that they don't feel awkward or out of place in a specific room.

E

Enduring Play Computer 49:00

Podcast level, paused begin host commentary.

C

Cheryl Platz 49:04

Esa stands for the Entertainment Software Association, and for 26 years, they've been running knight to unite, which is a fundraising event that occurs currently during the Game Developers Conference. It brings leaders together across the video game industry to help fundraise for a cohort of college students from underrepresented groups seeking to enter the video game development field. So this sounds like a pretty all inclusive package for the scholars you identify each year for the Game Developers Conference,

J

Joanie Kraut 49:36

we cover your flight, hotel, food per diem travel to get there, and then we have these mentorship sessions. So we are doing fireside chat and studio tour with groups like PlayStation, meta gaming, AWS, Netflix, Xsolla. We have all discord we have all of these organizations that want to be part of that change. And so they want to support women in the industry. They want. To support people getting into the industry or moving up within the industry, or securing funding for their game in the industry, and having our scholars be able to see that, having the people that we're bringing our mentees, be able to see that it's not just us saying there should be something different here. It's Sony saying yeah, and here's what we're doing. And it's it's Xsolla saying yeah, and here's what we're doing, and it creates, again, that access to those resources, that access to those stories, that access to those conversations, that industry conversations about who wants to see the change and who's doing what to make that change happen. And that's one of the most powerful programs that we can put together. Because, again, it's not creating a room full of people who look just like me saying there should be change. It's bringing everyone to the table. It's bringing men, women, non binary. It's bringing every single person to the table to say, we want to see this change, and we want to be part of this change, and this is what we're doing to enact that change. And now that you're here, what would you like to see? How would you like to approach this? What is your you know your takeaway? Talk about your identity and what it is that you are seeing or navigating or how can we help you and support you? Our get in the game program, we typically see 90% of our mentees receive a job offer within two weeks of the programs closed when we go to GDC, specifically because it is more of a focus on that hiring side, they actually had three people receive a job offer before we left GDC last year. So it's it's creating those spaces and that opportunity, but also that confidence, that coaching, that mentorship on how to do it. So it's not just giving somebody a free ticket, it's giving someone a life changing experience, and very specifically focused on their career,

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Enduring Play Computer 51:39

launching podcast level 14, networking as your best, authentic self.

C

Cheryl Platz 51:45

You mentioned talking about what to wear, and that's actually pretty stressful for a lot of people in the games industry at events like this, because there's no real dress code. What advice do you give people about how they show up in general, whether that's fashion or just how they present themselves in an environment like this for people of any gender?

J Joanie Kraut 52:03

we talk about business casual and what that means, but we also talk about showing up as your authentic self, and it's so powerful to say you might worry about what shirt you're wearing for six hours, but I couldn't remember what shirt you wore because I only talked to you for a minute. So unless it's something so outrageous and amazing, like a shirt that you created yourself, or like a Pokemon jacket, where people are gonna be like, I remember you. You wore that one really cool thing. People aren't really gonna remember what you were so, so be yourself. Show up as yourself because you want to be remembered for the most authentic thing that speaks to you and who you are. So you have purple hair. Show up with purple hair. Don't be afraid to show up as yourself. Show up, but show up in a way that represents you. Don't show up in a way that you think you're supposed to be or you're supposed to represent. And just encouraging people to empower themselves to be their best self is a huge opportunity teaching people how to introduce themselves, stop apologizing. Yeah, and we teach people to introduce yourselves in a three step approach, of what's your name, what do you want to be known as, and what do you want out of this conversation? So my name is Joni. I'm the CEO at WIGI, and I'm here running a get in the game program. I would love for you to meet my mentee. I'm here, you know, trying to get a job. I'm here to raise funds for my studio or my game. I'm a recent graduate, and I'm trying to navigate my way into the games industry.

C Cheryl Platz 53:21

Thank you so much for sharing that story, because you both described a really compelling program, and you shared some of the insights that will help anyone who's preparing for game developers conference or their whatever their next conference is, but the themes in the way you told people to prepare echo some of the things I liked about our whole conversation, right? You talked about lifting everyone up, right? Bipoc and LGBTQ, it's about lifting all of us up. The principles are the same. Regardless. It's Yes, we are lifting women up, but we want to lift everybody up while we're doing

E Enduring Play Computer 53:50

it, launching podcast level 15, the power of

J Joanie Kraut 53:55

curiosity, and give them space to be curious and ask questions and help drive the conversation to a meaningful place for that person that you're talking to, because you never know who you're talking to, maybe talking to a hiring manager or a CEO or a founder who needs to hire somebody. So if you are very specific about what you're trying to do, that gives them the opportunity to respond or to and make an introduction and continue to grow your network. And if you say, my, my legal name is Joanna, and my my gamer tag, and just give me one thing to remember. So give me one name, and that's been one of the most powerful thing is because, oh yeah, I remember you. You're Cheryl, right? Even if I can't remember your last name, if I can just remember your first name to start a conversation or make an introduction, it's been a really powerful way to get people in front of the right people.

C Cheryl Platz 54:40

The curiosity of leaving space for questions, even I'm like, you know, I should probably do more of that. Being crisp and leaving space in conversation to allow the other person to interact is a gift, and like I learned that on stage and improv, is it like it was when someone would come on into a scene and ask me a question and invite me to just like, Oh, that's so nice of them as a performer, but it's. The same thing in a conversation, isn't it?

J Joanie Kraut 55:03

Yeah, absolutely. And I think that's something that we're all just trying to navigate together. Is, you know, so many people, like, I would never apply for a CEO job, because CEOs have to know everything. And then when you start working directly with CEOs, you realize we're all just doing the best we can. Like, there's so many times that I'm like, I have no idea. It's just finding that space and that opportunity for you know that curiosity and learning and an opportunity to adapt, for sure, yeah,

E Enduring Play Computer 55:29

launching podcast level 16, origin story, finance and gaming.

C Cheryl Platz 55:34

I'd love to wrap up our conversation today by bringing it back to you. You have this experience in finance, which is not something we always talk about in games, and your experience goes everywhere, from, you know, accounting to fractional CFO to Chief Executive Officer, and a lot of those things are fairly mysterious to many of our listeners. Can you walk me through your journey from finance to gaming to where you are today? Such a great question.

J

Joanie Kraut 56:03

So I started in, gosh, anyway, I started as a writer. I was writing for a newspaper. I would write these articles, and they were fine, I'm sure, but, but I really wanted to focus on the data and facts, and then that's not really a compelling story for a newspaper. Like, that's great if you're Wall Street recording, but not if you're, you know, trying to write a paper. And so really liked the big data approach. I liked the statistical approach. And so I ended up kind of shifting into a finance role and just studying finances. And so I was originally part of the movement from paper, pencil accounting to automated, computerized systems, and I played World of Warcraft, so I wasn't afraid of computers. So I ended up in a technology role where I was working with companies on a through Robert Half, on like a contract basis. And so I was working with one company, helping them shift, making sure that they were prepared for their audits, making sure that everything was completely succinct and aligned. And from there, I would move on to the next organization, you know. And so I got to experience a lot of different leadership styles, a lot of leadership types, a lot of different computer setups, a lot of different accounting softwares. And I just kind of became comfortable with that ambiguity and that shifting, that movement and that changing priorities. And I ended up working at Motorola through a contract. We were moving from internal, kind of an out of the box solution to a more prioritized moto now, so it was Motorola's version of counting software. In working with these, these tech companies, I came across these guys that were really into eSports. And I was like, What the heck is eSports? Since first time I had exposure to just seeing people playing video games to make money, and like, holy cow. Like, that seems incredible. And, and so I sort of started, like learning about it at that point, my next role was at, I'm still serious. I had a mentor at the time. Wanted to care. I wanted to move up in the industry. I wanted to get into a managerial role. But I just definitely care about what I was doing, and I was having a hard time just kind of connecting. And she said, you know, what is something that gets you excited? Like, what is the thing that gets you excited every morning? And I was like, my mouse. I really liked my mouse at the time, not an animal, my actual computer mouse. And she was like, Yeah, I can't relate to you, but continue, you know, like, What are you talking about? I was playing World of Warcraft, and I my mom, as a joke, saw a mouse at a store, and she was like, oh, that's the game you play. And so she bought it for me, and it was a steel series mouse, and it was like, butter on a warm pan, like it just glides. It just It changed my game, literally. So I was like, Okay, well, let me see what what mouse this is. And I was like, What the heck is a steel series? And it turns out the company was right down the street from me. It was a 10 minute commute to get to the office, and they were hiring an accountant. And I was like, What are the odds? You know, serendipity and whatever you believe in, like, I was just like, holy cow. And so I got to work there, and they were actually working with Esports teams to create the peripherals. So I was working with a couple, like x eSports pros, a couple people who had, you know, managing team experience. And so I got to really understand the industry, because I was working for a peripheral company, got to understand more about the actual eSports industry and what they do, and how they kind of navigate competitions and training and stuff. And so it was my first time, kind of entering into the industry. At that point,

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Enduring Play Computer 59:14

launching podcast level 17, how to exceed your own expectations,

C Cheryl Platz 59:20

and how did that experience inspire this consistent passion we see in your work with women in games International?

J Joanie Kraut 59:27

Kind of Fast forward to a few years later. I was looking for a new role, and I put a glass ceiling on myself of what Title I would be able to apply for, what pay I would be able to apply for, what companies I should be applying to because in my mind, I was at a specific level in my client, like you said, the executive positions like a CFO, I'd never apply for a CFO, no way. And so I was applying for controller roles and not understanding why I wasn't getting callbacks for controller roles. Well, controllers are very specifically taxes, and I didn't have a CPA. I. Didn't know that. I just thought, you know, self worth went down the hall. There's no way people are calling me back. It's because I'm not qualified.

E Enduring Play Computer 1:00:07

Podcast level. Paused. Begin host commentary.

C Cheryl Platz 1:00:11

Joni is now a CEO, but in her story, you can hear the cognitive dissonance that so many job searchers right now, especially in the games industry, with historic job losses. Struggle with she's applying for jobs and she's not getting the callbacks, and she's internalizing it. And so I want you to take a moment reflect on the way Joni pivots here, because rejections are not always about your lack of skill. Please don't internalize the rejections. Look at them as an opportunity to pivot, or an opportunity to pitch yourself in a different way. You might be selling yourself short,

J

Joanie Kraut 1:00:46

but a director role, I could do a director role. And so I applied for a director of finance role, and I got it, and my first day I was like, Oh, I can be a director. No problem. Director. My first day, I was introduced as a CFO, and I said, what the CFO? I'm a director. I'm just the director of finance. And the guy said, Oh well, yeah. I mean, the director of finance is CFO. It's the head of finance. And I was like, There's that's not the same that's not the same thing. He was like, No, yeah, it is. And so I suddenly got my business cards, they said, CFO. And I was like, oh my god, I never would have applied to a CFO role. I killed that interview. I was amazed. Like I was, like, I can be a director of finance. I killed it like I was, I was ready to go, and I was, I never would have applied for a CFO role. And it really made me take that step back and go. Why? Because I knew everything that I was supposed to do in this role. The job description fit me perfectly. I never even read a CFO job description because I couldn't possibly be a CFO. I was joining from the trailer court like I wasn't going to be a CFO, and because I was able to accidentally get that title in San Francisco at a real company, I was I was just, I was blown away. And it wasn't like it was a company I started and gave myself the title. This was a 50 year old company that I was walking into, and I blew their socks off because I did know my stuff, and I think that's one of the biggest things that people say. Why do you work at WIGI? Why are you doing this work? And it's like because I didn't realize I had a glass ceiling when I placed on myself, until I accidentally broke it. So how do I encourage other people to break their glass ceilings that they're putting on themselves. Not to say that there's not a glass ceiling, but if it's self imposed limitations, how do we navigate breaking those for ourselves? So then I was working with that company for a while, and then I found WIGI. I was just like, I want to get back into the games industry. I just missed it. I missed that work hard, play hard, mentality. I missed the community and camaraderie of gamers. I miss the competitiveness of gamers. I missed I missed competing with somebody and it being a fun thing and trash talking, but then still being best friends at the end of the day, not everybody does it hard. Turns out,

C

Cheryl Platz 1:02:56

I love the picture of you trying that in like, a completely other context.

J

Joanie Kraut 1:02:59

Yeah. People get like mad and like, why? So when I started at WIGI, I was their finest person. So I was their CFO, and every time I'm just looking at we were doing two networking events, I was like, we could be doing so much more. We weren't doing donations. Why aren't we pursuing donations? Well, we don't have the time. We don't have the bandwidth. Why don't we have any grants? How are we a nonprofit that has no grants? Why don't we have a grant? Why are we only doing sponsorship for the programs we're trying to run? Like, what is it that we're trying to do? And we had two programs. One was a networking event at GDC in San Francisco. One was a networking event at an LA at e3 and that's great, free access if you can get to San Francisco, if you can get to LA and so the two of the most expensive cities in the country, if you can be there. So we were really only catering to upper middle class and more than, often than not, white women. So are we really supporting women in the industry, or are we supporting a specific group of women in the industry? And so that was something I really wanted to change. And I just kind of kept coming to the table with new ideas and new suggestions, and I'll lead it, and I'll do it. And finally, it was like, Okay, you have a lot of ideas, why don't you just try it yourself, take it over, see what you can do. And there was a lot of naysayers. You know, nobody's ever gonna be able to run a program like that. No one's ever done something like that. No one's ever funded something you're right. So it's the first time, and we did it. You know, got a huge grant from Activision, and we've had fundraising through Humble Bundle. We've had partners and AAA studios willing to donate and to sponsor or to give us grants. We've worked with Google Games and Amazon and exola and Netflix. It's all of these companies coming together to say we want to be part of this conversation. We want to see this change, but we are also trying to do our thing. So if we can pay you to do that thing, it would create that meaningful impact that we can be part of, but that we don't have to necessarily own or kind of run ourselves creating those opportunities. All of our programs are 100% free to access for everybody, every. Single program that we run, there is no charge, and that's incredibly important to me, because if I'm telling a woman, you're not getting paid enough, but also give me \$5,000 to be part of my group, that feels really gross. I don't want to do that. I don't want to take your money. I want to help you make more money. And then once you have an you know, all the money in the world. If you want to donate back to us, we'll keep running these programs. But you know, our biggest focus, really, especially attending some of these conferences or having these conversations, is just to continue to drive fundraising efforts so that we can continue the programmatic work. Because we do see the impact. We do see it changing the industry. We see it changing people's lives. We see it as a huge resource and way that people can just continue to learn from each other. And you know, one of the things we talked about earlier, too, is just using our community to identify new problems so that we can find better solutions. So people coming to us and say, Hey, I really see you supporting people trying to get into the industry. What about the women who are in executive positions? They need support too. So now we have executive leadership dinners. We have the leadership summit on the Monday of GDC. What about women who are mid managers trying to get to C suite? We ran a mentorship program navigating that journey from mid manager to C suite, and 100% of our people received either a new job offer, pay increase or a promotion based on the mentorship received during that program. So we're seeing the shift. We're seeing the change, and we're seeing people who are really interested in being part of those conversations, and it's just really great to be able to introduce them to each other and to continue to network and grow in in the right way, and by having the right conversations,

C Cheryl Platz 1:06:31

your discussion about like accidentally limiting yourself, like that resonates very much with me, because there's two very concrete points in my career where I found out I was doing that to myself, one right before I made the move to director, and people were like, you're overqualified for principal design. Like moving to this role, where somebody came at me was like, you want to be a creative director? I'm like, I mean, yes. The other thing that was so resonant too is the once you get there, it doesn't stop, right? The uncertainty doesn't stop. You get into these positions and there are still naysayers. There's you get in the position, and everyone's like, well, it's nice that you're sitting there, but no one's ever done things the way that you're doing them. And part of this whole journey is to learn enough self worth and enough trust in yourself and the process and your knowledge and everything to say, like, thank you so much for your feedback. Maybe digging in a little bit to figure out what what's motivating the naysaying. Like, let me hear you. I'll adjust plans a little bit. But no, there's a reason we're going down this path, and I'm going, I look forward to delighting you later, when we found a new path forward, because that's why you put me here. So I love that you're creating all these spaces where people can do that. We can, can take the take the ceiling down, and tart new paths forward, because the industry is on fire. We need new ways of doing things, and so we need to create space for new ways of doing things that lift everyone up. Thank you so much for walking us through that journey.

J Joanie Kraut 1:07:53

Oh man, I love that. Somebody said to you, why aren't you applying to this? I love that lift as you climb mentality? And so I would just encourage people to it's not necessarily when you see something, say something to change in mind, but it See Something, Say Something to to pull someone else up. So focusing on on the positive, focusing on how can we move things forward, rather than how there's always a problem, I think, is one of the biggest things that we really try to do at wiki,

E Enduring Play Computer 1:08:23

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C Cheryl Platz 1:08:29

Is there anything else you want our listeners to take away with them?

 J

Joanie Kraut 1:08:33

Please, really focus on your networking. It was told early on my career, your network is so powerful. Your network means so much. And I was like, Okay. And I went on LinkedIn. I just started connecting with people. And I was like, I guess was like, I guess I have a network now, but it's so much more than that. It's actually talking to people, following up with people, having those conversations, growing those relationships. And right now, as you said, the industry is on fire, and there's so many layoffs. If you have a solid network who knows your capabilities to work on a game or to move some something forward. Or when you reach out to your network and you say, Hey, I'm navigating a layup. Do you have any leads, having somebody who knows how hard you work or how well you can do the thing that you do, or bring to the team, your personality, your experience, it's going to help you as you navigate some of these, these fires that we're all seeing. So having that space and opportunity, having the network to not just reach out when you need something, but to reach out to have conversations and to to support them and to support yourself, and to find new ways to, as you said, move things forward. That network is so powerful and so important.

 C

Cheryl Platz 1:09:35

And you mentioned pulling people up, and that's like an easy thing for people who, if you are on the other side of the layoff, that is an easy hand you can give that gives gifts later. You don't even have to have an answer, just like reaching out and acknowledging someone's humanity when they're going through a layoff, because, as someone who's gone through it, often the people you worked with either are not allowed to reach out or they don't, because it's socially awkward. And so that's one way, if you're like, I don't know where to. Start, like, start with the folks who need connection right now. And maybe you don't know where it will go, but like, just start by being human and reach out, because we all need each other right now. And that advice about, like, reaching out, lifting other people up is so important,

 E

Enduring Play Computer 1:10:15

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J Joanie Kraut 1:10:20

If you don't have a network, join the wiki discord channel. We love to work with people and just continue to create spaces for additional networking. Check us out at getwigi.com we are global. We're in 83 countries, so chances are we have worked with somebody in your area, if not new, and we're just trying to continue those conversations. So if you have ideas or opportunities for wiki to continue to create new programming or new conversations because of community feedback, we created a program focused on how to secure funding for your organization, and we brought people to, how do you create a pitch stack workshop, but we created space for actually testing it and having feedback from investors to say, this is What I want to see or don't want to see, and there's definitely a lot of opportunities to continue to grow, and we would love to have people be part of that journey. So check us out, and there's no fee to join, there's no membership, there's no application. If you're interested in being part of the conversation, we would love to have you and anybody can join the discord.

C Cheryl Platz 1:11:19

Thank you, Joanie. And is there any place that you would want people to follow you and your personal work, like the shared wiggys presence all over the internet, which is fantastic, and everybody should go check that out. Is there any place that folks should network with you personally,

J Joanie Kraut 1:11:32

LinkedIn is where I'm most responsive. I'm also on Facebook because I'm old, but I think LinkedIn is probably where I would be the most responsive. So it's just my name, just Joanie Kraut.

C Cheryl Platz 1:11:41

Thank you, Joanie, so much. I have had so much fun with this conversation. I'm so energized by it, and I can't wait to cross paths with you and everybody else from wiki in person in San Francisco in a couple of weeks, and you know, infuture events. Thank you for your work, lifting up the community. It is so important and so appreciated.

J Joanie Kraut 1:12:01

Yeah, thank you for having me, and this is an amazing, amazing opportunity to share. So thank you for doing this, this podcast, this is huge for sure.

- C** Cheryl Platz 1:12:10
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