

EPISODE 43**[INTRODUCTION]**

“SS: This is my work. But it's not a reflection of me as a person. I know my skills are good. I know what I'm bringing to the table. So I just want my friends and my peers to help me make this thing better. So I'm kind of like excited to get to that point where I'm like, “Okay, let me share this with folks. See what they have to say. And let me go about making this better.”

[00:00:29] TA: You're listening to the UI Narrative podcast, the biweekly podcast that shows the stories of people of color, interface designers and researchers, and their contributions towards creating user-centered experiences. And I'm your host, Tolu Ajayi. Let's get started.

Hey, guys, it's Tolu with a quick word from our sponsor. To design great products, a focus on the user is everything. That's true for me and for the teams at Google. Today's sponsor, Google Design, produces original content, like articles and videos to show how Google's products come to life, and to inspire designers everywhere. For example, on design.google, you can learn how Google Maps streamlined a palette of 700 colors down to 25 major and minor tones, or how an R&D team distilled five years of research into a tiny, intuitive, emotionally intelligent radar chip. How cool is that y'all?

On Google Design, you'll get to know how the products used by billions actually get made and hear from designers behind some of your favorite products like Chrome, Google Maps and Nest. Head over to design.google to get inspired. That's design.google. Or follow them on Twitter and Instagram @GoogleDesign.

[INTERVIEW]

[00:01:47] TA: Hello, everyone. Welcome back to the UI Narrative podcast. Let me introduce you to today's guest. Shanique is a product designer with six years of experience designing user-focused products for companies like SoundCloud and Shopify. She enjoys solving complex problems, mentoring others, and has a knack for facilitating collaborative workshops. When she

isn't working, she's probably singing her heart out at karaoke, mothering her cat, or trying to learn a language. Listeners, welcome Shanique to the UI Narrative podcast.

[00:02:22] SS: Yay! I made it.

[00:02:24] TA: Yes. I'm so glad to have you here. I'd like to start out the show by talking about your earliest memories of being interested in design.

[00:02:32] SS: That's an interesting question. I don't know. I feel like I've always remembered being the quiet person. So as a kid, I didn't really talk to people that much. I like to go into a little corner and draw little doodles. And I remember my mom, she is always telling me like, "Oh, you were always so good at coloring in the lines." I guess that was a huge feat at the time. But I've always been interested in like how things work and how people use things. And like how art could influence people and just like make things better. So I feel like, I don't know, I've just always had an interest in design. And I just kind of stuck to it. I never wanted to stray away from that. I never thought about being anything else. Like, my mom wanted me to be a doctor. She even tried to push me into law at one point. And I was always like, "No, I want to be a designer." So I don't know. I feel like that's always been my calling. And I'm glad that I stuck to it.

[00:03:32] TA: Yeah, I'm glad you stuck to it too. You recently did that talk at Figma's 2021 Config Conference. And if you didn't stick to it, then you wouldn't have been there to have the impact that you have there. But yeah, the name of the talk listeners was Hitting Control +N, how to work through a design breakup. And guys, I've talked on the show about how I've had some terrible design critique sessions that I've left me in tears, and questioning like if I have what it takes to be a designer. So, Shanique, I'd love for you to talk us through your thought process when you're dealing with a design breakup. How are you receptive to design critiques that didn't turn out the way you expected?

[00:04:13] SS: I mean, I've always felt like, honestly, growing up in the Bronx prepared me for this. I was always used to what we call getting roasted, or like someone's always like make it a joke. You're always getting critiqued for some reason. I don't know. I was always used to that environment. And I also have like a very – My mom's from Jamaica, and I feel like she's always had a lot of like harsher critiques on me, even as a person. So I've always been used to critique.

I feel like when it comes to design critiques though, I've never been afraid for like someone to tell me that my work needs to improve in some way, because I've always been like, "Okay, great. This will make my work better. So I've always been excited for that.

I went to college for design. So I was used to like studio critiques. And I feel like, honestly, those were worse than what I deal with like at a tech environment. But it's just like always this mindset I put myself in before I get into like a meeting where I'm putting my work up where it's just like, "This is my work. But it's not a reflection of me as a person." I know my skills are good. I know what I'm bringing to the table. So I just want my friends and my peers to help me make this thing better. So I'm kind of like excited to get to that point where I'm like, "Okay, let me share this with folks. See what they have to say. And let me go about making this better." I feel like that allows me to just be like I don't really mind.

[00:05:41] TA: Yeah, it's a struggle to separate the personal side of it, because it's like spend so much time on it, right? Like you develop this relationship with the work that you've created. And you remember from when it was a blank canvas to where it got to now. And I think one of the struggles is knowing when to not take the critique comments personally. So that can be like a comment of them describing your work as ugly. And then there could be someone that ridicules your intelligence, or calling your work stupid, and that's a difference between what's acceptable and what's uncalled for, right? So I'd like to go into like what's the worst design feedback session that you've had? And how have you grown since then?

[00:06:25] SS: Okay, I have had some pretty bad design feedback sessions. There was when I particularly remember, it's like because I was still a newer designer. And I just got the opportunity to lead a project. And I remember it's just like in the beginning stages, a lot of stakeholders were interested in this project. So they all kind of like came to the crits, the design crits. So we have PM, PM leads, engineers, engineering managers. It was packed. And I'm such a quiet person at the time. I think I was like overthinking things in my head. So I would know what I wanted to say. But because there were so many people in there, I feel like I was just so distracted. That was like part one.

Then once I started showing my work, people would like cut me off. They would ask questions. So they would just word vomit all of their questions like, "Why did you do that?" I remember

someone being like, “Oh, this math is off. So I can't really follow what you're saying.” And I was just so confused, because I'm like, “This is not even the purpose of this.” Number one, I was showing a wireframe. So if the math is off, like –

[00:07:39] TA: Right.

[00:07:42] SS: All right. I could put that down and make a note of it. But I just felt like it wasn't even a one-time thing. Every other critique, they would just do the same thing. And it was just – I don't know if it was like ego or just like the fact that they wanted to say something. But I can't even present well if someone's just like constantly interjecting when I'm speaking. So I would purposely say like, “Hey, I want to run through this. And then you can ask questions at the end.” Totally ignore that. They would continue barging in.

And I remember telling my lead, “Okay, this is honestly not cute. I cannot – It's like unprofessional at this point, like can we not even work as a team?” There were just so many levels to it. It wasn't even about my work. I felt like people were excited. And with that excitement, it was just like – I don't know. They just wanted to say things. And they didn't know how to act right. So there was like that part. And then I also remember like our PM at a time, we would make decisions together outside of those meetings, have discussions. And then once we got into the crit, they would start flip flopping and throwing us under the bus based on other feedback that people would be giving in the meeting. And I was like, “Come on. You can't just throw us under the bus like that. Like we talked about this. And now you're like saying, “Oh, yeah, we should have done that.” Or the seed like we didn't know what we were doing. And most importantly, like I didn't know what I was doing. And I was like, “Uh-oh. I hope to never – If I ever get in that situation, again, I am more than happy to speak up.” But I think at the time, I tend to wait and observe like, “Okay, it's just a one-time thing. I'll let it slide. If it's a recurring thing. Now, I'm a little annoyed if it's consistently happening. Now I'm going to say something.” I don't do that.

[00:09:45] TA: Yeah, it's super annoying. Like I've had very similar experience to what you've described. And also to like I don't know if you've ever worked in an open desk type format, but one of my worst experiences is just like when I would work on things, a lot of people would pass by and give me uncalled-for feedback. And like one time it was the CEO of the company. And he

was just standing there and like, “No, no, no. Move it that way. Move it this way.” And I was so frustrated, I went and talked to my creative director, “Like what can I do about these situations when people come up to my desk?” And she's like, “You can tell them to go away. Or tell them –” Like in my case, I go away. I'm only the black person here. They're probably going to fire me for something like that. But yeah, it was just very frustrating, because I felt like – And it gave me a little bit of PTSD of open-desk format, which is partially like why I'm fully remote now. It's just kind of like I felt like, “Oh, my gosh, any little thing I do, people are going to be so critical of it.”

Thinking back on it, is it because I was like black? I don't know. It's like you don't want to think about those types of things, but then you start to like dissect it and wonder like, “Why were people only coming to my desk and not the other designer's desks?” But yeah, I think it's important to know the difference of how to respond to feedback that's uncalled for, especially like if there's name calling or things like we both described. And if it ever gets to the point, please pull that person aside, or like call them out for how their comments are inappropriate, or like if they can just give you a chance to speak first, or like if there's just some type of way to better approach it to where you don't feel like people are attacking you. You shouldn't feel those types of ways when it comes to feedback at work. Like if you're a person that's like a bit shy about this, and then you could also write an email too, any type of way to have some type of communication about how you feel with the feedback going on.

[00:11:48] SS: I always feel like maybe as you touched on before, there's sometimes a fine line, right? So when you are not calling people out. You're trying to correct people, or pull them to the side. I always have felt like I wasn't quiet because I didn't have anything to say, or I didn't have an opinion, or like I'm shy. But I still speak up. It's just like I've been in so many situations where people have not responded well to things I've had to say.

[00:12:20] TA: Yeah, I know what you mean.

[00:12:23] SS: So it's just like I've read so many books, I try to find that balance of how to give that feedback. And I think I got to the point where I'm like was over-analyzing over trying to be considerate of people that it just felt easier to not say anything. So I mean, that did not do me any good. So it's like I always struggle with that, because it's just like, “Okay, that fragility is there.” People, they can dish it, but they can't take it. And I'm like, “Okay. Like if you want to

have that energy and crits, etc., that's fine.” However, if I then pull you to the side and say something, like it shouldn't be like all of a sudden, “Shanique is X, Y, Z, or she's hard to work with. You know that's not true. We were having a good time all those other times. But I didn't say anything. So I guess now it's an issue now that I'm putting up boundaries. Now that I'm like letting you know like that your behavior is not as welcoming, or it shuts people down and doesn't make them feel comfortable in this space.” That's the biggest thing that I feel like has been my goal in correcting in any space that I'm in.

So like I try to make it intentional that crits are a space where we show work, right? We always say, “Get feedback early and often.” And this space should be where we're encouraging folks to feel comfortable to do that and fail, or maybe something is not pixel perfect at an early stage of work. You should understand that, and give your feedback accordingly. You should keep that in mind. But it just feels like that goes out the window with some folks. So I feel like I struggle more so with that part.

[00:14:15] TA: I also think like another way that you can be receptive to feedback is preparing for the meeting. What are some of the ways that you like to prepare for a design critique?

[00:14:25] SS: So I feel like now that Shopify is digital by default, or like fully remote, there is this balance where we kind of try to do more async updates. And even moving to Figma, I feel like that has changed the way that I lay out my artboards or like my pages. I try to make it as clear like where I'm at or what I'm thinking about within my files. So I kind of put, Okay, here is what I'm exploring. This is the level of fidelity that it's at. Then I kind of like include a whole rundown of like this is what I'm going to show you. And I include like a page or a different screen where I say, “All right. Now, this is all of the questions that I have,” or any open questions, anything that I'm noodling on, anything that I would specifically like feedback on. I try to have that all in one space. So people can go in and see like, “Okay, this is what she's doing. This is what she's thinking. And these are the things that I should specifically tailor my feedback to just so I kind of remove that sense where people are giving you feedback on things that you don't really care about, right?”

So I try to have that all laid out. And then when I get to like our Google Meet type crits, that's where I would also run through that, and try to repeat like, “Okay, this is where I am at. This is

what I'm looking for feedback on." When I finished speaking, and people are giving their feedback, if there's anything that doesn't really help me, or like if it's not specifically what I'm looking for in that time, then I'll be like, "Thanks. That's good feedback." And then I'll pin it. Or I'll be like, "Okay. This is not what we're looking for right now." Or like, "That's a good suggestion. But that's not where I'm at. Like this is very early stages." I try to like reel it in so that's just not getting all over the place. So I feel like I've gotten a lot better in that sense of just like, if it's not specifically what I'm asking for, I'll kind of like cut it. I'll keep it in mind. So that's like also something that I've learned, is just it's okay if you're not going to explore something. But people still want to feel like they're being heard. So I'll write things down. I'll repeat things back to them. Make a note of it in my Figma. So it's just like, "Okay, you can see that I am considering this thing." And I'll follow up. Because, honestly, most of the time, the feedback is valid, and it just might be more useful later on. So it's just like, "Okay, I'll still keep it. I'll still keep note of it." I won't disregard things, like, "I don't need that." It's just like, "Okay, maybe not at this time." So I always try to prep beforehand, put all that information in Figma.

And then afterwards, we also kind of tend to do video updates. So it'll be like quick, I don't know, two minutes, like, "Hey, this is what I'm working on." Kind of run through that same format. And then you can also open it up to people to get that feedback more organically. So like people have an idea of what you're working on beforehand, right? So just letting folks know like this is not the only space for you to give that crit makes them feel more comfortable like not dumping everything on you in that moment. So it's more so like I try to prepare things beforehand, and I don't go too crazy. I feel like there could be a tendency to over-prepare for crits. And I try not to do that as well. But just having something laid out helps me spend less time on what I want to say, and like that extra prep. And then, I don't know, for me, I tend to be a little bit more scatterbrained. So by having that, it just like guides me as well.

[00:18:17] TA: I love to have notes for every meeting I go to, because it helps me stay on track for making sure that my questions get answered, and like I don't care if it's a casual meeting too. Like I have to have a notes, because it shows that I'm also taking the meeting seriously, because sometimes it's just like two words to remind me to speak up about what I need from this meeting. Because it could be a one-on-one, it could be design critiquing. It could be me critiquing someone's stuff. But yeah, like if I don't have notes, that's a sign I'm not prepared. I

just have to have a way for me to like guide the conversation and make sure that I'm getting what I need.

[00:18:54] SS: Indeed. I feel like I got feedback once from a manager and he was like, "When you prepare, you're on point." But he was like, "However, there are times when you can't prepare." Right? So now I'm like, "Okay, for those moments where it's like, okay, maybe I didn't intend to share something, but people aren't sharing anything." Like on those sessions there nobody wants to share, and I'm like, "Okay, let me just find something and share it." That's why it's like even helpful for me to have an area where –

[00:19:29] TA: Right. A backup?

[00:19:31] SS: Yeah. It's like, "Okay, maybe I didn't fully do this to the way that I had planned. However, I could still walk y'all through and we could still have a conversation." Like I feel like that's what I also had to learn. Like, "Okay, you can't keep spending like five hours trying to read a dissertation before you get to a crit." You got to be able to talk to things on the fly. So there's also that balance.

[00:19:57] TA: intentionality is a characteristic that I think every designer should obtain whenever you get into a job. From day one, whenever you start a job, I think you should be intentional about what you plan to gain from that job. Because sometimes it's just money to pay the bills, and that's okay. And I think you can still document the things like you want to learn and the opportunities you're getting at the job. And most of us have worked at jobs that absolutely suck. But for you, Shanique, like what are some ways you've been intentional about your career growth at companies?

[00:20:35] SS: I think this is a great topic for me, because I'm so passionate about this area of things. I know you said like, "Oh, sometimes you do get to a point where it's just money." But when I started out, I had basically nothing. I had graduated college, and I wasn't able to find a job. So I did have that period where I had bad jobs. Like I worked at Macy's and Lord & Taylor at the same time. Apparently, you weren't supposed to do that. But I didn't know. So I would do like a day shift at Macy's, and then go to Lord & Taylor at night.

For me, it was always like I had nothing to fall back on. So this was just like a temporary thing to get me to where I want it to be. Like, yes, I still knew I wanted to do design. So I've always been intentional in that sense, right? So it's like when I would get home, I will work on my portfolio. When I got money for Christmas, I would buy a design book. When I talk to people – I don't really like talking to people that much. So I was even intentional with that. Like I can't do long conversations that often with multiple people. So it's like, "If I'm going to talk to someone, I wanted to be meaningful. I want it to be enjoyable for me as well." So always kind of just like had that energy. And getting into my first job with SoundCloud, it was like I liked music. And I liked what they were doing. However, I also saw that there were great designers who work there. There were people that I can learn from. There was so much else that I can get from that job. Like people knew the name. And I don't know this. It's just like that whole package is something that I also keep in mind. So let's say for Shopify, I wasn't really looking for a job at the time. However, I do know that something that has always followed me at jobs is work on communication, work on speaking up. That's always been the thing for me. And it makes sense. So I was like, "Okay, where can I go to like challenge myself to take that on?" is kind of how I went about that.

So, previously, I had been working at smaller companies, like startup vibes. And this was like a more medium-sized company for me at the time. And they really stress that you can own your own development and the area that you can grow and fail. And I was like, "Okay, for me, at that time, that is what I was looking for," right? And I feel like I always have to have that like sense of intentionality, because I don't feel like I've had time to like waste and be frivolous. And like, "Oh, I'm trying this thing just because," or like, "I'm just doing this because it's fun. I'm going to go take a leap year, or like take a year off to just like travel the seven seas or something." I never felt like I had that space. So it was always like, "Okay, I'm going to make everything count."

And I also feel like it's because, growing up, I didn't have a lot of opportunities. So I was just like, "Okay, now that I have this space to do the things that I want to do, I want to do it right." And, I don't know, I feel like it's been the greatest thing that I have done. I see how much I've grown because of that intentionality. I feel like I have truly invested in myself. And I feel like sometimes people get lost in companies, right? The hot topic these days, I was like, "Oh, mission." There are a lot of mission-driven companies. And I feel like that's cool. However, I have my own personal mission. And I'm also here to like tackle that. So I feel like I am blessed

to have had leads who kind of stay out of my way in that sense. If there's a course I want, they're pretty okay saying, "Okay, go ahead. Do that thing." If there's a book I want, I can buy it. Yeah, I'm not really wasteful on thing. So I'm really happy about that at least. I feel like if there's anyone who wants to know about courses that are actually of good quality that you could spend your money on or not spend your money on. I have taken so many, or any book recommendations that are worthwhile. You're low on money and you want like so recommendations. I got you.

[00:24:58] TA: Y'all heard her. I'm going to shout out Shanieuq Shield. She got the course I lists.

[00:25:04] SS: I guess I do. So, yeah, I feel so sad when I see people who are just like you ask them, "Okay, like what do you want to do? What do you want to get better at? Or like where do you see yourself?" And they don't know. And it's just like, "Okay, that's cool." But the one thing I learned from one of the startups I worked at was like you don't leave money on the table. So if there's something that is offered, I'm going to use it. If you tell me that I can do something, I'm going to do it. And if you are going to stress me out on the daily, I got to make sure that I am good as well. So that's how I think about it.

[BREAK]

[00:25:40] TA: Let's take a short break.

So one of the top questions I get about product design is how do I stay inspired? And the other day I decided to take inventory of what I'm doing routinely. The biggest thing that stood out to me was how I'm always investing time to understand products that are advancing in design and technology. Today's sponsor, Google Design, produces original content like articles and videos to show how Google's products come to life, and to inspire designers everywhere. On Google Design, you'll get to know how the products used by billions actually get made. And hear from desires behind some of your favorite products like Chrome, Google Maps, and Nest. Head over to design.google to get inspired. That's design.google. Or follow them on Twitter and Instagram @GoogleDesign.

[INTERVIEW CONTINUED]

[00:26:36] TA: Every six months I do this like evaluation of like, “Okay, can I see myself where I am for another six months?” And if I can't, then that's always a sign like, “Okay, I think it's time to move on.”

Because it's like I feel like it's hard. You know how people are like, “Okay, five years, I'm going to be doing this.” I was like, “Yeah, I have my five-year goals and all that stuff.” But it's hard to see that within like past six months. Because it's like, you don't know what life is going to throw at you and like how things going to be going at the time. So just being able to like evaluate like where you are now and painting out six months. I think that's a great way to like start with being intentional with career growth.

And if you see yourself at that company – I know for myself, it's funny, like I had left corporate America to be like an independent contractor. And then now I was like I'm not necessarily what corporate America, but like our clients are corporate America, because I ended up at a small design studio working full-time now. But it's just funny, because like I didn't see myself back in this as far as being like full-time employee that I would just be an independent contractor the rest of my life. But it's like, who knows? There're six months to a year. From now, I might go back to that. But it's just always like checking in with yourself to see if like what you're doing is what you really want, because it's so easy to just get tied up and like, “Okay, I got a job, I'm making the money.” But you can set yourself up to be at a job that you actually enjoy instead of it just being a check. You just have to be really intentional about that. I know it's not one of those things that you can always do tomorrow or today. But if you plan for it, I think you can put yourself in that position.

[00:28:28] SS: Indeed. I kind of wanted to also add that, I feel like in my talk, I didn't have enough time, but your girl was going through it in 2020. And I had so much anxiety, because I feel like I was also that person who was so eager for growth. And like I was always hard on myself, because I was like, “Okay, you could do better. You could do more.” That it got to the point where I was trying to take on too much where you're saying sometimes you try to plan too far out as well. I had to then scale it back. Where, now, I'll give myself general goals.

So instead of being like, “I'm going to do this, this, this and this.” I just say, “Okay. This year, I want to speak at a conference. I want to mentor someone. And I want to refresh my knowledge on Mandarin,” right? Those are my top three. And that's it. I'm not being prescriptive on like which course I'm going to take or like all the different conferences I want to speak at. Because I felt like I was like boxing myself in. And then when I didn't make it, it's like, “Okay, May is coming up. Oh, man! I didn't do all of those things. Now I suck.” Like I always get into that motion. So now I don't do that. I'm like, “Okay, I want to speak at a conference. I'll take my steps to get there. If I do it, great. If I don't, I need to reassess. Am I taking on too much?” Meeting yourself where you're at is also a good thing to do. Because, yeah, you can get overwhelmed and then start to shut down, and then you're not meeting any of your goals, and then you said.

[00:29:59] TA: I completely relate to that. I was doing the same thing originally. Like I have all these huge goals, right? And when you start to get into the day-to-day of how you're going to achieve this stuff, that's when you get real with yourself of like, “Okay, actually, this is what I can do. This is what I have time for.” And realizing that you can't set these like huge goals, right? But then not draw the plan for how you're going to achieve them. Because it's like one thing to like, okay, you dream for these big things. But you have to go into like for today, for this week, for this month. Like, “Okay, realistically, would I be able to achieve that by that six-month mark that I put for myself or a year mark?” Because it's like we can be like, “Oh, I'll make the time.” But it's just like life will get in the way. So just being gracious with yourself of like, “Okay, let me cut back a little bit and just start with one thing.” And then from there, you can see like how much tolerance you have to be able to add in more goals to that.

So in an interview that you had with Lovers Magazine, you gave some advice to some ambitious designers asking them to speak up and invest in your craft. So you mentioned how you're a bit of a shy person. And there have been some times that you had a good idea, but you didn't speak up. What are some benefits you've had from speaking up in meetings?

[00:31:34] SS: That brought me back so far. I was like, “Oh, man.” I don't love that. I don't know what I was doing back then. But it is true. I don't know why. But I was always that type of person where I don't know if it's like I have a leg in my brain. But I have things I want to say. In the meetings, maybe I'm like pondering too long. By the time I try to get to the point where I am saying something, either it's already been said or the meeting is over. So like our design lead at

SoundCloud at the time, she would always say, “Shanique, you need to speak up. Shanique, you need to make sure you're speaking up in meetings.” She would tell my leads, “Hey, try to give her space to speak.” She was so great about that, that that helped me early on. I think if I didn't have that, I would continue to like do that same thing. Like she was very direct about it. And I tend to refer when people are direct. It's like, “Just tell me what you mean. And then I can go about tackling what I need to do.” So it has always burned into my brain.

And what I really think helped me know that, “Alright, it's important for me to be speaking up,” is I felt like when I did say things, I had thought about it already, right? Like I didn't just say things because like I want it to be heard. It's like, “Okay, I'm listening. I've thought about this thing. I've read about it. I know what I'm saying is based on something that will add to the conversation that it was like it does it make sense for me to not add my point of view.” So that was the first step. Like, Okay, what you have to say is a value.” And when you do say it, you get positive responses from people. They're like, “Oh, that makes sense.” Or people would then follow up on it. I got that positive reinforcement. Then there was like the second hurdle where it's like there are people who like to chat. In the tech environments, like people want to make impact. They're from that environment where it's like what they have to say matters. And they're used to just run in chatting. I don't know. I never felt like I had that where people asked me for my opinion. It was just always in this vacuum of my own head and my own thoughts that when someone actually did ask me for my opinion, it was like, “Oh, wow! Like you really want to hear what I have to say?” Like, “Oh, sure. This is what I've been thinking.”

So I feel like most of the time, quiet people do have things that does add value. So I was like, “Okay, nice.” So when I realized that it was good for me to be speaking up, it's like I remember at some startups where I had worked previously, we were trying to do like a rebrand. And we were looking for like different folks, like an agency to do the work. And we were sitting in meetings with the CEO. And we had some terrible options. Like we were just being cheap, I think at the time. And I was like, “Come on. I can't sit here anymore and like look at them seriously want to go through with this option.” And I think at that point, they noticed me, and they continued to come to me for feedback or like, “Oh, like we want to see what Shanique is thinking. We want to gut check with Shanique.” So you get more visibility. And I think, nowadays, I kind of used my speaking up to advocate for either my team, myself, or just design in general. I feel like finding that space where I realize now I'm noticing people like to speak up for things

that don't really matter in my opinion. It's like, "Okay, you're going to ride and die on, I don't know, let's say a rounded quarter. Like radius is off." But when it comes to things that actually matter, you see your peer is being shut out of conversations. You see that design doesn't have a seat at the table, or people of color are able to thrive in your spaces, your quiet. I never understood that.

And I think people say – Someone told me recently that I'm quiet, that I'm crazy. So I'll be quiet for a certain extent. But if I feel like something has to be said, I'm going to say it. And sometimes you have to take that space to speak up, because sometimes if you don't, either no change is going to come, things going to change, or potentially, people just don't know you, right? Like if you're not speaking up, then you don't have that chance to get certain opportunities as well, right? So you might be able to lead something. You might be able to get a promotion, or more pay. I think that's mostly the benefits that I'm getting now of speaking up. It's just like this is Shanique as a person. I'm pretty fun. I'm pretty caring. People are getting to know me.

There's a drawback that now too many people try to talk to me sometimes. And I'm like –

[00:37:01] TA: [inaudible 00:37:01].

[00:37:03] SS: Ooh! Or you have too many opportunities. You have too many things. You have too many projects. So it's like find that balance. However, I'd rather be here than where I was when I wasn't really saying anything. Yeah, because I feel like it's still pretty rewarding. Maybe you have a good idea that you're sitting on. Try to run it by somebody. And just building up that tolerance of like, I'm going to say, messing around and finding out. It's not going to kill you. I feel like I've been in worse situations. And speaking up has definitely been the easiest thing that I could be doing. So that's how I think about it these days.

[00:37:41] TA: I imagine now that you're a senior designer. You've maybe put in more situations that you need to be like the one that gave the feedback. So what are some challenges like you've had to overcome as a senior product designer at Shopify?

[00:37:56] SS: I don't know. I'm in this weird space where a lot of the things that I do is guiding, guiding folks. I try to be that voice in the room that makes you think like, "Should you really be

exploring that thing? Should we really be investing in this direction?" I find that those are the most challenging, especially when it's paired with the different levels of hierarchy, right? So you just move up one step. However, there are still many levels above you, and you're still trying to get your voice heard in that sense where a PM may have a stronger opinion, engineers might have a stronger opinion. So it's like how do I push for design focus or like design thinking and different user experiences to be prioritized and considered? I think that's been harder. Like, "Okay, yes, we can be very lean about this. And we could ship things quickly." Like how do we balance doing that versus spending time to make more crafted experiences is a lot of what I do these days, or like a lot of what I'm thinking about. Yeah, and I find that could be very challenging.

[00:39:15] TA: Yeah, it's definitely a different muscle in the brain like once you get to senior product designer. And I know it's different, like each company, as far as like responsibilities. But it's nice, because I feel like you, in a way, have proving yourself. It's like a credible type of thing. Because like when you're first getting started out as a junior designer, people might not give you the pedestal, I guess, to be able to speak up on things at all times. It's more of like you might have the manager that is the one that will speak up on your behalf, like you have to voice things to them.

Basically, you heard more. It all depends on the company. And also y'all listening be like, "No, I'm not heard." But it's nice to be able to mentor people. I feel like that's the biggest gratitude I have like being in a senior position, because that's like when you're in a regular position, if you're trying to mentor someone that's like above you, they may not be trying to hear you. But I feel like when you're in an upper position, like people are a bit more receptive to that.

[00:40:22] SS: That is true. Managing up is real. I feel like sometimes I would hear that, "Yeah, you need a manager-manager." And I was like, Oh, why would I be doing that? I can't even manage myself." But now it's like sometimes you do have to do it. You have to be empathetic and caring. You're not trying to build those people under like, "I know better. Or you're not doing stuff for me." But getting your voice heard means you will have to convince and be influencing to people above you. Just being comfortable with that, it is something that I try to mentor people to do. It is nicer to be in that space where you can mentor folks, because I feel like sometimes I would mentor people on the same level as me. And you see them progressing ahead of you, or

like getting promotions, or like getting greater impact ratings. And you're like, "Well, wow!" Like, "I was the one who spent the time to help them and guide them." So it's nice when you're in that position where it's like, okay, you get that recognition. And that mentorship is attributed to you and is a positive notch on your belt is much more gratifying for me.

[00:41:39] TA: Do you have any additional advice for our listeners,

[00:41:43] SS: Mostly that it's okay to be soft spoken, or quieter? I think after my talk, I realized that people were able to gauge my personality and like how much I cared from that talk. And that was weird. Like that was maybe some people's first interaction with me. But I think someone described me as being quiet, yet confident. And I really like that. Maybe you're not the loudest in the room. However, find those channels where you're still able to speak up. And just take a deep breath, usually, and say what you need to say. I feel like when you speak with conviction, then people don't tend to second guess you even if you're talking loud, or just talking in a calm voice. I feel like that has helped me the most. So I feel like definitely tried to do that. And just try to try things more. I feel like maybe some people these days are a little too focused on being perfect. And I think there's some relatability that comes from being more vulnerable and putting yourself out there. So yeah, try not to – I don't know. That's just the type of energy I try to bring. And I feel like I've gotten pretty far. So there is a space for the quiet people. You can thrive and survive. Like don't let other people intimidate you, or make you feel like you have to change yourself to be something that you're not. Wait for your time. And when it comes, grab it, or say what you need to say. I think that's the greatest bit of advice that I could give today.

[00:43:27] TA: Yes, I love it. So I like to end this show with a random question completely unrelated to what we've been talking about. Who's someone you really admire?

[00:43:36] SS: I think I'm very boring in the sense that I don't really think about like celebrities or like great social media presences. I'm really inspired by my mom. Just the fact that she had us young and she immigrated to America, and she has always been this pillar of grace and care, but pretty stern. I've always looked up to her in some way, because she has dealt with a lot on her own and has pushed through a lot of situations that I feel like many people would buckle under. And I think that gives me that edge of grit to survive in certain workspaces. I think there's so much that I have watched her do that helps me just be a better person and always strive to

bring others along with me. She's very selfless in a world that is very selfish. And yeah, I give her a lot of trouble. But I will always take the opportunity to thank her and let her know how much she has done for me. And I feel like that's more meaningful to me than anyone else that I could think of.

[00:44:56] TA: That's amazing. Where did your mom immigrate from?

[00:44:59] SS: Oh, she's from Jamaica.

[00:45:00] TA: Oh, Nice.

[00:45:01] SS: Yes, indeed. So both of my parents are from Jamaica, and they had me here. So, a lot of struggle there and –

[00:45:09] TA: I love stories like that of hearing how people have had success from their parents immigrating from another country. Like I can't imagine, like having to leave, or I've grown up to go somewhere else to try to have a better opportunity. There's a lot of things you have to leave behind. And you have to adjust.

[00:45:27] SS: I feel like it's so interesting, because I took her to Afrotech with me. And she told me, she was like, "That was the first time I've ever seen black people. And they're so empowered, and stepping into their greatness." I feel like she dealt with a lot of being shut out, or not given the same space as her peers. There wasn't a lot of speaking up or advocating for yourself. So sometimes I see how she battles with that, where I'm like, "Hey, Mom, I'm going to go X for this promotion." And she's like, "Oh, should you be doing that? Whatever." She hits me with all the concerns, and it's because she's just so used to being shut down. And I think this is the first time she's seeing her wild child just fearfully try to combat some of those things. I also like that we kind of go through that together. Like she's able to see me progress and do some of the things that maybe she didn't have the opportunity to do. But I try to help her see, like, "It's not too late. You can still fight for what you want, or like make your voice known. And don't lessen yourself for other people."

I remember so many days she would come home defeated from work just because of like unfair situations where she was more qualified than other people, but still overlooked. And she would always tell me at the time she had kids and responsibilities. So she couldn't easily like walk away from such situations. So I try to be mindful of that as well, right. I'm privileged in that sense. And I know where I came from, and I know the difficulties that folks who also weren't born and raised in America have, like with visas and stuff. Like that's a whole – Like I don't think some people empathize with that process and stuff like that. So, different perspectives that I'm happy that I cherish.

[00:47:31] MO: Where can we connect with you online?

[00:47:34] SS: Oh, no. I don't know. I feel like when people see me in-person, it's a much better experience, because I don't really use social media much. But I'm doing better. You can email me.

[00:47:48] TA: Yeah. And not everyone has to have social media. I feel like there's the pressure of people like, “Hey, did you see that meme? Or like did you see that video?” right? But I mean, do whatever you feel is best for you. People will find you when they find you.

[00:48:03] SS: That is true. I mean, yeah, you can email me at shaniqueshields@gmail.com. I have my website up, but it has like my Twitter and stuff on there. My Twitter, I don't even remember it right now. But it was this post that I'll re-tweeted. It always messaged me though. I do respond. I don't mind responding to people. I have alerts the Internet for years. So I'm on there. I just don't say anything.

[00:48:32] TA: Alright , guys. I'll add her Twitter to the show notes. And you heard her email address. If you have any questions or comments about today's episode, make sure to tag Shanique Shields on her social handles. I'll have her Twitter link in the show notes. And make sure to tag me @uinarrative on Instagram, or @uinarrativeco on Twitter.

Also, don't forget to share this episode with anyone you think would benefit from it, especially if you see anyone that's been having a bit of trouble with design feedback. Or if you are on a

team, I think this would be great to share with them as well. But I appreciate you so much, Shanique, for taking the time to join us on this episode.

[00:49:09] SS: Thank you for having me.

[OUTRO]

[00:49:15] TA: Thank you for listening to the UI Narrative podcast. If you like what you hear, make sure to show this podcast and love by commenting and subscribing where you listen. You can find me on Instagram and Facebook at UI Uarrative, or twitter @uinarrativco. I also respond to emails at Hello@uinarrative.com. Talk to you later. Bye.

[END]