EPISODE 46

[INTRODUCTION]

[INTRO]

> "***JG:*** *If you don't stay up on technology, then you will get left behind. And the words that I heard, Tolu, I have to make myself invaluable. And I have to make sure that I'm bringing more to the table than the average designer.*"

[00:00:20] TG: You're listening to the UI Narrative podcast, the biweekly podcast that shares the stories of people of color, interface designers and researchers and their contributions towards creating user-centered experiences? And I'm your host, Tolu Garcia. Let's get started.

[SPONSOR MESSAGE]

[00:00:40] TG: Hey, guys, it's tolu. Here 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 to how Google, you can learn how Google Maps streamline the 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 you 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]

[00:01:43] TG: Hey, everybody, welcome back to the UI Native Podcast. So, let me introduce you to today's guest. From design contest to designing customer experiences, seeing the world

through the lens of creative opportunity has helped to curate Jeremy Gaston's career. Before taking the role as a principal experienced designer for Capital One, where he helps create product experiences that help preserve the customer's dignity, they're in financial hardship. He strengthened his consumer compassion working with several multinational brands, from designing match.coms in Agro App UI to designing Michael's plus Sony Pictures partnership experience for The Vow movie, to founding and successfully exiting the tech startup UBALLN, where he designed and developed an enterprise grade UGC App for recreational athletes.

Although a very capable designer, Jeremy is a multi-disciplined, multifaceted, value rich executer, mentor, strategist and friend in the professional world. Listeners, let's welcome Jeremy to the UI Narrative Podcast.

[00:02:54] JG: Thank you. Thank you.

[00:02:57] TG: So, before we begin today's topic, I got to let listeners know just how important of a guest you are to me on the show. Listeners, on my very first podcast episode where I talked about my journey to UX. I talked about a mentor I had, who inspired me, who helped me get into UX and inspired me. Well listeners, the day is finally here. I have him as a guest on the show. And for those that are listening for the first time, they don't know the story. So, Jeremy, and I used to be coworkers and it was just so inspiring to see a black UX designer, and he gave me mentorship on what the job is actually like, and also encouraged me to look more into UX. So yeah, to this date, like Jeremy, you're the only black designer who I worked with in the corporate setting.

[00:03:45] JG: Oh, that hurts my heart.

[00:03:46] TG: I'm going to tell good because seeing you crush it at work was just so motivating to me because at the time, I was a graphic designer, and I hardly ever saw anyone that looked like me as a designer. So, you setting that example for me of like, how I could aim for something higher than what I was doing, which is like everything. And it's even humbling, like thinking back at that moment. So yeah, thank you, Jeremy, again, for being here on the podcast. It really means the world to me.

[00:04:14] JG: Yeah, absolutely. Thank you for having me, Tolu. It's been an honor, number one getting to know you, getting to work with you, but also to see you take suggestions and to run with them and to do more. It was really easy to be honest with you, it was easy to go and support you because of seeing the work that you were already doing and knowing that there was going to be a limitation and what value that you could bring to the world as just a visual designer when there's so much. There's so much more rich interaction and feedback that you can get in the product design space. So, I just believe that more of the world needed to experience you and what you brought to the table. So, you made it really easy for me to support you, you always do.

[00:05:01] TG: Thank you for that, Jeremy. Thank you. So, I'd like to start off the episode by talking about some of your earliest memories of being interested in design.

[00:05:12] JG: Back in the mid-80s, when Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles and The Simpsons came out, my brother, who's three years older than me, he got a wild hair and decided that he was going to sketch, he was going to draw each one of them. He was going to draw Bart Simpson. He was going to draw Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. When you were a kid, and you get into comics or something like that, you kind of get this mindset of like, I wonder if I could create something like that, and maybe not everybody's like that. Maybe as dorky designers are like that.

But my brother, he drew Bart Simpson. And it was really good, at least I thought so and he's always been an inspiration to me, and somebody who I've looked up to. So, I decided, let me see if I can do it. It wasn't to be honest with you, Tolu, it wasn't anything like, man, I think being a designer would be great. It was really like my brother can do it. I wonder if I can do it. So, I did it and I did it just as good as him. And then he did the same thing with Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, I followed soon, and I got really excited just about this idea of being able to see something in your mind or see something in front of you, and to be able to recreate it, and then get into the space of where you could create, where you could see something in your mind's eye and then create.

And so, ever since then, I was maybe six or seven years old, I was hooked on creating from what was in my mind. So, design had me pretty young.

[00:06:44] TG: I think a lot of people too, they don't realize just because you can't draw that there's other avenues of design that you can get into because I've met a lot of designers that really cannot draw. I thought I was bad.

I think it's a great that you were able to grow from that experience, to where you are now, even though I'm sure maybe at the time we didn't even know you know about UX and all this other stuff. But still, you being able to challenge yourself to create something from your mind, I think that's always the hardest part.

[00:07:18] JG: Yeah, absolutely.

[00:07:19] TG: You chose the self-taught route into UX. We talked about a little bit about this, off the podcast, but I'd love for you to like tell everyone, walk us through your journey of how you got started to get into UX and being a principal experience designer at Capital One?

[00:07:36] JG: Yeah, absolutely. So, first thing that I have to lay some groundwork, I think it's important to understand, number one, on a much grander scale is, it's very important to understand the value, what value points that you bring to the world. But secondly, it's important for you to understand how it is that you consume education, and information. How do you then turn around and execute that and share it with the world?

So, for me, I'm very much an observer, observer executer, so I can very easily experience being in someone's presence, seeing them do what they're skilled at, break down how it is that they're doing what they're doing, and then I can mimic it. It may not be that I'm mimic it, as well as they are implementing it. But the fact that I can do it is something that's really big to me, that there's not a whole bunch of things that I can't try, and that with some with some persistence that I can't do.

The same thing with my design career, turn UX. A lot of it was observation, and then execution. So, throughout junior high, elementary school, high school, my favorite classes were always the design classes. It was just being able to create something that hasn't been created yet, or creating something in a different style than what it was already created in. So, that led me into

the Art Institute of Dallas, moving from Arkansas, to Texas, and jump started my career as a freelancer spent the first seven years of my design career. As a freelancer and an entrepreneur, I launched my own design agency when I was 21 years old. May 22, 2002, was when I launched my very first business. And I was just focused on design, on branding, and things that nature.

And then I remembered something that one of my favorite instructors told me, his name is David Lipe, I'll give him a shout out. He is now I believe Dean of Students at the Art Institute of Dallas, he may have changed positions. But he said in our color theory class, he was taking us through Photoshop and at this time, this was Adobe Photoshop 3, I want to say. So, this is back in the 1999, 2000, to date myself, and what he said, echoed in me. It wasn't even the exact words that he said. But he was making a point and he was expressing the level and the speed at that time. So, this is, again, this is 1999, or 2000 and he's talking about the speed in which Adobe was releasing software. And they were releasing at that time, they were releasing software on an annual basis and that was fast back then. Because you had a CD ROM that you had to put into your computer, download the software, and all that stuff. Before the cloud, they had gotten to the place to where they had cut that down to maybe every three to six months, I believe it was around every six months, they were releasing a new version of Adobe. And then they went into the cloud.

Now, they make pushes and updates to the software to different pieces of the software all the time. So, he made this statement. And he said, "If you don't stay up on technology, then you will get left behind." He said, "It is an out with the old, in with a new career that you have to stay current." And the words that I heard, Tolu, was I have to make myself invaluable. I have to make sure that I'm bringing more to the table than the average designer.

So, from there I went on to – I got the development software Dreamweaver, which back then it was Macromedia before Adobe bought them. So, I had Dreamweaver and Macromedia Flash and I taught myself how to use both of those. I'd gone and taken a semester at Richland College here in Dallas, Texas. And that course was super slow. So, I just taught myself how to build websites, using Dreamweaver and using Flash, to give it a little bit more possess. And that took me to the next level, right? It gave me more accessibility to what I could do to help companies out, and things of that nature to go from branding, to giving them a web presence.

And then I came to this place of impasse. Back in 2007, took on this client and when I took on this client, this was the largest client I've ever worked with. They were a staffing agency. But this was the corporate headquarters and they wanted to redo their website. I remember sitting in their boardroom, and being absolutely terrified, self-conscious. At that point, I was 26 years old, but I look all of 18 years old, with very little facial hair, not much meat on my bones. First, I was concerned with being an imposter, right? And then secondly, I was concerned with with being dismissed because of maybe people are going to think I'm too young. And then they start lobbing questions and I had an answer for every single question.

There was at that moment that I was like, "Not only do I belong here, but I'm the right person that they should be asking about this." I remember leaving from there and needing to create a proposal to go back to them. This was my first multi thousand-dollar project that I was going to bid for. And even looking at it today, like I still feel really good in my soul, about the price that I put on that paper because of the outcome that I know that they wanted. At that time, like what the requirements were at that time, right?

So, I remember going through the process of building out the proposal. This is the genesis of my UX career. As I went through, and I listed out the value props, that me building this for them should bring to the table, I was confronted with the understanding of analytics. They needed to increase in market share and visibility and things of that nature, and here I am selling them on a wing and a prayer that I'm going to build them a website that's going to be stellar, that's going to be all the things, and now I have the issue and the concern of. "Well, what if they want me to quantitatively backup what I'm saying that I'm capable of?" And I had this very real moment where I went back through all of my artistic training at the Art Institute of Dallas, and throughout school, throughout Grammar School, and it hit me that everything I've been being taught was how to be Vincent van Gogh. I was being taught on how to be Pablo Picasso. What I mean by that, Jackson Pollock is going to create a piece of artwork that that sends you somewhere emotionally, but it's not going to be the same exact place as your counterpart.

So, if you're standing in a museum and you're looking at an art piece, and two of you, I'm not talking about 200 of you, if two of you are standing beside each other look at art piece, you're going to conceptualize it with your mind. You're going to say, "This is what it makes me feel. This

is what it makes me think." And everyone can extrapolate their own meaning from the artwork, versus if it was an intentionalized design that is meant to drive you to an action, you can't have abstract design be the way that you build your website. You can't build your business cards off of abstract design. It has to be very intentional. So, when I coined the phrase personally for myself, that I am no longer a visual designer or web designer, I'm an analytical designer.

So, this is pre UX design. I realized that I have to I have to analyze, why is it that I chose that color for the button? Why is it that I chose to put the hero image there and not below? Why did I use this type font? And I had to start analyzing my design, if I was going to be expected to create a product that was then going to generate revenue.

[00:16:22] TG: Yeah.

[00:16:22] JG: So, I went from there, two months later, getting hired by Verizon, a Verizon company called Idearc Media. It was just a website mill. I mean, we were building websites all day, essentially, the sales team was going through the Verizon Yellow Pages, and they were reaching out to companies and saying, "Hey, you're listed with us do, you also need a website?" And we were building those websites for next to nothing for them. That was my start into corporate America. It was awesome. It was great. But it was horrible. Because I had already had this crisis of design, where I realize that if we are building these for businesses, we are essentially building islands to themselves that no one's going to use. Or if they do use it, it may not be of value to them, when they do use it. They may run into a lot of issues, because we're just popping these designs out, we're not thinking about who is going to be using it.

So, I started to explore these concepts of, of the psychology of customers. And so that drove me further down the path of my own journey of how can I really add value to a company, because my greatest fear, Tolu, was that I was going to put out there, a $15,000, a $20,000 $40,000 bid for a project and I was going to win it. And now, after it was done, and it was in market, and they were trying to validate that, that it was worth it, that it was worth the 40k or the 20k, or whatever, that I would have no way to quantify what I built for them, and they would ask for a refund.

So, I had this healthy fear of that, that led me to start analyzing what I was doing as a visual designer, and moving into the web space. And then that took me into looking at all the different

channels in which design can be implemented and can affect a customer's actions. Once I did that, then my excitement for mobile design, it peaked and I felt like I was more well-rounded at that point, because of those being the two major channels in which a business interacts with the customer on our website and then in the mobile application.

It was a very – I call it a complex journey, because there were so many nuances and stops along the way that helps so much value working at match.com. Match.com was where I learned how to become a UX researcher before there was even the term, number one UX designer or UX researcher. They were doing AB testing on the profile, I was blessed to be able to work on the design of the match.com user profile, and to help them to increase user engagement. Like if you were looking for somebody on match.com, and you went to their profile, you were looking for specific data points to help first validate if you were ever going to have the conversation, if you were going to even start a conversation with them. So, it was learning what are those data points and what happens if we put it here? What happens if we put it below the fold? All this other stuff. So, I learned so much there. Same thing with Michaels. Michaels, I was blessed to be able to be the chief designer and to work on the homepage. So, a lot of the ad placements, the verbiage that we use and things that nature, it was a process of research while it being in market.

I just realized, man, I love, I absolutely love getting feedback in my personal life. So that much more I love getting feedback from customers that what it is that we're doing, what it is that we're showing is, is exactly what they need to see in order to make an educated purchase.

[00:20:24] TG: Man, that's so amazing hearing, how you started out, not even knowing what UX was. The term wasn't even coined yet. So, it was a matter of you just trying to figure out how to add value to clients. So that way, your imposter syndrome wouldn't be telling you like, "Hey, your credibility here is at stake and stuff like that."

[00:20:50] JG: Exactly.

[00:20:50] TG: But yeah, I think it's really important listeners to take from like how Jeremy was able to figure out as he said, what value points can you add, to a company. I think starting out, you know, there's lots of ways to get into UX, but understanding your ability, as he said, of like

how you want to self-learn. And I know like not everybody has this skill. Some people need guided mentorship, in order to succeed in this profession. But I argue that you kind of need to have some of that self-learning curiosity and also to a little bit of vulnerability of just saying you don't know things and asking people like, "Hey, how'd you do that?" To get more comfortable with just the learning aspect. Because when you become a designer, specifically a UX designer, you're constantly learning, you're constantly in this limbo of you think you know, then you go and talk to some people and you're like, "Oh, crap, I don't know anything, we're back to the drawing board again."

So, it's like getting comfortable with that self-learning aspect that Jeremy talked about, and just really figuring out like, "Okay, I see that a lot more companies are looking for people with these types of skills, maybe I should try to learn some middle skills." Because it's like, I'm seeing with a lot of these boot camps and stuff out here. And even with college degrees, like I wanted to also dive into like, different college courses you took that you feel, helped you out. Because I feel like a lot of education out there, just kind of like bland when it comes to actually teaching you the fundamentals of what you need to actually make products successful.

I want to dive into like, what type of college courses did you take that you feel were actually beneficial?

[00:22:46] JG: That were beneficial to my UX career, I think first of all, the foundation of design was really an important form, flow function. That's the foundation that I'll always go back to. And then from there, when you start getting into the psychology of design, design heuristics, a lot of those things I didn't experience them on a collegiate level. I didn't experience them through courses. A good amount of the things that I experienced in UX learnings, they were – I'm sorry, professors that are out there that are teaching HCI courses. But a lot of them were on YouTube for me, as well, when you're in a corporation, I mean, I've gleaned so much from designers at Capital One, and being able to take away from them and their career experiences has really been great. So, there's that network that you're talking about mentors are a network of peers, who have a somewhat parallel tractor experience. But that took them in different ways that they learned.

I'm positive that there are some courses out there that you can take definitely human centered design courses, I believe that first and foremost are always going to give you the things that you need, the tools that you need, in order to be a great user experience designer. If you're not designing with empathy, if your designs are not thinking about the humans behind the action, you're failing. You're failing as a user experience designer. The whole point is that your user is a human and you have to remove as much friction in their journey as you possibly can. You need to understand as much of who it is that they are, as you can in order to be able to deliver designs that hold the right value. But then also like any course that can help you understand the business outcomes, understand the product management side of things because you have to think about it from a technology standpoint as well. You can deliver a design and it be a great design all day, but products or tech may not have the budget to be able to take the time to do the build out that your design requires.

So, you can't just go around presenting designs that are going to be above budget, that also don't take into account the business needs. What currently does the business need so that, if your product is fanciful, and it just gives a great experience, but it doesn't drive any revenue incentives, then that number one is likely going to get shot down by stakeholders in the corporation. And then number two, it's just not thinking about the whole picture. UX design is not just about the customer, the customer, as far as the consumer. You have a customer who is your consumer. And then you have a customer, that's the business, that's a stakeholder. They have a goal in which they're trying to hit as well.

So, I will say for those of you that are currently going the self-taught route, definitely utilize YouTube. There is nothing disrespectful about using YouTube. There are instructors on there that are just as great as some of your instructors that are at schools. Because I hate to tell you, but some of the instructors at these institutions only have theoretical design knowledge.

[00:26:16] TG: Seriously.

[00:26:18] JG: They don't have professional design knowledge. And then you may find some instructors that are on YouTube, who only have professional design background, but they don't have theoretical design. So, it's good to be able to mix both.

Another source is Udemy. There are instructors on there who are inside of universities, but they in order to make more money, they have created courses outside of their 9 to 5 as college instructors and they've put together these courses where they get paid directly. So now, you get instructors who have theoretical understanding of design, and maybe even across between theoretical and professional. So, we're in a very unique time. There is no way you can tell me, right now, that you want to become a UX designer or product designer, but I just don't know how to, I don't know where I can, I don't know if I can. You're really making excuses because they are from boot camps to Udemy, to YouTube, to colleges, there are a plethora of options for you to choose from. I don't think that there's just any one way to be able to glean information and education.

[00:27:35] TG: Let's take a short break.

[SPONSOR MESSAGE]

[00:27:38] TG: 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 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 CONTINUED]

[00:28:32] TG: I can understand the folks that don't know like which one to choose, just because like there's a lot of boot camps out there that are crap. I've looked at the curriculum, and I'm not going to go into that, but it's just, talk to people that are in the profession. If you really want to get into UX design, you know my email, hello@uinarrative.com. I've answered a

lot of your questions about this type of stuff. If it's a simple like, which one should I choose? I would ask them basically how this conversation goes, I'd ask you what your goals are. And then I'd give you a suggestion of what boot camps look pretty good out there. There's no excuse at this point. If you want to get in, especially like the self-taught route, you have to have that initiative, the drive, the discipline to go out there and be curious looking for resources of like how you want to get started.

Jeremy, as far as like when you were getting started on self-taught route, what are some of the biggest challenges you faced?

[00:29:33] JG: The best way I can answer that is the fact that UX was so new. I had this conviction surrounding analytical design, but with trying to implement that, inside of companies made it a challenge, because you also need the research to back it up. You have when people that I worked with were so used to – there's a term that they use, but basically, it's the person with the biggest title in the room is who decides if this design goes forward. And that's a horrible way to decide what designs are going to live on your website, what designs are going to live in your products and all that.

So, it was going up against a lot of that until UX became normalized. And then after UX became normalized, then we still had to work against people not wanting to do the research, want to take the time to do the research. It's like, you've got usability hub, or usertesting.com, or you've got all these different channels in which you can put together a cohort of customers, or potential customers and you can expose a very early mocks of your product design or experience and get feedback from them, direct feedback on how it is that they would solve their problem using your design. With that, companies were still pushing back on, do we really need to spend that money? Do we really need to blah, blah, blah? So, it was pushing through that five to seven years of just crap, dealing with companies that just didn't get it and couldn't see, they couldn't see the future. They couldn't see how it is that UX research is utterly going to change and increase corporate profitability, because you will have greater touchpoints, and you will monetize your big data units.

Because now sorting through all that data, you can see customer behavior, and you can now monetize customer behavior. It was really important to get past that season. But that was the

hardest time. Anytime if I have to go into another corporation in my future, and contend for UX research, that will always be the greatest bane of my existence, that people think that your subjective suggestions about a design are more valid than user responses. So, that's my rant.

[00:32:17] TG: Yeah, I mean, it's a well worthy rant, like what's needed, because there's still a lot of companies out here, especially like a Fortune 50 company. I'm going to call them out, because I worked with them. But like, a lot of them don't want to do research. And it's funny, because at the beginning, they're like, "Oh, yeah. We got the budget. We're going to do the research." And then when it comes to the times, like, "Oh, you have like a week. Oh, you have like a day." I'm just, "Okay, so generative research friends and family." You're not serious, but okay, whatever.

[00:32:50] JG: Absolutely.

[00:32:51] TG: What's something that you wish was talked about more in UX?

[00:32:55] JG: To me, there are four cross sections that hold up UX design. And if you are designing for user experience, you're only doing that, because you want to increase revenue. You want to generate money or you want to generate an action that may be equivalent to money. So, whether it's a nonprofit or for profit. But at the end of the day, there are four things that you have to always consider. You have to always think about in the process of UX design, in my opinion. And that is, first of all, and they are in no particular order, because they all hold the same level of importance. You can't have one, you should not have one without the other.

So, I'll say, the first one is the one that everybody thinks about, is the customer. Getting the customer to wow, eliminating friction for the customer, right? I need them to show up and to show up often and to show up more times than they did before. And then secondly, I need to understand what are the business needs? The business needs to they need to increase revenue? They need to increase interactions? They need to increase data submissions? What is their need? So, my designs are going to be concerned about those things, right?

And then the technology. Technology usage. How is it that I'm delivering this experience? What's my technical limitations? What are we using in order to deliver it? What languages are

we using to deliver it? Also, what tech debt am I working with? Do we have things that we are grandfathered into? Code bases that we're grandfathered into, that may limit us being able to deliver the solution and the experience that we want to and the way that we want to because we're dealing with tech debt and old technology that's going to kind of cripple us a little bit. And then the last part is, what is the cost associated with it for the tech teams. If this is a solution we want to bring to the table and this is going to create an overhaul, how many sprints do I project, the delivery of this design to take and do we have that in our tech budget in order to do? Or are we only allotted three sprint, a solution that that should take us three sprints long versus a solution that takes us seven plus sprints long?

Those altogether, I believe needs to be talked about more, the unification of those. But what I see more times than not is the isolation, the silos, where designers only talk about design. And then when he gets around product teams, then that's when they start talking about design. And then they talk about the technology space, how it's being delivered, or they talk about design, and they talk about if tech teams have the ability, the capability to do it. But it's rare that I sit in a room, and I hear all four of those conversations come together, when we're talking about the delivering, the experience that the customer needs.

[00:36:07] TG: Yes, I completely agree, especially with the technology one. I was just recently dealing with the client that we have the conversation that they had, the development resources to create what I was designing. Like recently, when I looked at what they were coding on this like, "Okay, so you don't? Are you going to get it?" Because there's some of the like data sets that we have that were supposed to be displayed. And I'm like, "Okay. Then I'm going to stay. What's going on?" But also, too, I think it just comes down to like some companies, especially startups. When it comes down to costs, I think they underestimate sometimes. And then that's how a lot of designs that we have end up not being quoted, but it's always satisfying to see your designs live.

So, I think it's so important to try to get the four things Jeremy talked about customer, businesses, technology, and costs in every conversation when you're creating any product. So now, I want to get into Jeremy's entrepreneurship. So, Jeremy was the founder of you UBALLN, which is an app which helps you find local pickup basketball games and players. So yeah, tell us, Jeremy, like what inspired you to create this app?

[00:37:21] JG: My own personal experience, there was a – in that timeline I shared with you all earlier, there was a time where I went back to college for a third time. So, there was **[inaudible 00:37:32]**, and that was a course that I took at Richland College, and then I went to Dallas Christian college to go and play basketball there. For them had a little bit of eligibility, always loved basketball, growing up played a lot of different sports, played football, basketball, soccer. Never played in play school ball or anything like that, aside from football. I went on to play collegiate basketball, and I went from there to play semi pro for one season, but was so enamored with business that I moved back from – actually moved to New York and then moved back to Texas.

It was a moment in 2014, where my love for basketball, hit an impasse with wanting to find a quality pickup game, and not really having a forum for how it is that I could find other players or active games. So, I set out to create a platform that would allow for a wage like sharing of information between other basketball players, other people who were creating games, or were showing up to the court. And I just wanted to be able to produce something that in the words of Sir Richard Branson, I almost forgot his name. He said, when he creates a company, he thinks about how would it work if I solved this problem using magic. And that was my premise for creating UBALLN was how would start in a pickup game look, if I did it using magic?

So, I set out to design a product that felt like magic. We put it out in the market, in the marketplace back in 2019, May, early June of 2019. It has grown every month since. We've generated new users ever since, even during a pandemic which was very interesting. Nevertheless, the pandemic, it was a huge blow to us because of municipalities removing basketball rims, and some still haven't returned obviously, because the COVID. It's a very physical sport, very close and personal sport. So, it's totally understandable. Gyms also closed down, but we were able to prove out that it was a model that would absolutely work. And so that was my greatest success or my most proud moment in the business world that I've had, with having been an entrepreneur, having launched a marketing agency that I had to close down. And being an entrepreneur who was just simply a freelancer masquerading as a boss, all those different learnings.

But to really come to a place where I got the opportunity to fall in love with the problem, and then learn through all of the same tools that I would implement for a corporation, and to implement that for my startup. And then to see the fruits of it and the return that I got from our users, the feedback that I got from them in the App Store. If you go to the App Store now and and look up UBALLN, it's a five-star app. We don't have a single negative review. Our Android version is a great version, that my co-founder built. We have one negative review on that, because of a technical issue that we have with one of our deployments. But outside of that, we've had nothing but glowing reviews. And none of them have been paid reviewers, or friends or family.

So, that's been really awesome. That's kind of the thing that I go back to anytime that I feel like I'm an imposter working inside of a large corporation. I remember things that I've done on my own, using the same tools that I tout, and bring to the table for a corporation, and I'm reminded that more than enough, and I'm still learning.

[00:41:35] TG: Do you have any advice for those that are thinking about creating their own app, for instance, like how did you outsource help? Or did you code it all by yourself?

[00:41:45] JG: Oh, heck yeah. So, I've got a couple of different pieces of advice. Fall in love with the problem, make sure that when you think about this problem that you're wanting to solve, that you truly understand the level of pain that it creates. When you go to the emergency room, or when you're in the hospital, they have this board in the room, once you get admitted that has these little faces. These little mood faces on them and it asks you what's the level of pain that you're feeling today?

I would venture to say that if your customer, if you're possible customer, if the problem that you're trying to solve, if it does not generate a pain level and a frustration level of anywhere from 8, 9 and 10, then you're not going to have – you're not going to create a product that generates as much revenue. Now, you may create some excitement, people may use it, but they won't spend on it. Because it's not a great enough pain that requires their money in order for them to solve it. If the pain level is a five or six people will say, "Well, I'll deal with how I'm solving it right now." But if it is an eight, then people will say, "Oh, my goodness. Oh my gosh, this alleviates so much frustration for me. Yes, this is worth $19.95. This is worth $29.95. This is worth $59.95."

And that's the sweet spot of when you feel like, okay, this actually needs to be in an application, I can do this, and I'm going to move forward with it.

So, that's the first piece of advice. The second is, you have to recognize what it is that you want your business outcome to be. So, I had heard and read Mike Zuckerberg's story and the thing that stood out to me about Mark Zuckerberg's story was that he was able to capture and control as much equity as he could. Which meant that he got a chance to keep equity not just for himself, but for his co-founders, to be able to distribute it to early employees and that was really important to him. And how he was able to do it was really simple. He had the capability to be able to develop and to deploy the product and iterate and iterate and iterate, before he needed to go to any third-party offshore team.

So, my encouragement would be simply to look at how much can you build before you need to bring on, before you need to pay anybody else to help you to get your product to market. Having to pay to have an MVP created is a cumbersome and nauseating way to start. You really want to be able to partner with somebody if you don't have the willingness to learn technology, because there's so many technological advances in languages that are simplified for you to be able to learn them and figure them out, and to do it yourself. If you are already a UX designer, you have about 60% of the process figured out. And you are invaluable, because you're going to design the experience, and you're going to think about how it is that it should be delivered. And then if you can add in technical expertise and capability to that, you are 100% of the solve. Because there's only two things in delivering an MVP that really holds value in a startup and that is, who designs it, and who builds it.

So, I would encourage you to either be that person or find a co-founder to be your counterpart, someone who doesn't have to be paid for it. Somebody who's just as passionate with the pain point as you are, who will stick it through, and who will go version for version, trash after trash after trash, MVP version that you may create. And then get out there and get customers using your product and get them spending money for your service or your product so that you can then move to the next level.

But I always encourage people be the builders in your company. So, that way, you can keep more of your equity so when your product is working, and when people are buying it. They're

buying it, because you created it, they're not buying it because you've got investors behind you, and you throw a whole bunch of money at the problem, they are buying it because you genuinely solved their problem. I think those are my bigger keys of launching out there and building your own mobile app or designing your own mobile app.

But I would highly, highly encourage you to move away from thinking about, "Oh, I'll just get a third party to build it for me." Because you're going to have to build, you're going to have to go from MVP, to 1.0, to 1.1, 1.2, 1.3 to 2.0, and that's going to be very expensive if you keep having to open up your pocketbook, just to get a third party to come back in. And to continue that, you want to know as much as you can about your product, about your deployment, about the changes that needs to be made to your application. Own as much of that as you possibly can, not from a fear standpoint, but from a knowledge standpoint. Know your brand, know your company, know your products, know your technology. So then when you need to hire, and you need to hire leaders in your company, you need to hire executers in your company, you are very well aware about the part of your business that generates revenue. It's okay if you need to hire a bookkeeper.

It's okay if you need to hire an accountant. It's okay if you need to hire an account executive or an executive assistant. Those things are okay because those are not the things that generate that ask for money from your customer. The things that require money from your customer, you need to be an expert on because it is your company, it is your brand, it's your product, it's your service.

[00:48:16] TG: You all, this is gold. Gold mentorship here. Make sure you're notes and of course, you can always you know, re listen or transcripts will be available on the website as well. Jeremy, do you have any final messages for listeners looking to get started in UX?

[00:48:32] JG: You know what, I would say this, notice how it is that you solve problems in your daily life as it pertained to experiences. Exercise your ability to reframe personal experiences for other people. Start to cultivate that off of the paper, cultivate that off of the screen. And this is what I mean, the next house party that you have, you're having guests over, think about – be very particular about how it is that you think about the placement of the food, the placement of the drinks, where in the room are you putting those things, and where are you creating flow,

where are you creating congestion? How are you thinking about place settings? Is everyone going to be sitting around a table? Are you going to have different groups of people? If it's a large dinner party of 15 or 20 people, how many of them know each other? Can you put them into groups and expect some of them to naturally huddle up around your cocktail tables, while others sit in the couch in the living room, while others take up space at the table? Think about every person that will be in your dining experience and your evening experience and how it is that you can create a unique and powerful experience for them there. Cultivate it there, and you'll notice that if you start thinking about that, if you start thinking like that, outside of the computer experience or the mobile experience, you start thinking about it in your everyday life, you will truly become a user experience designer in your whole life existence. You'll notice that it even creates, it helps you to create better relationships, better friendships, and that's the payoff in the real world.

So, you can always reproduce that in a corporate setting, you can always reproduce that for a company, because you do it in your real life.

[00:50:37] TG: Hundred percent agree. So, I like to end the show with a random question completely unrelated to everything we talked about today. So, if you had lots of money, what unnecessary thing would you splurge on?

[00:50:55] JG: I've thought about it. This is like always top of mind, especially during basketball season. I would purchase naming rights for an arena.

[00:51:08] TG: You know which arena you would choose?

[00:51:10] JG: That, I don't know. I mean, it obviously. Well, I'm a Dallas Mavs fan. And that may not be obvious to everyone, Arkansas boy, in Texas. But yeah, I would definitely if I could get the naming rights to American Airlines Center, I would definitely rename it The UBALLN Center.

[00:51:28] TG: That's awesome. I would love to have my own private island or something like that.

[00:51:40] JG: Oh, nice.

[00:51:40] TG: Private beach, just a whole place that I go to and it's just like mine, like Tolu Island or something.

[00:51:49] JG: Dope. That's dope.

[00:51:52] TG: Where can we connect with you online, Jeremy?

[00:51:54] JG: You can catch me on Instagram, on Twitter. On Facebook. My handle is the same on all of those. It's my first and last name without the vowels. So, @jrmygstn. Also, look out for our new product Trainr, that's T-R-A-I-N-R, so trainer without the E. Keep it simple, where we're bringing product to market specifically for athletes. We want to democratize access to training, to athletic training for them, and then also help trainers generate more revenue be able to scale up their business by taking their training capabilities mobile, right where their athletes are all day. I mean, middle school to post grad, these folks are on their phones constantly. We want to give them access to training to really be able to go to the next level at an affordable price.

[00:52:56] TG: If any of you have questions or comments about today's episode, make sure to tag Jeremy on his handles, which will be in the show notes. And also, to tag me, @UINarrative on Instagram or on Twitter, @UInarrativeCO. Also, to don't forget to share the episode with anyone who you think would benefit it, people who are just getting started in UX, or people who you know have already gotten started. I think this episode would be beneficial for everyone. I appreciate you again, Jeremy, for taking the time to join us on this episode. So much appreciate it.

[00:53:30] JG: Tolu, I'm absolutely honored. I can't believe that we are here right now. Because that means that you are not only capable, you're not only teachable, but you're also fearless.

[00:53:46] TG: Thank you.

[00:53:47] JG: So, I appreciate you push past any feelings that you may have ever had of feeling incapable or feeling like you were an imposter. You are none of those things. You are 100% a UX and product designer, you're the queen of all these things and I'm so proud of the work that you're doing, proud of what you're doing with the UI Narrative. And I know your guests have already been blessed, and they've been able to go to the next level just because of being connected with you. So, thank you for this invite. Thank you for this time. Thank you folks for listening.

[OUTRO]

[00:54:28] TG: Thank you for listening to the UI Narrative podcast. If you like what you hear, make sure to show this podcast some love by commenting and subscribing where you listen. You can find me on Instagram and Facebook @UINarrative, or Twitter @UINarrativeCO. I also respond to emails at Hello@uinarrative.com. Talk to you later. Bye.

[END]