

EPISODE 49

“NM: I have very good design basics, but really beyond that. If I had to way myself, in terms of design, I’d say I’m a mediocre designer at best, but when it comes to like really being to get the job done, really being able to articulate value, really being able to deliver value, it’s 100% with research.”

[INTRODUCTION]

[00:00:25] TG: You're listening to the UI Narrative Podcast, the by weekly podcast that shares the stories of people of color interface designers and researchers, and their contributions towards creating user centered experiences. I'm your host, Tolu Garcia. Let's get started.

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 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 you all?

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Hey, everybody. Welcome back to the UI Narrative Podcast. Let me tell you a little bit about today's guest. Nandi Manning is a UX Designer turned Researcher, who solves problems that improve customer experience and increase business revenue. She's also the founder and lead UX mentor at UX Her, a career development organization that empowers women of color in UX design. Everybody, please give a warm welcome to my friend Nandi.

[00:02:12] NM: Thank you. What a nice intro. I know I wrote it, but every time I hear it back, it's just like, oh, yey.

[00:02:22] TG: So, listeners, Nandi and I are actually friends, offline, too. We're both based in Dallas, Texas, but we're originally met online there in the Panorama. It's just so awesome to have you as a guest today on the show, because I feel like this is a topic we've talked about multiple times offline. I know that you're a perfect guest for this topic.

[00:02:43] NM: Yeah, thank you for having me. I'm so excited to be here.

[00:02:48] TG: I'd like to start us off by doing a rewind. What are some of your first memories of being interested in UX Research?

[00:02:55] NM: Good question. I really got the bulk of my experience with research during my time, as a designer at The Container Store. I was under contract with them for about a year. I was the only designer on the team. So, I had to do design and research. In my first role, as a designer, everything I touched was so heavily focused on UI. I built out a style guide and a component library, so I was experienced in that and I thought that that would be like my niche throughout my entire UX career to implement UI standards, but it wasn't.

I was able to do hands on usability testing within my first week at the container store, and I fell in love with it, I really did. I loved everything about it from the recruitment process to analysis, I loved it all. Thinking back on it, I think I enjoyed it so much, because it reminded me of like the data driven effort in digital marketing that I was accustomed to. I felt right at home.

[00:03:45] TG: I love your story so much of how you got into UX Research, because like me being so heavy on visual design, it's total opposite of what I would choose career wise, but I like that you were able to find something for yourself within getting into UX. That's what I try to tell people, like there's so many different paths, you can go and UX, it's not just design oriented.

[00:04:11] NM: Right. I agree completely.

[00:04:14] TG: As a designer, a lot of the topics on the podcast are geared towards becoming a designer. Some of you may be struggling more than others with design or you're finding that day

to day of pixel pushing isn't making you happy. I have to ask you guys like, have you considered that maybe you're not supposed to be a designer and maybe it's UX research that you're truly passionate about. Nandi, she's currently a UX researcher at Mailchimp, but you know, you didn't start your career as a UX Researcher.

[00:04:45] NM: I did not.

[00:04:46] TG: Yeah. I would love for you to walk us through your process of transitioning from UX designer to UX researcher, and basically getting into like, what was that defining moment for you that made you realize like, "Oh, I need to change my path to UX researcher."

[00:05:01] NM: Absolutely. I started my UX career in 2018. I had been a UX designer from 2018, up until 2020 of last year. But in this most recent role for, and I'll get into why, but in this most recent role as a designer, I really struggled at my previous company. But before diving into that, I actually spent the first six months at my previous company, helping designers learn how to implement their own usability test. So I thoroughly enjoyed that. Being a designer who could initiate and run their own usability tests was how I landed the role in the first place.

In my interview, I spoke to that experience heavily and how much I enjoyed research, and they were eager to get me a part of the design team because of it. Now, what I will say is, this was the first time I was on a design team that did not include just me. I was super excited to be a part of a team and get feedback from other designers instead of the usual design critiques that I was used to with my development team and my development team only. It was at that moment, when I transitioned back on to just doing design, because the first six months, they had me doing just usability testing, collaborating with designers and researchers to get them running like rapid usability tests.

Once I got put back on design projects, it was at that moment that I realized I was behind other designers, because I had been the only designer in my previous role for so long. I was definitely a few steps behind other junior designers, or junior **[inaudible 00:06:32]**, excuse me, level designers. When I think about it more, it's because I had nothing to measure my own success against. It was as if like I was wandering aimlessly throughout my career by myself this whole

time, like with these blinders one. I really had to sit with that. There were so many things that I had not experienced in my other UI UX design roles until this most recent, the job.

It was everything from presenting my findings to executives, managing the cadence of my projects, and my meetings collaborate, like really collaborating with cross functional teams. It was a lot, it was a lot to handle at first, it was a huge learning curve for me. I really struggled, I really did. As if the year 2020 was not difficult enough. There I was struggling I work, but I knew at that moment, I really had to make a decision. I was either, should I stick it out, keep grinding, try to become a better designer after what felt like, I'd spent so long just trying to become a better designer. I was no, I don't want to so it was either bad, which I knew I really didn't want to wholeheartedly, but I ultimately decided to just lean into my superpower when it came to research. So I chose research.

[00:07:50] TG: I love that you were able to get real what yourself when it comes to the reality of like, okay. I'm sure designers listening can relate to this, the feeling of being behind, compared to like other designers, and I think to become a decent designer, it can take years to get really good at design. Like that's just point blank, of course you can see improvement in a matter of months, but starting with zero knowledge, and also too depending on like the job that you may not get as much exposure to designing often.

You may notice that you're getting better, but you're still not good enough yet, to like the level that you may see other designers at, and I think something anyone making a transition into UX should pay attention to in a question that they should ask themselves is like, "Am I having fun? Do I enjoy the work? What part of the work am I enjoying the most? Is it the design? Is it the research? Or is it both?"

I think then you can really start to understand if you want to stay a designer or researcher like, Nandi made that pivot, because she did that evaluation. I don't think it's more of like an ultimatum, like you have to stay a designer, if that's how you started out there are different paths within UX. So understanding like, what drew you to UX in the first place and what's going to keep you to stay in it. I think that's something to consider before like changing careers completely to something else.

[00:09:22] NM: Absolutely. I will say this for a lot of people that did not go to school, and major in design or not did not graduate from a prestigious design program. You're essentially like when you learn UX, you're essentially a self-taught designer in some sense. I did not have a lot of the design basics that a lot of my other design counterparts had and that was difficult to accept and it hurt my self-esteem for a while, but the way that I was able to get over it in a sense because I have very good design basics, but nothing really beyond that.

If I had to weigh myself in terms of design, I'd say I'm a mediocre designer at best, but when it comes to really being able to get the job done, really being able to articulate value, really being able to deliver value, it's 100% with research. So I'm very happy with my decision. I had to mourn the death of my design career for a little bit. But – I'm very happy, because –

[00:10:20] TG: Because you spend so much time.

[00:10:26] NM: Yeah, countless hours.

[00:10:30] TG: I can't imagine the nights, the **[inaudible 00:10:30]** –

[00:10:32] NM: You know the nights, we would be texting each other, like three o'clock in the morning, sometimes like –

[00:10:41] TG: Design is not for the faint of heart. It's not –

[00:10:45] NM: It's such a rewarding career that I don't want you to get me wrong, but –

[00:10:47] TG: Because I enjoy, like I'm the one that's told the offices, like yes. Not to work on this for five hours straight, but that's not for everyone.

[00:10:57] NM: No, it's not. A lot of the people that I've been meeting recently, what they fall in love with about UX is the research. It's not the design. I'm happy to convert those folks.

[00:11:11] TG: So you mentioned like your struggle with the design part of UX design, right? I want to get into like, what are some of the areas you struggled with when making the transition to UX research?

[00:11:24] NM: Again, as I stated. I had to mourn the death of my design career. That was really difficult, because I did spend what felt like so many years, investing into being like this amazing designer, and then having the realization that I was, that just wasn't going to, that's not how I was going to spend the next five to 10 years in my career. Also, just being confident in my designs, I feel like it would take – I was a slow designer. So speed is something that you actually have to progressively get better at with time and your design career. I just wasn't picking that up. I was so slow. Like it would take a designer, like senior designers I had noticed on my team, like half a day to knock something out. If that maybe a couple hours, maybe even half a day is generous.

I would have to literally stay all night. I would be exhausted the next day. I was just slow and then as I'm like building it out, I'm I hate it. It's ugly. It doesn't make sense. Yeah, I just – I don't think I had enough practice as a designer to become confident in my design abilities to be able to keep up with like my other, the other designers on my team 100%.

[00:12:32] TG: I still hate my designs, most of the time we speak on that. I think too, like it's one of those things that there's this feeling of it never being good enough, even when you are completely done, and I think that's just part of the iterative process, right? You're always trying to think of a new way to make it better and you still do that with UX research, right? There's always something else you could test to make it better, right. But, yeah to your point, like with design, if you're not into it then you will hate it. Like for me, I enjoy the tenseness of like, oh my gosh, like I have a blank canvas, what am I going to come up with. But to other people that could be like so stressful to where they are not enjoying their job at all.

I feel like, it's going back to what we said earlier, like you have to evaluate, am I having fun? Do I enjoy the actual work? Sometimes it could just be the job. I mean, no matter what job you have, you're going to have that period of time of like really being into design and having to iterate quickly when it comes to design and of course, when you first start out, you're not going to be that fast, but you should be able to see improvement in a way that you see that you're

growing and getting better. Of course, with each person, that rate will be different, but as long as you are meant to, like you're okay with your rate, because I think too, like you have to be content with, "Okay, I know I'm not as good as this person, but I still enjoy this." It's all back to that word enjoying and having fun.

[00:14:15] NM: Yeah. I will also say this, management has a huge role.

[00:14:20] TG: Oh, yes.

[00:14:21] NM: In weather.

[00:14:23] TG: There's a quote who is a Randall Wilson said on the last episode. He said, it's not the job you leave it to the manager.

[00:14:32] NM: That quote, recent he said it, I'm like, oh, my gosh. Every job I've left. Yeah.

[00:14:36] TG: Fair. Yeah, true. Maybe I would still be, I'm not going to put it completely on management. Maybe I would still be a designer till this day, or if it wasn't for the type of manager that I had in my previous role, but because he was such micromanaging, and his approach to communication was harsh, and it just wasn't encouraging or uplifting or empowering at all. I was just defeated when I left. I was just ready to do something that I was accustomed to getting praised for. Yeah.

[00:15:15] NM: I'm glad you have that.

[00:15:17] TG: Same. I recently did an episode about becoming a T-shaped designer, or researcher, and break down the importance of having broad set of skills and expertise in one skill. So for you, Nandi, which skills have helped you the most with the scene growth in your new role as a UX researcher?

[00:15:37] NM: That's a great question, surprisingly, all the skills that I acquired stepping into my role as a part time UX mentor, and I was really able to take all the things that I didn't like about previous roles, or like management, or how people communicated with me, and then like

do the complete opposite for my mentees, and it works. One of the things that I think, aside being like this data driven and super analytics focused person and being able to really get to the root of what we're testing and why, and being really great with communication with designers and stuff like that, I really think what makes me so great in my role as a UX researcher is just my empathy and communication.

If I have had the big two, it's empathy and communication. I've noticed since I've been a mentor, I am so much better. I say that as I'm using improper grammar, I'm such a better communicator, than I've been in the past. I'm so much more confident in my communication, like when I'm in meetings now, like I'm not nervous to speak my mind or ask questions where I was earlier in my career. Yeah, it's definitely one of the things that I see within my growth.

[00:16:52] TG: I imagine that with having mentors, like they challenge you on those skills, right? So you constantly, especially communication, because I'm sure you get stumped by questions that they ask you and then you have to go and do your own research to make sure you understand the best way to communicate that. Then there's something to that, because you've been doing this for a little bit you're not brand new at it, like you have a higher level way of thinking about things, so having to break it down into bite size, digestible information. I imagine that's definitely a way that they've helped you to grow your skills.

[00:17:30] NM: Absolutely. In fact, I don't know if I would have been able to transition into more of a mid-level role as quickly as I was in comparison to like where I was in my last role. If it wasn't for me, being a mentor. It forced me to make sure that I thoroughly understood every single thing that I was explaining, and I created templates and processes. I essentially like gave myself a raise. I promoted myself and allowed myself to step into that role by mentoring Junior talent. Yeah, I'm better for it. I'm so much better for it.

[00:18:08] TG: Are there any UX skills you didn't know about with UX research that you're learning now, like on the job?

[00:18:14] NM: There are some methodologies that I haven't had hands on experience doing, but what I really love about where I'm at now, they allow you the freedom, like I am not micromanage at all in this role. When I check in with my manager on a weekly basis, I tell her

what I'm doing why I'm doing it. She's like, "Yeah, you've got it, you're doing great." It's really just allowing me to be, like I have other researchers on my team that have these amazing backgrounds, and have PhDs and here I am, like no degree. I just taught myself UX research on the job in a design role. I'm just like they're letting me wing it and do my thing. I'm still able to add value. I love that.

[00:18:55] TG: Yeah, I love when positions give you the opportunity to just do your own project management in a way, because I think too, just makes you a better like worker. You're able to figure out how much time you need to get things done and having the space to like have errors, right? Because I'm sure like, there's moment where you may plan, to get things done at this amount of time, but when you have that space to correct, right? Instead of it being okay, you have to check in twice a day and tell me what you're doing. It doesn't give you much time to be in your head and think about things and –

[00:19:34] NM: No – you need error and –

[00:19:36] TG: Creativity, it ruins it, and you don't –

[00:19:41] NM: I'm a firm believer and you don't know, what you don't know, that's also like my approach in mentoring, like you don't know, what you don't know. There's a lot of stuff that I just had no experience in like managing my projects and my previous role, and I would get reprimanded for not knowing how to like manage a project or manage the cadence of a meeting. It's like, I've never had to do this before.

[00:20:02] TG: Yeah.

[00:20:04] NM: I've never had experience in this. They just assigned the meetings and I attended them. They told me, what needed to be built, and I built it. No, that is not the case. Once you continue to grow in your design career, you're supposed to dictate all of that, and I did not know that.

[00:20:20] TG: Yeah. I think too, it's like some people's management style, like they're hindering the growth in employees, when they're not giving them opportunities to lead. So typically, of

course you have the leader boss, or whatever that will, they'll sort through all the main information from higher up, right, whatever the project is, and then they'll give people the task, but I think it's also important to give room for people to think about what the tasks should be, like present the problem, and then give like the designers the options to choose like, okay, which direction should we go? Because you never know they could have a better idea than what you have?

[00:21:03] NM: Absolutely. I heard a quote earlier today about that, about a micromanaging management style. It was like, if you micromanage your employees, you're only going to get an idea as good, as your mind, something to that effect. But it's like, oh, my gosh, that's 100% correct, because if you're hovering over them, and spoon feeding them everything and not allowing them to truly be creative and hone into their skills and what makes them great, then you're only going to get a product as good as what's in your head. That's what it is. That's the goal.

[00:21:35] TG: Exactly. I mean, that's entirely true. I feel like that's just like, it's setting up products to fail in a way, because I mean, why hire all these people, if you don't want their opinions? I mean, it's the whole purpose of being a UX designer, UX researcher. You're there to provide your best input suggestions for the product, right? If you're not able to do that, you're like you're being spoon fed everything and not having much space to explore ideas, then it's just like, well why have UX designers then?

[00:22:11] NM: Exactly, and then if you're not competent in the work you're doing, then it starts to be like a self-esteem issue. Then it's like, how do I add value, and it can just be a downward spiral.

[00:22:24] TG: Well, on to better things. I got a **[inaudible 00:22:27]** real quick. Okay, so Nandi is also the founder of UX Her, which is a platform for the design thinkers, information architects and problem solvers, who are ready to jump start and grow their careers and UX designer research. It's basically a place to meet and learn from each other. Nandi, tell us a little bit about what led you to create your company?

[00:22:52] NM: Yeah, absolutely. After spending so many years in UX design, being the only designer, being the only black woman on these teams, and only seeing other women of color in UX, like online. That's, of course, how we met. I just started to realize like this is – I started to get really lonely. It was such an isolated experience. Like, I had knew some other black men in UX, but I did not have any relationships with black women. It was really tough, because I don't think anybody could understand what I was going through on a day to day basis, quite like a black woman in UX.

Like how it felt to be talked over in meetings, or how it felt to – like how I felt my voice not being heard when I'm like, when I have the research to back up my design decisions or not feeling confident, or having imposter syndrome to that effect. It's just, it was really difficult early in my career, and I wanted a community to be able to lean on. There were other, I won't say that there weren't other communities out there. There are amazing communities. Eleanor Porter has an amazing black woman and UX community.

I don't know, I just wanted something a little different. I wanted a place where people could – I wanted all the things that I was missing, essentially. I wanted a place where people could come consistently, share their work, get feedback, without feeling like they were getting attacked, cause in some instances, that's how I felt at work, the safe place to get critique to get feedback, whether it's on your portfolio, the stuff that you're currently working on, if you can actually show what you're currently working on, and just continue to grow as a designer. So that's what I did. That's what I created. It's been amazing.

[00:24:40] TG: You also have a group mentorship program that has helped numerous women land jobs at companies like Google, Twitter, PayPal and so many more. I'd love for you to talk about that a little bit to your program and who would benefit from the listeners from the mentorship?

[00:24:59] NM: Yeah, so the group mentorship program actually started as a super small cohort that I beta tested to even see if that was a service that I could offer to the community, because when UX first started, it was a free community experience. But when I created that experience, so many people started to reach out to me asking like, how come they weren't able to land jobs? They had already taken boot camps at some really popular companies, and still having

trouble landing their first job. I would meet with them. I have these free discovery calls. I would take a look at their portfolio. I provide some critique.

When I realized I was like, oh, no, you need a dedicated, professional to go through your portfolio with you, to go through your resume with you, to tell you what needs to be included, why? What doesn't need to be included? Why you need practice articulating you're – because I would have them present their work. I'm like, oh, no, that doesn't know, yeah, that can be improved. So we have to work at our presentation skills. Getting them super confident showing either half completed work, because that's a part of the job. Getting them super confidence showing half completed work, just getting comfortable showing their work at all, was something that I noticed.

Then just essentially just getting them ready and prepared for interviews, because that's where that's ultimately what they were struggling with. They were struggling with that conversion of from finishing their portfolio, finishing their resume, and then getting that initial interview, and then killing that interview, and then going from the next interview and just doing amazing in that interview and then getting that offer. That's what I focused the program one. It has been, it's been a great success. I started I had the first cohort for the group mentorship program in December of 2020. We have had a cohort almost every month since then.

[00:26:58] TG: That's pretty awesome.

[00:26:59] NM: Thanks.

[00:27:00] TG: You've been, consistently doing, I love that. Let's take a short break.

[MESSAGE]

[00:27:06] TG: One of the top questions I get about product design is, how do I stay inspired? 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.

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[INTERVIEW CONTINUED]

[00:27:59] TG: The community what you heard is pretty amazing, y'all. I'm in there too. So if you ever, want feedback for a project and or networking or just UX community in general, I strongly suggest you head over to uxher.com sign up. Were in the group, there's lots of people in there that are there to like to talk about whatever topic you're interested in. Also to, there's the mentorship if you're a person that is looking, like if you're not landing jobs, right. One of the things I always say, I've done a whole episode on how to do it right, but if you're someone that let's say you just took a boot camp, and you need a little bit more help there. Nandi has a high success rate.

She has dedicated a lot of time to all mentees in that group. I have only seen success from people completing the mentorship program and also to using her to the best of your abilities. Yeah, I suggest you sign up uxher.com. Join a community and also to like tag me in a post when you sign up. I'd love to say hi, and see what you're up to and working on, tag Nandi as well. Do you have any more tips for those that are getting started in UX Research, or they're already a UX Designer and maybe looking to make a switch to UX research?

[00:29:17] NM: Yeah, being able to jump on projects with designers is a great way to get experience, because especially designers, as Junior as you are, because they need assistance in validating some of the design assumptions that they have about the product that they're building. It's a great opportunity for you to go in and do it usability tests get a score, and that is valuable feedback for you to be able to speak to in an interview and for the designer to be able to speak to an interview, because that really adds value to what you're presenting. That's how we communicate value to stakeholders in a job.

[00:29:56] TG: All right. So now next, we're going to get into listener questions. I have some Instagram, that questions do you have for today's guests and man, y'all showed up again. So little try to get through all the questions. So yeah, here's what some of you guys have to say. First question is from Vira Blessed, how can recent grads with no professional tech experience get into the industry? Is the next step to go back to school and get a Masters? I feel like this question is great for you, because of your experience of how you got into you eggs, go right ahead.

[00:30:32] NM: Yeah, I'm never going to be the person that's going to tell you to go back for a graduate degree, I'm never going to be that person, because you're talking to a college dropout. So, if you already have a bachelor's degree, I think that's a great place to start. It's not required, but it's a great place to start. There are plenty of boot camps and education courses, where you can either, get the credit and not pay for an entire new degree. Again, like I said before boot camps that will give you the foundation of UX that you need in order to start your portfolio. I think that once you actually start working on projects is where you get the bulk of your experience.

I'm a firm believer in like hands on experience, there's nothing like hands on experience. In fact, the bulk of the experience that I have is when I actually got the job and had to do the work. If you're able to do that with projects and if those projects are great enough to put on your portfolio, then I highly recommend doing that.

[00:31:29] TG: Yeah, I am right along with Nandi on this one. Boot Camp is a great way for foundation, but I feel mentorship is like the key. If you are really trying to get a job right away, of course, it's going to still take a month of work, regardless of what you see on a boot camp. If they say six weeks, like you're not going to land a job that quickly. It's going to take months to a year of work to really understand how to problem solve within UX. But utilize the resource UX Her, she has a mentorship program. Like I said, success rates, if you really are trying to get a job that's right there how you get in. I mean, I told you, the companies and there's a lot more companies I'm sure you can find on our website and Instagram of –

[00:32:11] NM: Absolutely.

[00:32:12] TG: People that had success with her mentorship, but yeah, there's so many ways to get into UX, but I'm not really wanting to advocate for a college degree either. Of course I did get a college degree, but that was in graphic design. That's helped me mainly with foundation of branding and understands like that, but you could still find online and practice, because design is the biggest way they get better at design as this the same. Yeah, next question is from, like the bridge, they asked, how to transition from academic research to UX R, we guess that's UX Research, right?

[00:32:52] NM: Yeah, yeah. UX Research. First, I will say I actually get quite a bit of people that are transitioning from academic research into UX research. Those people have tons of hands on research experience the only difference is it's not with digital products. They're able to easily pick up on all the different research methods in terms of transitioning from either physical products or the types of studies that they were doing in their academic research and easily grasp the concept of doing that with UI or UX UI.

[00:33:29] TG: How to transition from academic research to UX Research?

[00:33:33] NM: Quite honestly, the best way to go about doing this is to get a mentor who's already in UX Research, because they'll be able to help you connect the dots of what you already know and how much more you need to learn before making that transition completely.

[00:33:50] TG: I couldn't agree more. I'm going to continue to hype up mentors, because regardless of what you see out there, you'll see some people that will try to say like, oh, I completed a boot camp and I got a job, like why couldn't – there was obviously something they did when it comes to either they were constantly in taking the right type of content, getting feedback from someone, but to completely do it in silo you will not learn a job quickly.

You will find yourself applying to hundreds, 1000s of jobs and maybe you'll get an interview but that's another level that you have to learn how to do. Like learning how to speak about your projects, because there's a certain way that you have to present that you're a person that's knowledgeable about this type of stuff. I feel like a mentor is the best way to do that. Finding someone in the industry Nandi are me, UX Her. She's a mentorship you need. You can't do this on your own.

[00:34:55] NM: Yeah, it is really difficult to do it on your own. Whether it's me, whether it's Tolu definitely get yourself a mentor, it makes all the difference.

[00:35:06] TG: Next question is from Denise Andreala. They asked, what are some trusted boot camps for someone completely new to UI UX Design?

[00:35:18] NM: Great question. I have had a slew of mentees from every boot camp imaginable. The Google certificate right now I really to talk about like affordability. I think the Google certificate right now is the one that I recommend most often, because of its price point. I understand that a large majority of the people that are taking that certificate and that course are working full time jobs. It's more of your own pace for \$39 a month, I believe. I really liked that aspect of it. I feel like although I have an eight week curriculum, I approached my mentorship program in a similar way.

You have the recorded content to refer to when you need it, and the office hours are there if you need them. There are some people that buy the program and are not able to come to office hours at six o'clock at night on a Wednesday. That's okay, and those people still land jobs, because they're still sending me their work, they're still asking me for my feedback, they're still checking in with me, they're just not able to come to the weekly office hours. So find something if you have to work a full time job, find something that is going to complement your current lifestyle would be my recommendation.

[00:36:27] TG: Yeah, I couldn't agree more. Just the word of advice if you're spending \$1,000 on a boot camp, if it doesn't come with a mentor, do not buy it, because there's so many other options, I can give you that same type of education for a lot this. I feel like paying that high of a price, there should be some type of benefit out of it for you, other than the curriculum, right? Because the curriculum, you can find that at any boot camp. There's so many options out there. I don't know that it's necessarily like, one is completely better than the other, because I think it all depends on how a person learns, right? How they retain information, how they can use it to their benefit.

I know we keep talking about mentors, but like it's so important. I can't imagine getting into UX without one. That's how I've gotten better over the years. I write literally had a boss who would look over my work. I asked some like, "Hey, could you be my mentor through this process?" And he was fine with that. I was able to show him projects while I was completing a boot camp at General Assembly. I can't imagine not having that feedback, because my shit would have been terrible. If I have would have had someone to tell me like, hey. Actually, you didn't think about the problem in this way. You need someone to bounce off things from and I know to like that's why there's some boot camps you have a classroom setting, which is awesome, but majority of them are online. It's a lot of solo work. It's important to have that communication.

[00:38:03] NM: I agree. Another reason why in a lot of settings, I don't when they just pair you up in groups, is because it's the blind leading the blind at that point. Yeah, even though I have a group mentorship program, the only time we come together as a group is for office hours. I do that so that they can get comfortable presenting in front of other people as opposed them working with other people on their individual projects.

[00:38:28] TG: Yeah, I feel like presentation. I mean, that's such a big – I'm glad you cover that in your boot camp, because in just to from like interviewing people recently, presentation is something that you don't really get taught at boot camps. Even I mean you get it a little bit in college, thinking back to graphic design, but we found the same way like whenever your interview, it's so different, because you have to get straight to the point of why, like showcasing your skills.

First of all, showcasing how your design thinking and also to being able to demonstrate that you do good at the job, which is it's very challenging to be able to fit that within 32 minutes to an hour, presentation for an interview. I think that's a really important thing to consider getting that type of mentorship.

[00:39:20] NM: Yep, I agree.

[00:39:26] TG: Another question from Siri. They asked, what are the best design tips to know?

[00:39:31] NM: I think this is a great one for you, Tolu.

[00:39:33] TG: Yeah. I was just – I was like. You don't want design.

[00:39:37] NM: I am done, but what I will say from my previous experience, when in doubt, practice. If you have free time, then you haven't been practicing. When you think you're done, practice some more.

[00:39:51] TG: The best advice I have for you, learn how to design for different operating systems. So like, take a Mobeen, go to mobeen.com or mobile designer if you know what it is, but Google search Mobeen, also have it in the show notes. Do a comparison of like iOS versus Android. Take one of those screenshots, take it into figma, wherever you design and trace over that, being able to understand the difference for how to design for different operating systems will make you a high, top notch designer I'm telling you, because most designers don't know how to do this.

I didn't know how to do this. When I was first starting out, it wasn't until like I was talking with developers and getting frustrated, why my iOS design didn't look good on Android. You got to understand how to design for Android, if you want your design to look good on there, right? Because sometimes its limitations within the OS itself. I think that right, there is a huge tip, but also to learn how to be a good web designer too. Most of Junior designers go for the easy mobile app, because it's not hard to design a mobile app, web design is hard –

[00:41:01] NM: As text, even design a mobile app.

[00:41:07] TG: But seriously, go to land-book.com I have the initial notes too, same thing as the other one, take a screenshot. That way you can understand the – the base thing is like understanding the scale of things, because I'll find some designers will design their type hierarchy will be too small, or it'll be too large and just really be noticed, like okay, like typically for heroes, for headers maybe I should have at this font size and also to dis been able to compare, because it all depends on the design style, but there's also to limitations like job for web, you can't go smaller than 16 – you can go 12 pixels on web –

[00:41:47] NM: Yeah, they think as familiar with design standards as possible.

[00:41:50] TG: Yes, yes. Go and read. I know, it's like, "Okay, this is boring." –

[00:41:56] NM: But you got to make it fun. That's it.

[00:41:58] TG: Like go and try to understand iOS human interface design guidelines and then going and understanding material guidelines for Android and started out there, like understanding the patterns within UI of course like you can customize them to make your own. But being able to really understand constraints will make you like an amazing designer, because that's what makes you stand out, because it shows okay this person can communicate with the developer, like the UI that they want create it, and it's going to turn out the way that you want it, so top notch design tip right there.

[00:42:36] NM: Yes, it is the best advice.

[00:42:41] TG: Alright, I have one more question from the Denise Andreala. They asked, is UI UX designer career where people expect your work to be free? If so, is this an under-appreciated field? Would you say there are legitimate employment opportunities in this field? Or is more of a freelance field?

[00:43:02] NM: It's a great question. I don't think a lot of consumers outside of and when I say consumers, I mean if you're looking to be a freelance designer, they do not understand the value of a UI UX Designer. If they're not in tech, they do not, because they simply do not understand the value of UI UX Designer. In that aspect, you will always be undervalued. Now, if you're talking about freelance in terms of like a contract role with a corporation, that's a lot different, because they will pay you, you can usually get paid more in those type of contract roles because you're an hourly employee.

I say all that to say is, if you're trying to promote yourself like on Instagram as a web designer or UI UX designer, nine times out of 10 your customer or who you're trying to target is doesn't know doesn't understand the value of what you do. You're always going to feel like you have to lowball your offer. When just starting out, I would prioritize getting projects. I wouldn't prioritize, getting projects where I'm getting paid for, to put on my portfolio, because there are some

projects that I've gotten paid for that just look hideous, but the client loved it. I would never put those on my portfolio. I would never, that would not be my main goal.

My main goal would be getting on a project where I can actually add value, so that I can speak to that in an interview, because that's ultimately what they care about when it's time to make a hiring decision. In fact, value is like engraved into my mind like every time I open my mouth, I'm like, am I adding value in my ending? That's all I think about all day long. If it does not add value, then why are we doing it?

[00:44:48] TG: Right? That's very true. I think the main types of clients I'd expect work to be free are like startups, because they might try to give you equity in the company instead or like – and I feel like it's pretty easy to figure that out. I've done some freelancing and one of the first rules of freelancing is making sure you have in your own contract that they give you a percentage of money upfront, because that is your safety fee, right. But you can't always do that, depending on how the contract works. Like if you're working for a contract for a bigger company more established, most likely they will have you be implemented or on boarded as an employee. You would be a contract full time or part time.

Most likely, then they wouldn't be signing your agreement, it's more you're signing theirs. Then you have an agreement of when they would pay you. So typically you can tell if a person is trying to expect you to work for free, because you can ask a couple questions to get that dismissed and also to making sure you're not giving work for free. So that comes down to what's in the contract, either you're going to be paid up-front, or you're going to be working with a bigger company that has in their contract to pay you by a certain date.

What else? So there are legitimate employment opportunities in those freelance opportunities. I would say, there's more full time opportunities than there are freelance opportunity, just because when you're working within product design in general it's not something that's like you work on it once and you're done. Typically like those are not the types of things you want to work for, because that means that they're not trying to build a sustainable product that is going to last, because you always want a product that's always going to have feature updates. Otherwise, it will become old news very fast. Yes, there's always going to be like the legitimate employment

opportunities and right now it's actually one of the hottest times ever in UX, like recruiters are non-stop right now looking for people, it's insane, but yeah, I think that answers that question.

Thanks, everybody for all the listeners questions this week, we're actually able to get through all of them and as a reminder you could be included in the next episode. Make sure to follow me on Instagram at uinarrative and twitter @uiintuitiveco. I randomly ask questions that could be featured in an upcoming episode.

Alright, so we're so at the end of the episode, I like to ask a random question that's completely unrelated to everything we talked about today. My question for you Nandi is, if you were independently wealthy and you didn't have to work, what would you do what your time?

[00:47:45] NM: Well, I plan not to have to work one day.

[00:47:50] TG: So this is just future thinking, like future –

[00:47:53] NM: This is future planning. I hope – honestly, I hope to spend maybe another 10, 15 years tops in UX. I'm hoping to have made some great investments in that time and created like enough passive income, where I can just live off of that. I don't even know if I care as much about being wealthy. I would just love to be comfortable and just do what I want every day and just live in basket that I would – that is my ideal life.

[00:48:25] TG: I love it. I would like to be a traveler, like traveling to different countries and maybe have a travel YouTube. I feel like –

[00:48:34] NM: Oh, yes.

[00:48:37] TG: Every time I think of like, Oh my gosh. Like anything that I find is leisure. I always try to find a way to monetize it. I'm just like, “What's wrong with me?”

[00:48:46] NM: Same, same. I've spent this last week, like, “Oh, I'm going to get back into photography. Oh, I'm going to start doing NF T's.”

[00:48:58] TG: It never stops like –

[00:49:00] NM: Never ends. I'm just going to try to sit still if I get independently wealthy.

[00:49:08] TG: I started to hiking like as you know, right. Now, I'm like recording videos. I'm like, oh, I think I might turn this into like a YouTube video.

[00:49:17] NM: Yes.

[00:49:20] TG: Whatever, let me just go with it. I can't stop, won't stop.

[00:49:23] NM: No, it's just who you are. It's just embedded into you, into who you are.

[00:49:29] TG: I blame my father. He's been this way too. He has like three jobs. He does not need three jobs. He's like 70, but this is –

[00:49:38] NM: Oh, my gosh. Your dad will not retire either.

[00:49:40] TG: No, no.

[00:49:42] NM: Okay.

[00:49:43] TG: He say's he's going to, but he hasn't.

[00:49:45] NM: Same, same.

[00:49:50] TG: I'm always just checking machines, okay. But he loves working. I think that's where I get it from.

[00:49:53] NM: Same. Yeah, this is definitely one of those careers where I'm I could see myself doing this for the next five to 10 years, without a doubt and if I had to do anything for the rest of my life, I would love to do this. I absolutely love getting up and going to work. I love my team and I love the work that I'm doing, it's best job ever.

[00:50:11] TG: Where can we connect with you online?

[00:50:13] NM: Yeah, I am Nandi Manning everywhere. Nandi Manning on Instagram. Nandi Manning on Twitter. I'm not as frequent on Twitter as I am on Instagram. Nandi Manning on Facebook. I'm not really on Facebook, but I am Nandi Manning everywhere. I am also the owner and operator of all the UX Her account. So if you want to follow UX Her. We are UX Her on all platforms. If you want to check out the website, you can reach me at uxher.com.

[00:50:41] TG: All right, if you guys have any questions or comments about today's episode, make sure to tag Nandi on her social channels and tag me [uinarrative](#) on Instagram or [@uinarrativeco](#) on Twitter. I'll have her social channels in the shownotes. Also, don't forget to share this episode with anyone that you think would be interested in becoming a UX Researcher or if you have that one friend that keeps complaining about a job. Like, I hate designing, just come on over to the winning team baby. Nandi. I appreciate you so much for coming on the episode today. Like absolutely.

[00:51:24] NM: So fun. I forgot we were recording several times, I'm like let me act right because I'm about to –

[00:51:29] TG: It was so natural, I know, I know.

[OUTRO]

[00:51:39] 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]