

EPISODE 61**[INTRODUCTION]**

“DH: How much of the methodologies, and techniques, and things associated with UX do you really know? How big is your own UX repository? How big is your toolbox? To get about how big it is, what's in it? You could have a big toolbox and have a wrench in there. If every project, you just take out a wrench, well, that's not going to work. So you have to realize what you know, and you have to realize what you don't know, and realize that being a UX'er requires a commitment to lifelong learning. I've been in it for 26 years, I'm still learning. And there's some things I don't know.”

[00:00:36] TG: You're listening to the UI Narrative podcast, the bi-weekly 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.

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[INTERVIEW]

[00:01:50] TG: Hello, everybody. Welcome back to the UI Narrative podcast. Let me introduce you to today's guest. Darren Hood is extremely passionate about all things UX, practicing

experienced design UX, CX and LX for the past 26 plus years, spanning across several high-profile organizations. Darren currently serves as a UX research manager for Sherwin-Williams, and an adjunct professor teaching UX courses at three different universities; Kent State University, Harrisburg University and Lawrence Tech University.

Darren has a global footprint in discipline, rarely called upon to share his UX thought leadership all over the world. He is one of the authors featured in the new book *97 Things Every UX Practitioner Should Know*, published by O'Reilly. You can also hear Darren on the world of UX podcast available through a host of popular sources. Everyone, give a warm welcome to Darren Hood joining us on the UI Narrative podcast.

[00:02:59] DH: Hi, everybody. And thanks, Tolu, for having me. This is great. Always exciting. And I love to share.

[00:03:05] TG: Yeah, so there's one more accolade like I got to throw in there, because I can only imagine like all the hard work and dedication took you to get there. So, Darren also just achieved his doctoral candidate status at MCU. So, woohoo!

[00:03:20] DH: Yeah, excited about that. I think I'm more excited about the fact that my educational journey, at least the formal part, is about to come to an end. It's been a long haul.

[00:03:30] TG: Yeah, goodness. Can you share any of the ideas you have in mind for your dissertation yet? Or is it still hush-hush?

[00:03:37] DH: It's hush-hush. I will say this. What I'm planning on covering is something that is not being done. And when it comes to my focal point, it could possibly revolutionize some things. But it will be a complete secret until the paper is published.

[00:03:56] TG: I'm here for it. And make sure you guys follow him on LinkedIn. We'll post all of his social handles in the show notes so that way everyone can be aware when he publishes it. Yeah, I'm excited to ask you this first question that I typically ask all my guests mainly because of your decades of tenure in UX. What is your first memory of being interested in UX? And I imagine like the term user experience was fairly new. What was even called at the time, too?

[00:04:23] DH: At the time, it was all either interaction design, or information architecture. I created my first website in '95 because there was a nonprofit organization that needed some help. And I thought that I knew enough. I mean, I had a 25-megabyte hard drive. I can – It was what it was back then. I can help out. I know a few things. Let me see what I can do to help out since everybody was rushing to the Internet.

And the first books that I bought, the first book I ever purchased, was a book called *Interaction Design* by Nathan Shedroff. That was my first introduction to what we now know as UX. And I dived in a little bit. But during the day, I was mostly an instructional designer. So I was doing training work and education work during the day. And I started immediately after doing that website, I started doing some freelance web design business. I started that. And I would do it on the side. But I wasn't really that immersed.

My first real memory came when I got exposed to the polar bear book, and information as we know it now, and information architecture. And that's when some light bulbs started to go off. Now, here's what was funny, I think about my first foray into what we now know as UX. It's similar to a lot of other people. I collided with it. I didn't plan on doing any of it. And neither did a lot of the other people that were doing what we now know as UX back in the day. Everybody collided with this discipline.

And so, when I started to see some things about information architecture, and I started recognizing, "Wow! This is a thing. I think I like this." And I continue to do mostly my instructional design work. But UX was slowly gaining momentum. And it was slowly taking up more space in my heart, so to speak, more real estate in my heart. But it was that learning about interaction design. And I was doing a lot of the things that we now know as UX. We just didn't call them what we call them. I was doing usability testing, but that wasn't what we call it. And I did guerilla testing. That wasn't what we called it. And when I was doing my first information architecture work, I didn't know it was called information architecture. And I didn't know that I was working on nomenclatures, and taxonomies, and cognitive loads, and all these other things. I didn't know that's what it was called. But I was doing it to the best of my ability.

But when I heard about information architecture and realized it was really a thing, that's when the light bulb really came on for me. And I said, "You know what? Eventually, forget about this instructional design stuff. I think this is what I want to do." And I refer to it as mortgaging my future for UX, and just going hook line and sinker giving up my desire to go to Boise State and getting a master's in instructional design. I'm just going to do this, this information architecture thing at the time. And did not get my first job. And it just made me go back to the drawing board. And that was – I'm like, "I'm doing this thing," and that was it. And been here ever since.

[00:07:27] TG: Wow. It's amazing. I know it wasn't something that you sought out originally as a career. So I'm wondering, like, how it looks now compared to like 26 years ago? How did you start to acquire like your education in UX? Was it like more of like a gradual thing over the years? Something you are already starting to do at like jobs that you are going to?

[00:07:48] DH: That is an awesome question. I think a lot of people wonder about that. Already mentioned the collision. I call it "collision" with what we now know as UX. And I'm going to stop saying that and just say UX. I think everybody knows what I mean by now. It was all books. It was all books. YouTube was not a thing. So we didn't have access to that. I didn't know anything about the Interaction Design Foundation. So I couldn't tap into that. It was all books.

And then after the books initially came the websites. The website started to pop up. And back in the earlier days of UX, we learned to do good design by looking at bad design. Between the books, the Jakob Nielsen was writing books, the polar bear book, Nathan Shedroff, a lot of other people, Christina Wodtke was writing books on information architecture. Of course, Jesse James Garrett, his book came along about 2002, 2003. The Jakob Nielsen *Homepage Usability* book changed my life. But it wasn't just the books. Websites came along and started to become a commonplace.

So you have after time, Smashing Magazine became a thing at one point. There was an old website called webpagesthatsuck.com. And boy, did I spent a bunch of time on Web Pages That Suck. And they were talking about what was wrong with the design. And between that and the useit.com site that Jakob Nielsen had, that's where you spent all your time. That, and back in the day, newsgroups were hot. There was no Facebook. A lot of things we have today we didn't

have. But you still had inroads of interactivity where you could go and share knowledge or get downloads from people. And so those were the sources.

The funny thing that I got to mention here is that there was no misinformation in UX prior to about 2011. So practically, any book you picked up was worth it. And they're still worth it today. Good UX content has a long shelf life. So, I still have and tap into those same books today. I have a book called *Information Architecture: An Emerging 21st Century Profession*, written by Earl Morrogh. That information architecture book actually impacted me more than the polar bear book over time. But between those books, and those handful of websites, you just go to the sites and you would just sit and study them for hours. That's how I got ramped up in the discipline.

[00:10:24] TG: Wow! It's so contrasting to how people learn today. So many freaking resources of there being like tangible products that you can look at and be like, "Okay. Well, this one has a lot of good back to user research. So that's a starting point." Compared to, back in the day, where like you starting from like the worst possible scenario of a bunch of websites that it's like a whole website dedicated to that and looking for ways to start getting more companies learning about user experience. Compared to know, like, it's become more of a like a buzzword, where friends will just be like, "You need UX in your business." But they don't have any idea what that means. And they're like, "Okay."

[00:11:00] DH: Yeah. And they still don't.

[00:11:02] TG: Yeah. We're going to definitely get into that. So, what's something that you've enjoyed about your career and UX so far?

[00:11:11] DH: I think, for me, I just love the discipline. I love problem solving, which is a big part of what UX is. We're basically identifying a problem, and we're coming up with solutions for it. We brainstorm about ideas. And then we go, and we do research, which was my first love, by the way. I did my first research project when I was 10-years-old. So, I fell in love with research a long time ago. And that's what brought me back to working as a dedicated researcher today. Because that's the part of UX that I love the most.

So, for me, it's about seeing a problem. Putting that puzzle together. It reminds me of doing puzzles, which I also used to like as a kid. And then achieving that success and then celebrating that success. And then you're done with that project, then you move on to another. So, it's going around and putting out these fires, resolving issues, and helping people achieve success for the business, as well as for the users. That intrinsic satisfaction is what drives me. And the more I've grown in my own career, I've learned more and more. I should say, I become more and more intrinsically-focused.

So, it's not about money. It's not about prestige, or anything else, the kinds of things that people search after. It's about the intrinsic. It's about the satisfaction that you get, and about the warm fuzzies that you get because of what you accomplished, and watching other people enjoy doing the things that they want to do and how you help facilitate that. There's a lot of satisfaction that comes with that. And that's what drives me.

[00:12:47] TG: You've been in this profession of user experience for decades. I mean, since 1995. I was probably like what? Four at the time? I'm sure, like – I'm not trying to like duck you on age or anything. But I think it's amazing, because I'm sure you've seen like the ebbs and flows to where it's arrived today, user experience. Is there anything that has drastically changed in the way that we understand and teach user experience today? Like I know you touched on it a little bit with how a lot of the books, like, for instance, you could pick up a button you can trust that it had that credibility that you're going to learn the education that you need. But is there anything that's drastically changed that you think our generation is like missing the mark when it comes to learning about UX?

[00:13:31] DH: Oh, my God. 2011 was when there was a shift. And I talk about this a lot when I do talks. I have a segment where I talk about the history of UX. It's a very high. It's not an in-depth address of history. It's very, very basic. And it talks about how that Jacob Norman, the first person to have the title user experience, I should say, in their title. And he was working ironically on hardware and not on digital properties like a lot of us are today.

But UX starts to become a thing. Still, again, I'm just saying UX. But UX and its different related factors. Started to become a thing and get on everybody's radar in the late 90s and around 2000, because I am firmly of the belief that it is UX that help overturn issues associated with

the .com bust. And a lot of people today that are in UX don't even know what the .com bust is. They never heard of it. They grew up with the Internet.

[00:14:31] TG: Could you elaborate on that a little bit? Because I'm sure a lot of people are puzzled.

[00:14:33] DH: Yeah. In 1995, I was one of many people who have this memory of going to what today we are used to seeing BestBuy. You're used to seeing City Circuit. Although Circuit City is gone now, too. You're used to seeing these places where you could go, line up and buy whatever your heart desire, whether it's a TV, or a computer, or whatever it is. Well, that wasn't the case. In 1995, when BestBuy comes on the scene, all of a sudden – I mean, it wasn't normal for everybody to have computers in their houses. That was when things just shifted dramatically. So now, it's not just TVs, and stereos, and all these other electronic things. Now, you need to have a computer in your home. So there's this massive cultural shift that takes place.

And along with those 25-megabyte computers that we had, which was a big deal back then, even though today we have documents that are more than 25 megabytes, wouldn't even fit on those old computers, it was a miracle to get a 300-megabyte hard drive. And it cost you an arm and a leg to get it. But in conjunction with all that, everybody's rushing to the Internet. This internet comes out.

And so you go to get your first computer, like you have today. You have certain – Some people call it bloatware. You have a whole host of applications that are on your computer. And so, people know. They need to get on the Internet. Well, you've got CompuServe. You've got AOL. You've got SpryNet, and a whole host of different Internet service providers, or ISPs, as we used to call them. Everybody's running to the Internet. You're trying to do everything that you can get on the Internet as a person. And of course, the companies are trying to get out there because they know everybody's trying to run and get on the Internet.

Well, just like it is with UX today, companies want to get involved. But they do get involved. They do hire UX people. But the companies don't really know what UX is. And they don't really value it in a lot of instances. Just because somebody is hiring for UX, it doesn't mean they know what

UX is. The same thing was happening back then. Everybody ran to the Internet. Everybody wanted to be on the Internet. But they didn't know the first thing about how to get on the Internet. What are the best practices? How should we actually go about doing this? They didn't know. They just wanted to be on the Internet. That's where the .com bust came into play, because people were establishing an internet presence without understanding the users, without understanding the technology, without understanding anything. So, a lot of the early companies that went to the Internet, their Internet ventures were failing, because they were entering into a venue that they knew nothing about.

So a lot of the early .com initiatives failed. And that's where the .com bust comes from. You can read about it on Wikipedia as well. There's going to be a lot more information of what I'm talking about here. So that was really huge. So now there has to be a focus on users. That's what got us out of it. Instead of going to a website that had a Macromedia Flash splash screen that did all kinds of ridiculous things, that did nothing for the users, we need to steer away from that.

I remember, I tell a story some time about a website that I went to. Because remember, we were not on broadband. There was no broadband. Everybody was on a 14.4, or a 28.8, or a 33.6 speed modem, and you're dialing up. Everything's done over dial-up. And it was extremely slow. You can download a browser today in a few seconds. And back then, it would take like a half hour, 45 minutes just to download the browser to install. So, things have changed dramatically.

But when the UX people got brought in – Amazon. Huge success story. Because they became very user-centered. And they brought in the people who wrote the polar bear book to help them structure their business. And we know the end of that story today, that Amazon, they just invested tremendously in the user experience, whereas Barnes & Noble and Borders did not. Who survived that fray? I think we all know the answer to that question. So they were ahead of the game. Using them as an example. They focused on the user experience. They understood the users. They understood mental models. And when you can understand users, understand mental models and understand whatever constraints you're dealing with, you can just basically take over. You can achieve success.

And so that user focus, that user-centered mindset helped us recover from the .com bust. It helped make things more user centered, which then after that shifted, IBM and NASA did

research right after that. We've all heard it. You might not know who did it. But they did the research that says for every dollar you invest in UX, you get X-number of dollars in return. That is when the corporation said, "Really?"

Now, early, most of the UX work was being done by creative agencies, and companies were bringing in creative agencies to handle all their UX work and oversee their UX related work. Till when that research got out, I believe it was IBM that said the ratio was one to 100, and NASA was one to 250. So-for every dollar you invest, you get anywhere from \$100 to \$250 in return. So you're talking C-suites language when you say that. So they wanted to bring the UX'ers in. But they did the same thing they did before. They didn't take the time to learn what in a world UX was. And we're still stuck in that vicious cycle today because a lot of companies today still – They want to bring into UX people. And they do what I call decorating their offices with UX people. But they don't know what UX is. And because of that, they end up hiring people that don't know what UX is either, and a huge problem comes out of that. Now, that's a very long answer on that. But I think it's important to say that to break that down. That's where we are now, the Wild Wild West of UX. That's where we are.

[00:20:46] TG: Yes. Thank you for going through the history of that. I'm sure a lot of people listening are shook. They're probably like, "What? I learned that in my boot camp. I learned that in college." You know? So, thank you very much for breaking that down, because I am sure you're rocking a lot of people's worlds right now.

[00:21:02] DH: It's good. It needs to be rocked.

[00:21:05] TG: Yes, definitely. Let's see, another question I have. So when it comes to like UX education and like how that affects companies, adapting to like a user-centric business model for their products. Because, you know, the future aspiring UX'ers are potentially the ones that have got to keep the companies interested in user experience. So do you have like any predictions for how things will trend in the next decade? Like, the way education is taught, or the way businesses respond to user experience practices?

[00:21:37] DH: Yeah. You remind me of – And I was silent. You know I've been doing this for 26 years. I didn't become a thought leader until 2012. And one of the first things I started saying

was, and I'm going to explain this, too, but I'll be shorter on this one, was that UX is under siege. And what I meant by that was, remember, no misinformation in UX prior to 2011. None. Any website was just amazing, fantastic. You didn't hear anybody say UX/UI prior to about 2009, 2010. I never heard anybody say UX/UI prior to 2010 at all. So here we are in this situation where there's no misinformation. And then all of a sudden you have a lot of people, these articles being posted, Forbes and a lot of other sources. This is a new field. This is a great field this is the place to be. The salary report started getting out and people started saying, "What? I'm in the Midwest I can have a starting salary in the mid-70s? I think I need to start taking a look at this."

So we're already about to head into the Wild Wild West. And part of the reason today's landscape is a Wild Wild West landscape is because when people started flocking to the discipline of UX, which is by now it's called UX, it's like the gold rush. I did a talk once talking about managing misinformation, the whirlwinds of misinformation in UX. And I likened it unto the gold rush. The same reason if you look up any history of the gold rush, you will find that the reasons, the psyches, the mental models of people who went west to find gold are in direct parallel with a lot of people's mindsets that are coming to UX. It's not that they love UX. It's not that they're curious about UX. They think that it's easy. They think you can find "gold" anyway. So they just flock to where they think these UX jobs are. And they flock to anybody who claims that they can help you get ready for those jobs. It's the exact same phenomenon. And, which I also said in my talk, a lot of people end up with fool's gold.

Now, the funny thing about fool's gold, or pyrite, is that it actually has traces of gold in it. So the fact that you come in contact with a resource is giving you a few things that are valuable or accurate doesn't mean that the whole enchilada is. And that's where we are today with education. That's where we are today with our UX maturity levels at different companies.

To answer the question directly after laying that foundation, where are we going today? We're on a downward trajectory, because companies are not getting educated. There's some bright spots here and there. But for the most part, the trajectory. So we have a few success points, but that doesn't eliminate – That doesn't offset the trajectory. The trajectory is downward. Because we have people who want a microwave their ascent. We have people who will lie to get a UX job and will fabricate their experience just so they can get a UX job as a former hiring manager.

I'm a hiring manager again now. But when I was a hiring manager before, it was the first time in my career. And I worked for a fortune 500 company, might be fortune 100 with that company, where I saw all of the resumes come in. I had the pile of 300 resumes. Looking at people that were coming in. And I saw the things. That was the first time in my career that I saw people doing the things they were doing and seeing the way that they would represent themselves.

So you've got this massive influx of people who they want a UX job, but they don't really want to do the UX work. That's a problem, especially when you add to that pot of soup. I like to metaphorically address it as companies that don't know how to hire UX people. And then you get the companies, "Well, somebody's got to run the department. Well, you know what? Let's just put Jill, or let's just put Sam. Let's just have them run the department?" But what do they know about UX? Nothing. But they've been with the company a while. So let's just go ahead and Peter principal them over into this UX head role. So they don't know how to judge talent. And a lot of them actually have massive inferiority complexes. But when they call somebody like a Darren Hood, they're not going to bring you in, because they're threatened by you.

This is today's landscape of UX. Education is dysfunctional on average. Even though self-learning is still a thing, it's a dangerous path, because books today are not all reliable. Websites today are not all reliable. There's a lot of people in UX that they have this UX celebrityism that they pursue. And they just want to be somebody. And you have people saying. You got to back up and say this. You got to get your name out there. You got to be heard. You got to make yourself known. All that does is breathe the cesspool of misinformation. That's all it has done.

So you got all these unqualified people getting these jobs. And now they're getting jobs being in charge of departments. Being hired as directors of UX organizations. And they don't know or even care about UX. They don't care about the discipline. They don't care about the direction its headed. All they care about is that they're getting paid and they have a wonderful title, and that people are looking up to them. That's all they care about.

And so because UX is still such a young discipline, that is bad for the discipline. We still need people who will be caretakers over the discipline. And people won't like this, we need gatekeepers, because gatekeepers ensure health and compliance with quality. Gatekeepers are quality advocates. We're not trying to keep anybody out of anything. We're trying to usher you in

the front door and trying to stop you from climbing in the window all the time. Stop coming in the side window of the house. Come through the door. And this is how you come through the door. And it happens in every single solitary discipline on the face of the earth. That only disciplines only get places because there is gatekeeping and it's honored and it's understood. Whereas today, if you try to stand for quality, you end up encountering a bunch of trolls. You end up acknowledging a bunch of character assassins. And people that – Because they don't like the fact that they're being exposed by you, so they go out of their way to make you look bad hoping that they can keep people from listening to you. When in fact, everybody who listens to you when you advocate for quality thrives. And everybody who ignores you, those are the ones complaining about the fact they can't find a job. I wonder why. I didn't do my full Robin Lee's voice. But I think people understand. They know who Robin Lee is. I don't know why. You can't get a job because you don't deserve one.

And then beyond that, getting a job even no matter what level you're at in UX, it always takes time. It's always a press because of the aforementioned issues. People don't know how to hire for UX. But if you're not qualified, I don't care whether you're a dishwasher, a UX person, or an auto sales person. If you're not qualified, you shouldn't be in that role. That goes for anybody. So that's not a gatekeeping statement. That's just a matter of fact. If you don't qualify to be a doctor, you shouldn't be hired to be a doctor. If you don't qualify to be a dentist, you shouldn't be hired to be a dentist. If you don't qualify to be a short order cook, you shouldn't be hired to be a short undercooked. All of a sudden, these people don't qualify, but they still want the UX job. And nobody understands how dysfunctional that is.

[00:29:18] TG: We got to sit for a second with that one, because I know some people are probably questioning if they should get into UX. They're like, "Oh gosh! Like, Darren called me out."

[00:29:28] DH: It's a good point. And we're not trying to stop anybody from pursuing it. But trying to bring people back to a realistic state of mind. I did a series on my podcast, it was a nine-week series called *So, You Wanna Be a UXer?* Because, A, I thought I was going to be a lawyer once, and I backed out. Because you know what? I love the legal world. I love what's going on with being a lawyer. I know I'm cut out for it.

One of my teachers volunteered – He graduated from Notre Dame. He got his juris doctorate from Notre Dame. He volunteered to write my – He said that people are going to come for you. I will volunteer. I will write your letter of recommendation. I'm committing to that now because you are cut out for this. That's how determined I was at one point to be a lawyer. But then I thought one day, the reality hit me. And that's what I'm challenging people to do. The reality needs to hit you because you may or may not be cut out for this work. It's not what people think it is.

And one day, I realized, if I go into this – And I have my site set on corporate law. If I do this, I might have to defend someone that I know is guilty. Can I do that? And the answer was no. I walked away. And that was it. There are certain personality traits that are necessary to be in UX. You got to have thick skin. You have to be honest. You have to have integrity. There are people that basically letting you know that they're going to be terrible UX people just because of what they do with regard to things that have nothing to do with UX because of what it takes to be a good UX person. You have to be able to take a design that you really feel good about and then subject it to testing to find out that it is really terrible and then go, "You know what? Own it. Own it. Man, I really missed it with that. Well, let's go back to the drawing board. Let's do this again." Instead of – And then you don't take it personally. You just go back and you re-tool.

But today, when somebody finds out that somebody is criticizing what they've done, they take it personally. They get upset. They go on these campaigns. You're not ready. If that's your mindset, you're not ready for UX work, because your best work will be shot down. Even when it's right, it can be shot down by a biased hippo or a stakeholder that they just, "I'd like this color. It should be this color. I want to go this way because this is just what I like," even though the data says something completely different.

Snapchat was the company who the UX team gave all these recommendations. And they had all the data that proved the direction they should go with the design. The CEO, whoever the guy was, he just said, "Forget all that. We're going to do this, because I want to do this." And he ignored all the data. You haven't heard that much of Snapchat since then. That's the power that UX people hold. They did their best, and it still wasn't listened to. And we don't get listened to all the time no matter how great your research is, no matter how much you tend to prove or disprove. Can you deal with somebody on your best day telling you no.

[00:32:28] TG: Right, right.

[00:32:29] DH: And then just, "Okay, I'm going to wash my hands of that and move on to the next project. I'm not married to my work."

[00:32:36] TG: Yeah, I think that's a huge thing that you have to – Huge quality you have to have as a UX'er. Like, just not carrying every piece of thing that you do like on your shoulders. Like you kind of just have to let it out there. And it's being vulnerable of this is what I've spent the last three days working on. What do you think about it? It's like showing off your baby. And if they're calling it ugly, you kind of like, "Dang! I'm a little offended. That's my child."

[00:33:04] DH: Your baby is ugly. Deal with it. Deal with it. I saw a guy once. I saw a guy once who had his design. Number one, he went into a design meeting with one recommendation. I was always taught when I worked in creative agencies, you come in with three.

[00:33:19] TG: Yeah, 100% agree.

[00:33:19] DH: And you don't play a game. Don't come in with the one that you like and come in with two that you don't like and try to design it in a way that they'll play that old hairy arms game they used to do at Disney with some of their animations. Don't do that, because you might get a big surprise, and they might like one of the ugly ones.

[00:33:35] TG: I feel like that's always the case. They choose the one you hate the most. So never bring a design you hate.

[00:33:41] DH: Right. Yes. So you got to come in with three things that are viable. But this person came in with one, because they didn't know, because that person was – I call them posers, retrofits and upstarts. And this guy was a retrofit. He slid into a UX role. He was doing something completely different. He slid into a UX role. He inherited a UX role by happenstance because he happened to be at the company and the right scenario came up. But he really didn't know how to do the work. And he didn't know that. So he came into a meeting one day with one recommendation and it got shot down. He was so red. He was beat red, as people like to say, and you would have thought he was going to explode. But he actually created his own sense of

frustration, because he did not know – Because there's work, and then there's the way to approach the work.

There's the EQ, the emotional intelligence, or emotional quotient aspect of it. And then there's how much of the methodologies, and techniques, and things associated with UX do you really know? How big is your own UX repository? How big is your toolbox? Forget about how big it is. What's in it? You could have a big toolbox and have a wrench in there. If every project, you just take out a wrench, well, that's not going to work. So you have to realize what you know, and you have to realize what you don't know. And realize that being a UX'er requires a commitment to lifelong learning. I've been in it for 26 years, I'm still learning. And there's still some things I don't know.

I've never done IVR work, interactive voice response work. I've never done AI work. I've never done any VR work or AR work. And we're always at the mercy of whatever our company is calling for. You'll never be able to do something that your company doesn't need. So that's it. When you don't know something, that's fine. It's actually okay to not know. The question is, are you going to admit that you don't know, or are you going to do, like some people say, fake it till you make it, which is killing a lot of UX people. Never fake it. Never, never. Don't put the energy into faking something. When you could put less energy into something and achieve excellence, why would you go for faking it?

[00:35:45] TG: I can only imagine like how life has been like for you like as a black man working in this industry for several years. And I can only speak from my lived experiences and microaggressions that I face as a black woman. But I know this is like a loaded question. But how has it been working as a black man in the tech and user experience space? What have been some of the most challenging experiences you've had to overcome?

[00:36:12] DH: Wow. I will go as far as saying I'll give the short answer and a long answer. But the short answer is that it's harrowing. That's the best term I can use to describe it. It's been harrowing for several reasons. And as a person that never experienced any – This is a funny thing when I think about it. My first experiences with racism, being a target of racist treatment, always came at the hands of other black people. I did not experience any racist treatment at the hands of non-minorities until I was about 23-years-old. And once I did, I used to run a Word

processing department. I'm telling my age by saying that. But I used to run a Word – Some people don't even know, "What is that?" And there they go running off to Wikipedia again. Somebody wanted my job, and I had turned in my notice. And I ended up getting treated funny because somebody wanted my job. I was already headed off to another company. But that was the first time that I ever experienced anything that I could tie back to racially motivated maltreatment microaggressions or things of that nature.

As a UX person, fast forward X-number of years, as a UX person, I would go as far as saying as much as I've been a thought leader in this space. And based on things I've accomplished, things I've done, where my footprint has been, if I wasn't black, I wouldn't even be able to have a job because I'd be running out speaking too much.

[00:37:46] TG: I'm sure you would.

[00:37:48] DH: I know. And the funny thing is do you know that it's – I don't know if this is true. I'm going to say this. Now, the whole world's going to hear me say this. And that's fine and dandy, too. I might be the senior black UX professional in the world possibly.

[00:38:01] TG: I think so. You're the only person I know with your amount of tenor in this industry.

[00:38:07] DH: Yeah. Somebody referred to me as the Jackie Robinson of UX. And when they said that, because I'm not going to say – I'm going to repeat the fact that they said it, because I think it's relevant in this moment, that I encounter things just like Jackie Robinson did. And there are people that come against me because I say something. And if someone that was of Anglo-Saxon descent, let's put it that way, would say it, they would be revered practically. They'd be, "Oh, that's fantastic." "Oh, what a great thought."

And instead of that, I have people saying things to me like – I said in a meeting. I don't think this person meant harm when he said it. But I think it's the kind of thing that comes up. I made a statement one day about a particular term. I'll leave the term sliding because I don't want the person to be found out. But I made a statement. And the person said instead of saying, "Wow!

Communicating with me based on the common definition of the term that came up." They said, "Well, what does that term mean to you?"

Now, if somebody whitehead said what I said, they would have said, "Oh, that's really insightful." But because it was me, "Does that black guy even know what that means?" And so I go through things like that. I've been run out of conference rooms just because I was at the meeting early and I was black. Only to return to the same meeting. Confirm who the person who's in charge of the meeting was that they invite me to the meeting. Then they found out that I am Darren Hood. That the same person that ran me out of the room was the same person that invited me to the meeting. And then they're embarrassed and never say anything to me again. People wondering why I'm on the elevator going to the top floor in the GM building, "Oh, what are you doing here?" Looking at me, staring at me all the way up to the 38th floor like I finagled my way on to this elevator. People shooting down ideas only to have the same idea resurface three weeks later coming out of their mouth and being cited as being stupendous and outstanding. And then when I'm upset, because they stole my idea, then I get chewed out for being upset and then being, "Oh, well, it's not about who brought it up. It's the fact that it came up." Well, you would say that your if it wasn't your idea.

I've had a patent stolen from me before. The stories that I've got, on one hand, I wish I didn't have them. On the other hand, I'm glad that I have them because I can share them. Because a lot of times, people, they go through these things and they don't share them. And a lot of people do need to know these things. And eventually they will come out. If I have it my way, eventually they're going to come out.

I worked at one company, I talk about – I'm asked to do a talk called What is UX? I deliver the talk. Anywhere from – We don't know the exact numbers. But anywhere from to 10,000 to 40,000 people saw this talk live. The company had over 385,000 employees at the time. And the company wanted to know. Yeah, we're building their UX practice. And I was a senior practitioner in the organization. So I was asked to do this talk.

And where, if you've ever seen my illustration about the landscape of UX or the four pillars of UX, that's when I created it, for that talk. And I wanted people to see how broad ux really was and what it really consisted of. And unbeknownst to me, I exposed that team's central UX

practice. Because when people saw what I said UX was, they wondered what in the world these other people were doing. Well, they weren't happy with me because the black guy just made us all look bad. So it was like I had a lynch mob after me.

And it's funny. If somebody – And I know this is morbid, but it's just real. Just talking real. It's against the law, it's wrong, it's horrendous for somebody to lynch another person. But for some reason, if you lynch somebody figuratively, it's okay. It's not. I had my ascent to a directorship block because I was black. I have people reject the things that I say on social media, not because they found anything wrong factually or intellectually of what I said. Some people just get angry about the things I say because I'm black.

We had one guy who was teaching – I'm really going to expose somebody on this one. But that's what I'm going to do. A person was teaching UX courses for LinkedIn learning even though they have zero experience in UX. And according to this person's students, hates UX. How in the world can you have a person that hates UX teaching UX? Because that's just wrong. That's just wrong.

Now, somebody else called the person out. I chimed in and said, "Wow! That's exactly correct." And I give out sometimes something I call a UX fail award.

[00:42:36] TG: Oh, yeah. I love when you do this.

[00:42:38] DH: And I gave LinkedIn a UX fail award for allowing somebody with no respect or experience to teach a course. That is just wrong. And so, I called out. I didn't know who the teacher was. I wasn't making a personal statement. I wasn't even getting on the teacher. I was pointing the finger at LinkedIn and saying that they are wrong.

To show you what happens as being a black person in the UX experience space, there were other people who called this person out for what they had done. They actually talked before I did about the subject matter. Called the person out. Said it was wrong. Said all types of things. But they were all white. Once a black person said something, apparently, he took extreme umbrage. And I became the sole target of his ire to the extent I had just been – And I'm going to say something that people have not heard me say. So I'm about to say something on your show for

the first time publicly. I was, at the time, had just been elected to being the Director of Education for the UXPA International. I had more votes than any other person that was not running unopposed. So I had more votes than anybody else in the election. That people wanted me in that position. People were coming to me saying, "We're hoping you're going to be able to make some change. I'm excited about the things, Darren, that you're going to be able to do. Being in that position to be able to affect education discipline-wide is just phenomenal. I'm excited for you. I'm happy for you. I'm looking forward to see what you do."

Then along comes this situation I just mentioned. So this person, because I'm black, I contend with anybody. They did it because I'm black. Because all the other people who said things and were all white, he didn't say a single solitary thing to them. Matter of fact, he got into actual discourse with them. And they said things to him. And he respected them. But he lied on me from the beginning and said that I attacked him. But I call it the Emmett Till treatment. Thereby, especially your color, you remember what happened with Emmet Till. It's the Emmett Till treatment. If you say something about a black person that is derogatory, it's assumed to be true. Nobody wants proof. That's what we're up against as minorities. That people aren't going to give you a fair shake. You're not innocent until proven guilty. The mere fact that they said something, you're automatically guilty. And we don't care about the facts. That's what happens when you're a minority. It's just the reality of it.

This person reaches out to the UXPA, fabricates. He sends a letter to the UXPA that was fabricated under a pseudonym. Made all these claims about what I had did. Didn't prove a single solitary thing. I didn't attack him. He actually attacked me. I wasn't even talking to him. He attacks me. Sends that thing through. Then he claims that people are upset about what I said. Then he referred to them as we, the people. 12 people. 12 people. Are we the people? He wants the UXPA to do something about what I did. He's calling for some action with regard to the UXPA.

Here's the bombshell. So if anybody wants to know why I resigned from being the Director of Education for the UXPA, it was because of what I perceived based on their response to what he did. I told them it's blatantly obvious that everything that he has said about me is fabricated. There is no evidence to support anything he said. The person that that supposedly wrote the letter doesn't even exist. It was like the name was drawn out of a hat. The consonants and the

vowels were drawn out of a hat. You could do a search for the person's name, and that person doesn't exist anywhere. If the person existed, as he claimed, they would have been easy to find. The person didn't exist.

The 12 people, they had that old civil movie long time ago, the woman who had 12 personalities. Those must be the 12 people. He made them up, because it was all fabricated. I resigned as the Director of the UXPA International for a perceived lack of support. That is why. I didn't resign because of any pressure from him or anything like that. I refuse to be subjected to that type of maltreatment in a volunteer position. That's why I resigned. If you're not going to support me, I'm out of here.

12 we the people said that they thought I was wrong, which proved that just 12 of them didn't bother looking at the facts. But the people who voted for me were well beyond 12 people. So we the people said they wanted Darren Hood in the position. But when I saw a lack of support, when I saw people bombarding me, sending me notices, but then – This is what black people have to go through. When people write me notices in the midst of my work day, that disrupt me in my work day. But then when I send them a notice to ask them for their input, I get ignored for five, six hours, seven hours. And then the first thing I hear back is, "Well, you know, we have jobs." What? I don't? That's how black people get treated. It's like the Juwan Howard thing that just happened with the basketball.

[00:48:01] TG: Oh my God! Yes.

[00:48:02] DH: He was wrong. Was he wrong?

[00:48:04] TG: Terrible.

[00:48:05] DH: He was wrong. But he didn't start it. The guy tugged his arm. New York Post did a great piece on it. He was doing what they call a blow-by. I'm upset with this coach. I'm upset with this team. I'm not going to shake – I'm going through the line, but I'm not going to shake hands with that coach. So they walk by you. Just let the person walk by you.

Juwan Howard was trying to walk by and the guy grabbed him. And Juwan Howard didn't appreciate the fact that he got touched. Now, he, by no means, should he have slapped anybody or anything of that sort. Get verbal. Be upset. Express the fact that you're upset. But get out of here as quick as you can. That's the best way to manage that. But all of that came down on Juwan Howard. And they basically smacked the Wisconsin coach on the back of the hand. That's the kind of privilege.

And I bring up that example because it's happening in UX circles as well. Do you know how many people – Man, I'm going to get in trouble for this one, but I'm going to say it anyway. You know how many people in the Metro Detroit community gave me any – Celebrated when I was talking about my doctoral candidacy? Do you know how many people I just got my new manager's role at the new company where I am now? And people around the world, "Hey, congrats. I'm happy for you." And one person said, "I don't know if I should congratulate you or Sherwin-Williams. Because, man, they got a good one. I'm so happy for you. You're going to do great things." And just celebrating with me. The same way everybody else celebrates when you get a new job. Only then. Not those people.

And you know that those people trolled me as well about the UXPA thing after it was over. And I was interviewed. This interview is live on the UXPA Michigan site. And some people said – They made claims about some things that I had said. And the claims that they said in the attacks, they did the same thing that the LinkedIn teacher did. They made statements about things that I didn't even say. You can't fight against something that isn't true if somebody has decided to believe something that's not true. You can provide a fact that contradicts what they're saying. But when they have made up their mind that they want to throw you under the bus, that's where you're going to be, is under the bus.

So yeah, that's what it's like working as a black man. I have been at companies where I just experience God-awful things. And in many instances, they are tied back either to the color of my skin. I jokingly call it melaninitis. It refers to my melaninitis. Some people are offended. I've had people complain because I had master's degrees. You get up, you announce yourself. It's a one minute to a 90-second thing, "My name is – My position is –" at a company. "This is what I do. This is what I'm responsible for. I love to be able to help you." You give your educational. Because you if you don't give your credentials, they're going to ignore you. So you have to say

basically the whole thing why should I care who you are, and why should I listen to you. So this is my name. This is what I do. Here are my credentials. Here's where you can find me. This is what I love to partner with you on. Have a nice day. You sit down.

So I went through that at one company, and I got reprimanded for sharing where I got my degrees from, because I have two master's degrees. People come after me just because of that. They send the lynch mobs after me just because I have two master's degrees.

I had one person who, I interviewed the person. I was part of an interviewing team. We interviewed a person. People are really going to love this. And again, we don't talk about the same topic. We interview a guy. The guy, instead of talking about his qualifications as a UX person – We're about to bring him into an entry-level UX role. And that's why people stop crying about not finding entry level jobs. They're out there. I've been involved with too many of them. They're out. There stop that. And actually, by getting better about it, you're making it worse. We're interviewing this entry-level guy. All of a sudden, the whole interview shifts, and he becomes infatuated with the fact that he's interviewing for an entry-level job, but I already have the job. So he became fixated on me. And he starts harassing me during the interview, Tolu.

And I could tell, this guy's a white supremacist. His white hood must be under his briefcase that he brought in, or in his briefcase, or something, because he's just harassing me during the entire meeting to the point where we're not even interviewing him anymore. He's just harassing me, and he's comfortable with it. He's sitting back in the chair and just going off on me. And it's just ridiculous.

[00:52:38] TG: Interview over.

[00:52:41] DH: Could have been. It should have been. I tell our manager, "We can't hire this guy. This is what happened during the interview. This is what he did. He's not qualified. And he's abusive. My recommendation is that we don't hire this guy." I have no idea what the other two or three interviewers did because he got hired.

Anyway, and so now, that emboldens him, "Oh, well, if I did this to Darren Hood during the interview, I know what I can do to him if he's sitting across the table from me." And this guy

tormented me on a daily basis like it was his job. And at this company, I'm designing the English as a second language platform. I'm redesigning it. I'm leading the charge. I'm doing all the kind of stuff. Being subjected to maltreatment across the board by almost the entire team on a regular basis. But this guy was on another level to the point that I started working remote. I started working from home, because I can't go in there and do any work, because I just go in and harassed all day and nobody's going to do anything about it.

So I started working from home. Then they start ridiculing me for working at home, even though there was evidence that I was working, plenty of it. There wasn't any evidence that they were working. And this is the same crew that I talked about on LinkedIn recently that they were so idle that one day they got upset. And he was part of this crew, too. Upset because they looked at my LinkedIn endorsements. The LinkedIn counter stopped counting my endorsements. That's how many endorsements I have on LinkedIn. And they would sit there and complain for a half hour an hour about my endorsements as if they had nothing else to do. And they all got let go not too long after that. Go figure out. I wonder why. There's that question again. This is what it's been like for me. And, Tolu, I still succeed to the nth degree.

And instead of recognizing how much I have succeeded, people look at why I have these short stints at different places, which a lot of times is tied back to the same kind of things I'm talking about now. It's interesting stuff. But it's been tough. But all I know how to do is what I'm tasked to do. So that's what I do. And so, to me, a mountain is either going to be tunneled through, climbed, or I'm going to go around it. But I'm getting to the other side of the mountain.

[00:54:59] TG: You definitely are. I always tell, like, black people getting into this industry, like, you just have to be resilient, because you're going to face all types of like discrimination, unfortunately. One of the misconceptions that I wanted to talk about was we have a person of color or a black person on the team. So this company seems pretty inclusive and diverse. But that's not entirely always the case. You got to go and talk to the people know the people. A pretty picture on the website doesn't really say much at all. You got to know what the culture is actually like. Because you might be on a team where you are the only black person. And it's great. You don't find any instances of racism. But the chances of that aren't that very high. So it's like you have to talk to the people. See what it's like working there. And also to fight for not hiring people that will bring that type of culture to the company, like the team effort.

Thank you so much, Darren, for being vulnerable and sharing your experiences with us. Because I can imagine like how triggering just even thinking about all that stuff is. So I really appreciate you sharing it on the podcast.

[00:56:07] DH: Oh, absolutely, absolutely. Well, it's going to shock some folks.

[00:56:11] TG: I know. I know. Since we're still on this topic, one more question I have for you is do you think the industry like has improved at all? Will be more inclusive and diverse in the workplace? And I feel like I can't even ask this question with a serious face, because, like, I think the answer is no. Just because from my experience, the past experiences, like the past year, or two years, because the company I'm at is pretty – As far as like the way they treat me and all that. But, like, also I haven't been in the industry long enough to see the change. So what change have you seen? And what do you hope for in the future?

[00:56:46] DH: It's so big. The world is so big, the UX world. I think a lot of people get tunnel vision. A a lot of people I talk to, they're so busy looking at the circle where they are. And they assume that the entire world of UX is like their circle. So you could have a great experience, but it's actually bad overall. Or you could have a bad experience, and then it might be better in a certain arena overall.

I think that – I'm wondering, is I'll make it my business to talk to people around the world on a regular basis and get downloads all the time. When it comes to inclusivity and diversity in the workplace, I think that, on average, it's the best I can do. Is that on average, it's usually a song and a dance. There are a few companies that do a really good job at it. And they make it a point to do it. And it's not a song and a dance. It's not glitter, and rainbows, and unicorns, and cupcakes.

Actually, they don't just, "All this is going on. We need to hire a person in charge of diversity. And they must be a minority." Because that's usually something. You decide if something's wrong. I've seen companies who this whole top places to work thing is on the same line. Especially, they'll say, "This is a top place to work for diversity." And I look at companies on that list and I laugh because I know firsthand that that company is God-awful. And sometimes I've written the

people behind the list to tell them. You put their company on your list. But I know this, this, this, this, this, this, and this. I didn't hear from somebody else. I know."

And so a lot of times it's funny that people have to say that they're being inclusive and diverse. It should just be a standard mode of operation. And you can have to talk about it.

[00:58:33] TG: Yeah, 100%.

[00:58:35] DH: And so, I like the fact – Where I've landed recently, I think they do it right. And I'm happy to have found a place that is like that, the place where I just landed at, is actually on Forbes list of top large companies to work at. They're number six. That is a huge bragging point. Everything that I see says that that's accurate. And I'm really good at spotting things like that. There are a lot of other companies that I was at that have landed on similar lists. Not necessarily Forbes' list, but other lists. And one of the only reasons they made those lists is because I was there and I knew it was terrible and I refused to participate in the survey. And so did everybody else that could have brought them down in the service. So that's why they made it a lot of other companies to the top. A company lived because the people who make sure you don't didn't participate. It's just really sad.

So I tend to ignore, personally, inclusivity and diversity, broadcasting, because a lot of times that's all it is. You said it earlier. Talk to people that work there. Forget about what's happening in the public eye. Forget about these attempts to politicize inclusivity and diversity, which is really what's happening. Ignore that. Talk to people that work there to see what it's like. What is it really like? Find people of color that work there. And don't talk to the house mummies and the house negroes. I know some people get upset at me about that. But I said that on social media recently. So if you look at the movie Django, there's people that are exactly like Samuel Jackson's character. Beware of that.

[01:00:05] TG: Yeah, 100%.

[01:00:07] DH: Beware of the Candace Joneses of the world, because people – Minorities who have been accepted a lot of times, and this is going to ruffle some feathers, but that's what we do. It's the truth. You got to deal with it. A lot of minorities that are accepted are accepted

because they're willing to oppress other minorities. So you have to make sure that that's not who you're dealing with when you talk to folks. Find out what's going on. Find out who's real. Find out who's being honest. Because you will not get a proper representation during interviews a lot of times. Ask the tough questions. Find out how honest this company is.

And you'll be able to tell whether or not they're looking at you as a quota filler, or they're looking at you for your talent by the way that they talk to you and the things that they say. And you just have to be good at it. And don't have that pie in the sky toxic positivity mindset. Because if you do, you won't be able to see what you need to see. And then face it. Is it frustrating? Yes. But is it more frustrating to see something you need to see or to ignore it and go on and suffer later, which is more painful? And we should opt for the former. That it's just – Man, I'm shaking my head about this. But I'm better off to know now. And to suffer it later, and to get put on nothing projects because they don't trust you, or all types of things like that. That's when it's painful. That's what we don't want to be a part of.

And I'm going to lift up everybody. I know people say when somebody says they don't see color. We should ignore that. And that's garbage. I don't see color. I don't. I don't see anything but a professional who has a responsibility. And as a manager, I want to help them to be their absolute best. As a fellow UX'er, I want to help them be their absolute best. And I don't see anything else. That's all I care about. And that's why I'm so vocal about people who are contrary to that. And I address those things. And always leaving them room to change. Here's what you did. That's not the acceptable thing to do. This is what you should do. And now it's up to you whether or not you're going to change and do that. And that's pretty much it. None of the statements I make are personal. It's all about the what. Not the who. It's never about the who. And people don't get that. And I have to live with that. But again, they come at me because I'm a minority a lot of times. Not because of – I mean, I did expose them. Not everybody knows who you are. But killing me isn't going to change anything. It's not going to change who you are.

[01:02:37] TG: I like that you touched on not wanting to see color. Because something that I've struggled to help people understand is like, as a professional, I want to just be seen as like a product designer. Not like a black product designer, which not everyone gets. They're like, "Oh, you're not proud to be black." I'm like, "That has nothing to do with it. I just want to be the status quo Like, product designer, that's my you know title." Like, you don't just be like, "Oh, you're a

good product designer for a black person." "Oh, recruiters coming to me," and being like, "Oh, well, we have a diverse culture." Like, that's what they lead with." And I'm just like, "So, do you want me because of my portfolio or because I just add to that diverse culture?"

[01:03:17] DH: Right, right. Yep. And then the funny flip side of that, Tolu, as much as that's where we should be, we should focus on quality and not get caught up in the skin color. But we also need to be realists. If you are of color, you have to work harder. If you and somebody else who's not of color do the same exact thing, they will be valued on average. They will be valued more than you. They will be understood more than you. They will be embraced more than you. And you did the same exact thing that they did.

We have to be committed to excellence. It is an absolute must. It is an absolute must. Because we are held to a different standard on average. And what do you have to lose by being excellent? That's my argument. What do we have to lose by being excellent? Absolutely nothing. What do we have to gain by being excellent? Absolutely everything.

[01:04:08] TG: But one one thing I do want to touch with that, like, don't pick up other people's slack on the team. There's a fine line between that. Because it's like, I think, as people of color, black people specifically, like we're always trying to be the overachievers, do the one-up, because it's like we're trying to be like, "Well, I'm the only –" Especially if you're the only black person there. You kind of feel that pressure of like, "Whoa! I'm demonstrating what it is is for like black people as a whole. What it's like working with them."

[01:04:36] DH: No. You're right. Be excellent. Or guard your representation. That's an excellent point. Don't be in the business of being excellent to the extent that other people take advantage of you. That's part of the respect. When we carry ourselves in a respectful manner, I expect respect in return. I don't expect – I've told people this before. Yeah, I've got years. And I don't expect anybody to kiss my hand. That's not what I'm asking for. I'm not asking you to kiss my hand or my butt. But I do want your respect.

And when I carry myself in a respectful manner, then I expect us to operate from a perspective of mutual, professional respect. And they have to respect that. And then I'm sitting back there to watch you and see if you do. After I say it, I am watching you. And if the person begins to play

games or do certain things – If I can throw another story in here. I like to help manage UX material levels. I'm all about establishing UX intranets. To help talk about what the team is doing, share success stories, case studies, things of that nature. To have a knowledge repository. To help. Because you can't drive UX maturity just because of what the team does. UX maturity is not just about the practitioner. It's about the stakeholders and the clients. And the leadership, what is their perception of UX and how do they value it? And all that's going to come from the team. So a UX intranet will help you do that.

So I'm trying to start an intranet at another company. I caught more flack from a person on the UX team. "Why are you doing this? Who told you that you could do this?" And I'm thinking, "Who told you to ask me these questions? I'm the senior. You're like a person that you should be happy you have a UX job. And you're grilling me. You're interrogating me." And then I basically find out the person's interrogating me – This is another black UX'er story. Because the person had been asking me questions and getting downloads from me. This is one of those things where somebody took advantage of me and I didn't catch it. Didn't know about it. The person didn't want me to publish an Internet site, because then they wouldn't be able to take – They've been taking credit for things that they've been getting from me. And so when I publish the Internet, now they're going to see that this stuff was actually coming from Darren Hood the whole time.

[01:06:56] TG: The nerve. Oh my God!

[01:06:58] DH: The person didn't want me to talk because it was going to make them look bad. So there's one of those situations where I didn't know I was being taken advantage of, I found out. That's why they didn't want me to publish an – And they tried to discourage me from going through with executing the UX intranet because it was going to blow the lid off of what they were doing. Because they could ask me about something, go and talk about in a meeting as if it was something that they knew that, "Wow! This guy sure is knowledgeable." And they weren't talking to me. They didn't hear me. So they didn't know what I had to say. They just knew that I was a senior on the team. They didn't know how well-expressed I was or what my knowledge was. They thought that this other guy was the one that was helping keep the team afloat. Terrible story, but it's true.

[01:07:43] TG: There's still so much that I want to talk with you about, Darren. Like, even just from our intro call. Like, we could go on for hours. So I would love to split this into another episode if you're okay with that. We'll schedule some time to dive into some more misconceptions. Because I have a long whole list over here.

[01:08:02] DH: Anytime.

[01:08:02] TG: Thank you. I'm just going to go ahead and jump to – First of all, I wanted to highlight your podcast. So we're going to have a part two to this episode, guys. But, like, please, if you love to dive into more topics like these on like UX maturity, etc., you should definitely check out Darren's podcast, The World of Ux. He is always dropping so much valuable information on there. You're going to have your mind blown on each episode, I promise you. Please make sure you check that out.

Next, I want to get into listener questions. So we had quite a bit of questions coming. I think I'm going to split them into both episodes. So half this time and half the next time. So I asked on Instagram what questions do you have for Darren. And here's what some of you guys had to say. So first one is from Sequoia.gram, "What is the one tip you can share about having a good portfolio?"

[01:08:51] DH: Oh! Well, you're going to love this. The one tip I can have for portfolio is don't put all your eggs in one basket. I just did a talk for UCLA the other night. And I was talking about how – A matter of fact, I did a piece on medium called the UX job seeker manifesto. And I tell people, "Your portfolio is not magic." And some people were – We were in a conversation one day about currency, job seeker currency, and they put most of their emphasis on the portfolio. The emphasis is not on the portfolio. It's not. As a hiring manager, I don't even care what's in your portfolio. And I don't care what level you're interviewing for, because that's not the most critical thing.

I love how somebody said recently, "A portfolio tells me what you did. It doesn't tell me what you're capable of doing." And so the portfolio is giving somebody a tangible way to look at what your value proposition is. That is what the portfolio is for. You do not get an interview – You do not get an interview with a portfolio. You don't get the job with a portfolio. No matter what

somebody says and no matter what people are saying, you get the interview because of your resume. And so people are trying, they're putting all this emphasis. They're blown up the potential value of the weight, of the portfolio, to the point that it dwarfs everything else. It dwarfs your resume. You have an excellent portfolio, but you have a terrible resume. And then you get upset because you didn't get the job. But you don't realize that your resume sucks. So what about that?

What about the interviewing skills? People, they don't interview well at all, but they put all their effort and energy into that portfolio. But they haven't put any effort and energy into learning how to do well at interviews. And not only that. Be genuine. There's so many disingenuous people in UX today that it's become a cavalcade of actors.

[01:10:50] TG: Yeah, like robots. That seem –

[01:10:52] DH: That's garbage. You come into an interview with the – Right there, Tolu. They'd come in with a script. You're an actor. I'm not going to hire – At my level, it is the way I always say it. It takes me 20 seconds to smell you. That's the way I say it. If you're an actor, I smell you. If you're putting on fronts, I smell you. If you're trying to sell me on your potential to bring value to my team because of your bubbly personality, bubbly doesn't communicate with stakeholders. But a stakeholder will chew you up and spit you out. And we're going to find out how bubbly you are when you deal with that nasty stakeholder that doesn't care about you.

That's why I'm so forthright and why I just come out and tell you like it is when I'm talking on social media, because you need this truth now. You think I'm harsh? I'm not harsh at all, at all.

[01:11:42] TG: No.

[01:11:43] DH: You want to see harsh? Wait till you meet that stakeholder that doesn't like UX and doesn't feel like you should be in the room. And when they give you feedback on your work, that's when you're going to see what harsh really is. The kind of things that make you, have made me in my career, go and sit in your car and cry. This kind of stuff happens, folks.

So I'm trying to help you. I'm giving you what you need so you can thrive. Like I say, I'm not a gatekeeper. I'm ushering you in. But I'm showing you where the door is. And other people are playing games. So the one thing you do for your portfolio – You need a portfolio, absolutely. It's a necessary evil. I'll talk about that in an upcoming podcast, where I talk about the problem with portfolios, because actually we shouldn't even have them in UX spaces. And I know some people are starting to not even look at portfolios for UX candidates. So that'll take a long time for that to catch on. But it's not as important as people think it is.

So have your resume together. Learn book recommendations. The whole Knock 'Em dead series. Priceless. Must have. "I don't want to buy those books." You want a job? "Yeah." Then you got to buy the books. Because the books are going to give you knowledge downloads that are critical. It will help you with your resumes. It'll help you prepare for interviews.

And another book that I absolutely love it's called *60 Seconds and You're Hired*. It gives you these tough questions and what people are looking for. Because a lot of people that interview you, they're going off of a script. So go and look and see what they're really after when they ask you certain questions. You'll see that kind of stuff in *60 Seconds and You're Hired*, and it'll help you prepare.

Then when you get in a real interview and you do get to the portfolio, you can talk about what the portfolio is really about. And really, it's about storytelling. Are you telling your story? Or did you put like the equivalent of war and peace in a portfolio? That doesn't cut it. Nobody reads your portfolio. If it's overly verbose, nobody's looking at that. So you got to scale it back. Tell your story visually. Make sure that you're conveying what you did.

And I'll give you one quick tip, one flat out tip for portfolios. Don't talk about the people that worked on your project with you. Nobody cares about that. They're interviewing you. They're not interviewing your two or three team members. I've seen too many portfolios recently, "And this person A, B and C we're all on the team." And all their pictures are there and their names. Nobody needs that. So please take that stuff out of your portfolio.

And get off of the Wixes and the Squarespaces, and go and register a domain name. Show yourself professional. And give a good UX in your portfolio. Because you're trying to get a UX

job, right? So if you are, then your portfolio needs to have a good UX, right? You're showing them how much you know about UX by how you represent your personal brand. I know you asked me for one. And there's a bunch of them. I really got that stuff locked and ready to go.

[01:14:42] TG: Hey, I'm sure she or he is super happy about that. I'll do one more question. And then next time I'll answer questions from Lucy_rut, nanzanin.uxdesign, and true_ **[inaudible 01:14:55]**. This last question here for today is insta.azra. They asked, "How do you go about starting at a new company? What has changed within the field since you started?" Which I think you've answered that last question quite a bit.

[01:15:09] DH: Yeah. But I could touch on something else there. What's changed the most is that you have more companies that are starting to bring UX'ers in. And it's not really that it's changed. It's just that it's happening in bigger numbers. But they don't really want UX people.

And so, there's something that I call the opportunity paradox. And that you think, "I got an interview." You tell all your friends. You post on LinkedIn, "I got an interview. Everybody, pull for me. Yeah! I got an interview." And you go in. And you're assuming that they know what they're doing. They may not. And so, if you don't have the right people in your life giving you what you need to know, giving you those harsh truths, I'll call it that, your rose-colored glasses are going to be that much thicker and that much rosier. We need to clean those lenses, because I need to see these people. The *60 Seconds and You're Hired* will give you – They'll have a whole long list of tough questions you can ask. Go in and find out which ones are genuinely interesting and of note to you. Because they're not just interviewing you. You're interviewing them. So you want to go into these companies. You want to be able to go into the interviews, get the interview. That's just the first step. Find out whether or not that job is really for you. If that company is for you. Because a lot of them are not.

And people just, "I want to go work at Facebook. Yeah, I'm going to –" I hope I don't get you in trouble. Facebook sucks when it comes to UX. So just because they're a big company doesn't mean they know what they're doing. All you got to do is go use Facebook. You want to see how much they care about UX? What's your UX like when you're using Facebook?

[01:16:47] TG: I hate you.

[01:16:48] DH: That just told me something. Don't you see things all the time that let you know that they couldn't possibly be doing research? But who has like 50 billion researchers on their UX team? But they still rolled this thing out? Didn't somebody check that? No, they didn't. They got a bunch of fake it till you make folks working there.

So if you go into a company where fake it till you make it is honored, and revered, and valued more than actual expertise. Do you really want to be a part of that? So, that's what's going on at companies today. A lot of companies are doing a song and a dance when it comes to UX. They don't really want UX. And if you really love the discipline and you really want to be good at what you do, what a novel idea. Doctors want to be good. Barbers want to be good. Plumbers want to be good. Landscapers want to be good. But the UX'ers, even though the word is that we're going to make up one percent of the total earth's population, it's how much the discipline is growing. UX'ers are going to make up one percent of the earth's population. That's a lot of people. That's a lot of UX practitioners. Shouldn't we be good, too? Shouldn't we be good at what we do? Well, if that's the case, you can't get angry when somebody challenges you to be good. Because that's pretty much par for the course today.

As soon as you call somebody out, they get mad, "I don't believe Darren said that about me." Really? Well, if you knew what I knew, and you looked at your work, and I wasn't there, guess who would have said it? You. So it's not about me. Let's stop reducing these things to personalities. It's not about personalities. You do not want to go to a company. If you like doing UX work, if you love – You went through whatever training program you went through, and you love what you're exposed to, and you can't wait to start doing the work. You do not want to go to a company. And there's a lot of them that don't want anything to do with real UX. They want to tell you, "I want a button. Go give it to me." And when you go to offer them UX advice, they say, "Shut up, and give me what I asked for." You'd be surprised how many companies that that's what's going on.

[inaudible 01:18:53] did a research project back in about 2017, I think it was, where they said they found out 97% of user experiences, basically, websites was what they actually said. The user experiences on those sites were wrong. They were erroneous. They were flawed. 97%. That's a big undertaking. That's a lot of problems. And that's a lot of people holding UX positions

that either are not being listened to or are not doing what they're supposed to do. We are here to solve problems. We are leaders. We're all leaders. I don't care what level of UX you're at. We're all leaders. But you got to be the leader. And you got to learn how to be the leader and take pride in it and go forth. We're managing a discipline. That is the only discipline in the room that's still wearing diapers. So we need people to be their absolute best so we can help the discipline.

I'll be gone. I'll be retired in 10 years.

[01:19:51] TG: I don't want to think about that.

[01:19:52] DH: I'll be retired in 10 years. What I'm fighting for is for you folks to have somewhere to go. I'm not going to partake of the results of this. You are.

[01:20:02] TG: We're chilling. Sipping some lemonade, like, "Well –"

[01:20:07] DH: I'll actually still be in academia.

[01:20:09] TG: Okay. I will be building UX'ers, the UX'ers of tomorrow, for quite some time if all goes well. But I fight today. I don't fight for me. I fight for you. So people who fight against me are fighting against themselves, because I'm trying to help you all. I'm not going to partake of this. Because it's going to take 10 years to fix it, to move the needle to any substantive degree. So I already know. I'm not going to partake of the fruits of my labor. I'm not going to. And I already know it. So if somebody tells you that I'm mean and don't have a big heart, they're a liar.

[01:20:48] TG: You're just looking out for us, basically, and trying to make sure that we actually stay in this profession and don't leave.

[01:20:55] DH: Yeah. Somebody called me Uncle Darren one day. I got a kick out of that. But that's how they saw what I was doing. When you really digest it and look at it for what it is instead of buying into the hype of the trolls and the EQ-deficient folk.

[01:21:12] TG: That's all the listener questions for this week. As a reminder, you could be included in the next episode that we do for this. Make sure to follow me on Instagram @UINarrative. I randomly asked questions that could be featured in an upcoming episode.

All right. So I'd like to end the show with the random question completely unrelated to everything that we've been talking about today. What interesting skill do you want to learn?

[01:21:35] DH: For me, it's about research ops. That's the thing, forefront of my mind. I just learned that research ops was a thing not too long ago. And research ops is a part of my job now that I have as a UX research manager. And when I dove into it, I found out that I've actually been doing research ops for years. It just wasn't called research ops. But now I need to assemble all of those Lego pieces, if you will, and begin to understand what's going on so I can take a more formal look at and gain a stronger understanding of what people are now referring to as research ops and build my research ops practice and chops. So that's number one on my list right now, is research ops.

[01:22:20] TG: Let me see. For me, I want to learn more like FUI, fictional UI. I know it's like not UX related at all. I just think it'd be pretty cool to like design something and it shows up in a movie. So you don't screen my animation up on there, even though it probably won't be functional. But just be a fun passion project, you know?

[01:22:40] DH: Still sweet. That'd be sweet.

[01:22:43] TG: Where can we connect with you online?

[01:22:45] DH: Oh my goodness. I am everywhere. Of course, LinkedIn. People connect with me on LinkedIn. I talk to people all the time. That's where I met Tolu.

[01:22:53] TG: Yes.

[01:22:54] DH: I've got my Medium. UX Uncensored is one of my monikers that I write under. And that's where you'll find uxuncensored.medium.com. A lot of pieces that I write are out there.

I have an up and coming UX – Or I'm sorry. YouTube channel, which is also called UX Uncensored.

And right now, most of the content out there are recordings of talks. And I do speak at talks all over the world, including a TEDx talk that I did. You will find a TEDx talk that I did. If you search TEDx Patna. It was done for folks in India. And it was called The Garrison of Excellence. You will find that out there. So I'm available there. I'm on Instagram. I have a Facebook page. And I'm going to forget something. I'm everywhere.

[01:23:40] TG: I'm sure I'll find some stuff you forgot about, like Twitter, yeah.

[01:23:44] DH: Twitter. We tried to start a private social media area, and it just became too difficult to manage. And I was the only one – I posted 95% of the content. If other people don't post anything, I'm not going to – I don't need all that extra stuff.

I am going to start – Oh, the UX chit-chat hour, where –

[01:24:04] TG: Oh, yeah. I'm so sad I had to miss that last week. I got to make the next one.

[01:24:10] DH: The last Thursday of every month at 12:15 Eastern Time, we meet to just have regular coffee house conversations with UX'ers from all over the world. It usually runs from 12:15 to 1:45. When I left the other day, people were still going. It really is extremely energetic. A lot of people find it therapeutic. And you just talk about whatever. And people learn a lot. They were raving about this last one. The new thing we're announcing – Somebody from Malaysia said that, "We'd love to come. But there's a 13-hour time difference. And it's one o'clock here in the morning. So we can't come to that. Can you do anything for us?"

So because of that, starting in March – And we're going to pilot this for the folks in Malaysia and the folks on the other side of the world. But it's also going to benefit folks on the West Coast and even people on the East Coast that feel like they want to talk about UX at 10:15 at night on the last Friday of the month. We're going to have a special UX chit-chat session to accommodate people that are in different time zones. And so we're going to do that.

And I'm also potentially going to be piloting the Kaizen-UX mentoring hour. We're going to meet on a Saturday for roughly two hours once a month to talk about anybody who's asking questions, like, what just came that you just presented, Tolu. You want to talk about portfolios? You want to talk about the job search? You want to talk about how to make yourself better? Something I call the UX cycle of excellence, we can talk about that and how you can apply it to manage your own career. We'll be getting together. And we're talking about potentially June or July is when the Kaizen-UX mentoring hour will launch to go through that initial pilot stage. So I'm everywhere.

[01:25:58] TG: I will have everything he mentioned in the show notes. So please make sure to engage with Darren. He has so many resources, so much tenure of information wisdom in the UX space that I can't provide you. So please, make sure you dive into that wealth of information. If you guys have any questions or comments about today's episode, make sure to tag Darren on his social channels, or tag me @UINarrative on Instagram, or @UINarrativeCo. And also, don't forget to share this episode with anyone you think would benefit from it, which I think a lot of people definitely will.

I appreciate you so much, Darren, for taking the time to join us for this very, very insightful episode I really enjoyed our time together. And I cannot wait for part two, because we dived into some more misconceptions. And I seriously cannot wait.

[01:26:48] DH: Awesome. Thank you so much for having me. I love sharing. I care about everybody. I really want everybody to do well. And I'm going to do any and everything I can to help foster that type of success for you in your journey. Looking forward to it.

[OUTRO]

[01:27:07] TG: Thank you for listening to the UI Narrative podcast. If you like what you hear, make sure to share 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.

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