

Nikki Anderson

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[00:00:05] **Amy:** Hello and welcome to what is wrong with hiring the podcast, where we talk about why hiring people and getting hired in tech are both absolute nightmares and try to figure out what we can do about it. I'm Amy Santee, a career strategist and coach for user experience.

[00:00:20] Today I am chatting with writer, podcaster, speaker, and UX researcher extraordinaire, the one and only Nikki Anderson.

[00:00:28] Nikki is the founder of User Research Academy, where she has trained students from 15 countries on how to conduct research more creatively and confidently, and collaborate with stakeholders to achieve impact with their work. And speaking of which, she is also the author of Impact, a complete guide to creating a research practice at your organization, . Nikki has been a prolific contributor to the UX community for several years, writing hundreds of articles about her UX research career and providing sage advice for designing an effective job search.

[00:00:59] [00:01:00] Welcome to the show, Nikki.

[00:01:01] **Nikki:** Hey, thank you so much. I am really happy to be here.

[00:01:05] **Amy:** Good, Good. I'm so glad you're here. And I think that's probably how I found you initially was finding some of your stuff online. I think it might've been some previous version of your resume that we might discuss later on.

[00:01:19] **Nikki:** Yeah. Yeah. That beautiful. I don't even know what I would call it. Specimen. Yes.

[00:01:28] **Amy:** Yes. No I love it. I love everything that you do and put out into the UX. community. And I want to get right to the most important question that I have for you today, which is tell me about your love for Pokemon.

[00:01:43] **Nikki:** I love how that's the most important one because I would 100 percent agree with you. Yeah. So the obsession happened. I don't even know when Pokemon was created 1997 or so maybe. I think so. 97, 98, something like that. Yeah, I just fell in love because I was and still am a very introverted

person. [00:02:00] So like I spent my time like we had a house outside of Boston. That was my childhood house. And I spent my time like in the woods like hang out with trees. I was like trees are ants like the Lord of the Rings. Yay. I'm an elf. Yeah, it wasn't real. It was okay. And so Pokemon was like a tangential way for me to have fun. friends because I was so introverted like to the point where I couldn't speak up in class like I couldn't raise my hand and Participate in class without like my eyes started tearing my face turned red. Like I was just a mess I was gonna say a hot mess, but I don't think you should say that about your childhood Yeah, I just Pokemon was such a way for me to engage my creativity, imagination. I love cute things. I love animals. So it just sucked me right in.

[00:02:51] And I'm still obsessed. Like I, I went to the U. S. a few weeks ago and my parents were like, here, we have this like game boy of yours. And it's like a [00:03:00] game boy color with my original red version of Pokemon. I cried. Oh my gosh. I literally cried. I was like, this is the best thing that's ever happened to me. So did you bring it back to the UK? Yeah, and I brought it in my carry on just in case, I was like, so concerned that my luggage was gonna get, I had so much nice stuff in my packed luggage, but this was the most important thing.

[00:03:22] So yeah,

[00:03:23] **Amy:** you have to protect it with all of your abilities and what's your favorite Pokemon?

[00:03:28] **Nikki:** Charm. It's it's hard. It's the charmander evolution. So Charmander, charmian, charizard. But I also have a very, God, it's every single one to be honest, but very soft spot for the ghost Pokemon. So the ghastly, haunting, gengar Pokemon. . All the good vibes.

[00:03:43] **Amy:** I love that. Yeah. I'm sure there's many applicable lessons from Pokemon to doing the job search and all of that. So if any, ideas come up as we go through a conversation, please feel free to mention those.

[00:03:57] Thank you so much for [00:04:00] taking the time to address some That very important topic before we jump into some of these other things. I do want to move to talking about the state of the UX job markets. It's been a bumpy ride for the past couple of years now with layoffs and fewer jobs and lots of people looking for jobs. And I'm curious as someone who's been paying attention over time, like what are your observations these days? Like what's your take on how things are going?

[00:04:27] **Nikki:** Yeah, I have. An interesting perspective on this as like a business owner who coaches user researchers or who engages companies with user research workshops, ? So from my stance, I saw. the industry and the job market kind of explode in a bad way. Do you like, I don't know, de splode? Implode? Implode. I write.

[00:04:52] **Amy:** I write words and I say words too.

[00:04:58] **Nikki:** Oh, today's the [00:05:00] day. As somebody who Has a business coaching researchers or supporting companies with user research. I watched that implode within the scope of my business. So huge drops in my mentorship, my membership subscriptions. I went from holding like eight company workshops a year to literally zero. Crickets, beyond, not even crickets, just silence. And what I have seen is just, people are in a state of fear, and this is what happens when we get in this state of fear, there's a lot of fear mongering that can happen, there's a lot of, I have to preserve the self, there's a lot of, let's cut back

[00:05:45] So these are the observations that I saw through my business lens now through my more personal lens of somebody who's engaging With user researchers every day through like my mentorship or my membership I also heard the hardships of people getting laid off or [00:06:00] of budgets getting completely cut for any tools or resources Or any sort of like professional development was suddenly the first thing to go for literally everybody. And so I watched that kind of just completely nosedive. And it was quite sad to see something that we had all built up so much kind of fall back down to pieces.

[00:06:23] But you know what? It's happened before. And it's happened with so many different industries that I think that what also happens is because we now have a broader net of social media, we're all being amplified, ?

[00:06:38] , there was a time back in 2016 when there were a lot of layoffs as well. I think it was 2016, 2017, there were a ton of layoffs, or maybe it was 2018, I can't remember exactly where it, I got laid off and I just, I don't remember the year. And when that happened as well, there was just like you didn't have on LinkedIn, like I'm looking for work so I didn't know that [00:07:00] everybody was also looking for work, I didn't know that all of these things were happening, we didn't have everybody writing about how UX was dead, or dying, like that stuff just didn't happen, and I think that we've been through the ebb and flow you know?

[00:07:13] **Nikki:** With user research before with pretty much every kind of industry before and what we have to focus on now and what I'm hoping we are going to focus on and what's going to happen is, yes, it's falling back to pieces, but that means that we can rebuild it in a better way. And we hopefully will move past some of that negative sentiment, some of that UX is dead, some of that like terrible. Vibes that can happen from really catastrophic events like this and say, okay, how do we want user research to evolve? How do we want this to move forward and rebuild it in a way that is even better than before so I'm trying to view that as like an opportunity and of course I'm lucky. I'm not lucky because my business has suffered greatly from it, but I'm also not laid off

[00:08:00] Because of it because I don't experience those kinds of layoffs So yeah, it's a weird thing to experience from that perspective, but I'm hoping that we can Move forward and rebuild in a way that's really effective and impactful

[00:08:12] **Amy:** Yeah, I hope so too. And it's an interesting time because even if let's say there were no layoffs over the past couple years, UX and UX research, we're always in this like funky spot trying to figure out what we're doing and how to do it. And there's a lot of opinions and perspectives and approaches. So it's a lot of kind of chaos. happening at once, growing pains and this weird in between time where we don't know quite what it's going to be moving forward after, The layoffs settled down, which they seem to have settled down in the past few months, we don't know the rate at which research will be hired in the future.

[00:08:57] There's a lot of open questions right now and [00:09:00] uncertainty and uncertainty. And to your point about self preservation and risk aversion, like the most important thing for people right now really is just finding a job, the ones who have been laid off and then even people who weren't laid off, there's still a lot of people out there who want a new job because they don't like their current job. That's never going to go away either. At the same time, do those people have capacity to participate? in a conversation about what is the future of UX research? .

[00:09:30] **Nikki:** Yeah. I think what we're trying to do is, so I practice Buddhism. , what we do is we do a lot of what ifs. So we do a lot of future based thinking and worrying. Especially when we don't have the facts and right now nobody can predict what user research is going to look like we can do a lot of hey, it might look like this or what if it looks like this or what if it dies or what if this or what if that and so those what if thoughts While they might be interesting. It's like how can we maybe reframe them to say? [00:10:00] Okay, instead of like what if user research dies or what if this or what if that let's say

Let's do how might we is, it's like what do we want it to look like? What do we, how do we want to rebuild it?

[00:10:10] How do we how might we make user research more more effective, like more valuable in the future? And so I think if we took effort out of those, what ifs and put them into like the, how might we is, it might, How might we, It might help us with moving forward because what ifs get us stuck because we're trying to future cast

[00:10:29] **Amy:** yeah. Crystal balls don't really work at all, and I see the same thing too with the job search. Lots of people are like what if I don't find a job? And what if, any number of scenarios and I find myself doing that. I think all humans do that, but it's very good to be aware. And to really be aware of how your mind is. thinking about things and your thoughts and feelings and those inform your behavior. So yeah, that, that concept definitely is applicable to a lot of what's [00:11:00] going on right now.

[00:11:01] Let's talk more about the UX research hiring process. Not only have you been through the job search many times in your career, but you've also been a hiring manager. So I'd love to get more of your perspective on this. People tend to be familiar with the standard process of going through a UX research interview. Doing a recruiter call, chatting with the hiring manager, you do a panel presentation with your case studies, you chat with some stakeholders, that sort of thing.

[00:11:26] After the initial call with the recruiter, candidates typically move on to an interview with the hiring manager. And I'm wondering if you can share what are hiring managers looking for in this call and how do you suggest people prepare for it?

[00:11:41] **Nikki:** Yeah, that's a really great question. And I will answer infuriatingly with the, it depends. answer that we're all so good at. It depends, honestly, if your hiring manager is a user researcher. So oftentimes or some of the time you can actually get a [00:12:00] hiring manager that's not a user researcher.

[00:12:02] What I can talk about through this is as a person who was interviewing with a hiring manager that wasn't a user researcher what my experience was like And I can also tell as a user researcher who was a hiring manager what my experience was like.

[00:12:16] so whenever I interviewed in the past with hiring managers that were not user researchers so they could be somebody like a product manager or a designer and i've You Also had a hiring manager who was like the director of product. I've had a developer who was a hiring manager.

[00:12:36] That was a tough one. Yeah. So with those types of interviews where I was interviewing with somebody who wasn't necessarily an expert in what I was trying to be in that organization, what I tried to do was clarify really. Clearly, the impact that user research can have. And the support that user research can [00:13:00] give other functions in a team, because as a user researcher, like as a hiring manager, user researcher, I understand how user research can support different functions, but as a hiring manager, who's not a user researcher, that is primarily probably what they're most interested in because they are hiring a user researcher, probably to impact the entire organization to help support the organization.

[00:13:25] For a long time, I just went in and was like presenting or talking about like just what I did. So yeah, tell me about a time that chose a particular methodology and why. That's what they would ask me. So those are some common questions that you might get from a hiring manager. It's more like looking through your technical skills and how you've applied them outside of something that you have created of like in terms of a beautiful portfolio or case study presentation that you've had time to rehearse. So you a little bit more like. Having that conversation or tell me about a difficult stakeholder that you've [00:14:00] encountered before and so when I was going into those interviews as a user researcher looking for a job talking to a hiring manager that wasn't a user researcher I was telling them the things that I did.

[00:14:12] And what I did not do was tell them, yes, the things that I did, but tell them the subsequent impact that had in supporting whatever function I was doing. If I was talking about how I ran this beautiful diary study, I'm like, oh yeah, we got so many insights and it was great and, and we did, all this stuff, and it's okay Somebody who's not a user researcher might have a really hard time tangibly understanding okay, how did you get, data, qualitative data from 25 participants into something that the product team can use, into something that the devs can use, the designers can use, the marketing team can use, like, how did you do that, right?

[00:14:49] So I found that I had to get a little bit more clear About how I actually went through my process in a slightly more granular way and focus less on like the activities that [00:15:00] I did so I glossed over. Yeah, we did a diary study, but the impact on all these teams was this and this, right?

[00:15:05] And this is how I got this was the collaboration piece, right? And so that was, I found that to be pretty effective. And I'm not saying that's not effective when you're talking to you. A user research hiring manager because I would love that because I want you to be able as a hiring manager who's a user researcher.

[00:15:23] I want you to be talking about that as well. But particularly with people who aren't user researchers, you might have to break down so what do we do with it? How are you going to help us? How are you going to support us? How have you helped and supported people in the past? Cause that's what they're trying to assess is okay, cool. You've done stuff, but if we plop you into our organization, what are you going to do for us?

[00:15:47] **Amy:** And they want to do a successful hire. Like they want to set themselves up to show that they've hired the right person as well.

[00:15:57] **Nikki:** Yeah, absolutely. And I think [00:16:00] it's, and I know that we might talk about this later, but we can talk about it a little bit now. It's also thinking about who is your audience, as the person who is going through the interview process, as the candidate, who is your audience, who you're speaking to and what level of context do you think they have? Because you are 100 percent right in the fact that Usually when you don't have a user research manager, you're probably going to be the first and solo user researcher. And knowing what that might mean. So teams might not have a lot of education on user research. Teams might not know anything about user research. Teams might be skeptical about user research, knowing to also potentially talk through, previous experiences that might be relevant to a first and solo user researcher of Hey, yeah, in the past.

[00:16:49] Here's how I've collaborated with stakeholders who have been skeptical in the past, right? Here's how I've collaborated with stakeholders who might not know when to come to me for research. So when you're talking to a [00:17:00] hiring manager, who's not a user researcher, ha helping them understand how you're going to set the organization up for success is super helpful.

[00:17:08] **Amy:** Yeah, I am. As you're describing all of this, I'm thinking back to different managers. I've had who were researchers who maybe they were doing a hybrid role of managing and doing I see work. I have had bosses who were not researchers. And yeah, I think that's a really. If there's anything to take away, it's think of who your audience is. What do they know? What might those organizational dynamics be? Are you the first researcher? Are you joining a

large team? And you can tailor your responses to questions to the hiring manager in those ways.

[00:17:42] And, I think. It relates to resumes in a way as well. And we can talk more about resumes in a bit, but , knowing the audience of your resume and focusing not so much on the, nuances of your projects, but Here's this thing that I accomplished out of the research, or here's [00:18:00] how I contributed to the organization and product design and all of that with research.

[00:18:04] Any other thoughts to add on like initial chats with hiring managers, how to approach those, how to prepare for those.

[00:18:12] **Nikki:** Yeah, if you are talking, so I'll put my hiring manager hat on now moving away from the candidate hat. So as a hiring manager I have in the past I haven't used a scorecard in the past and that's messed me up. And now as a hiring manager, I, Especially later in the years, I tended to use kind of something called a scorecard. It sounds really bad, but it's not bad. It's a way for me to make the process more objective. Has this person handled difficult situations? Has this person approached things with empathy, has this person used a variety of methods?

[00:18:43] So I think When you are as a so as a hiring manager, what I'm trying to do is I'm trying to see if I put you in this organization, how would you work? What would you do? How would you respond to our challenges? How would you respond to our stakeholders, our situations, [00:19:00] our context? So By understanding that kind of context, you are better set up for success as a candidate.

[00:19:08] You might not know, obviously, the ins and outs of the situation, but if you can get some sort of idea, maybe from that first initial call with the recruiter of what are, and this is, I know we might talk about this later, but this is where it's important to come up with questions.

[00:19:23] For within the scope of your process of interviewing and job searching, it's what are the top problems that people are struggling with? The researchers are struggling with what are the top requests that researchers get, what are the stakeholders like, how do they respond to research, but trying to understand that context and then build your. Interview through that and there have been some of my most successful interviews as a candidate and as a hiring manager is when that interview turns into a conversation. So that person is Oh, have you, how have address difficult stakeholders [00:20:00] and something that I actually go back with sometimes is I will say, Oh I'm curious what are

some actual. Issues that you have with stakeholders so that I can, talk through the most relevant experience that I've had.

[00:20:12] And so I will respond with a question. They'll say they come to us too late. And then I'm like, great. In the past when I've had stakeholders come to me too late, here's a concrete example of how I have overcome that. And as a manager, that's really great for me because what you're essentially doing is you're making my job easier because you are asking me the things that I essentially want a need from you, and you are directly answering them. This took a really long time for me to get more comfortable with it doesn't work all the time right but trying to get more context from them during the actual interview is really helpful not only for catering your answers to them and giving them relevant information in a very short window of time. But it's also really great for you to get contact and be like, do I want to run away from this dumpster fire or am I [00:21:00] okay with it?

[00:21:01] **Amy:** Yeah, exactly. That's yeah, tailoring your responses. I think that's the way to go. It's a very researcher y way of doing things. And have a more effective conversation rather than speak from generalizations.

[00:21:14] **Nikki:** Yeah, and I do recommend for most of the questions brainstorm questions that you would want to ask somebody if you were trying to hire them. That's what I did. I sourced Over the time, all these different questions that people were asking me and I started seeing trends across different companies and I was like, okay, these are like super common questions, why don't I brainstorm three concrete examples of like how I've overcome them or ways to answer them so that, you have.

[00:21:43] Already in your arsenal all these different examples that you could use, you know So that if you don't feel comfortable necessarily asking somebody well What are the issues that you have so that I can tailor my response? Best to you and use the most relevant experience you can say I've tried to deal with it in these three [00:22:00] ways and hopefully one of those three ways first they show a variance of experience.

[00:22:04] But second like hopefully one of those three ways Hits home with the hiring manager.

[00:22:10]

[00:22:10] **Advertisement:** Hey folks, Laura here. Remember when companies employed people to do user research? Huh, yeah, me neither. I can tell you,

these days, how many designers, product managers, founders, end up having to do their own product discovery. As a consultant, I've helped a lot of folks figure out how to learn more about their users, specifically how to combine qualitative and quantitative research to get a better view of who they are.

[00:22:39] What people are doing and why and here's the thing almost everybody makes really similar mistakes when they're trying to do it I mean, I get it. It's hard qualitative research is tough Quant is sometimes even tougher doing them together That's just a whole new level of complexity and add to this the fact that you're already doing it on top of I'm going to be doing a [00:23:00] whole other job, you know, the one that they originally hired you for.

[00:23:04] So look, if you're struggling with learning from your users or trying to figure out what to learn and how to learn it, I'm here for you. I'll be doing a free talk on research for non researchers on August 1st at 10am Pacific. You can find it on maven. com. That's M A V E N dot com. This is just the intro to a larger course that I'm planning on doing to help folks learn how to combine qualitative and quantitative research for better user insights. That class should be announced later this year. For now though, come listen to me rant about the mistakes that everybody makes so that you can make new, more interesting mistakes.

[00:23:37]

[00:23:47] **Amy:** I want to talk a little bit about portfolio presentations. That's another pretty common thing that we have to do for the interview process. My two questions for you are, what's the best way to [00:24:00] select case studies? And what mistakes do you see people make with their case study presentations?

[00:24:06] **Nikki:** Yeah. So how to select case studies. I used to just. Pick my, and I'm not saying this is wrong, I used to just pick my favorite like project or two and be like, this is it. But what I started doing to, that helped me more was picking the case studies that I felt were most relevant to the job description. So what is it that they actually want me to do in the job? What are they looking for? Like, So it's pointless if I'm talking about, these long, foundational, research studies that are, very discovery based when they're like, oh you're going to be doing usability testing.

[00:24:45] So that's not going to help. You know, Of course, we all want to do that discovery research and we should have a balance, but cater to the job description. So looking at what they are looking for. Now. It seems now

[00:25:00] that job descriptions are looking for everything. So if that is the case and you're like they're looking for everything, so I'm not sure what to pick.

[00:25:07] Then what I say is, pick those projects where you're like, man, I'm a bad ass, like that was awesome. That felt good because what happens is especially remote interviews now I, you can tell when somebody's talking about a project that they were passionate about. Pick the projects that you were super passionate about or are super passionate about that can demonstrate okay, cool. I love this stuff. I'm super into it. I was, this was one of my favorite studies or I'm really proud of this study. I think that there's some, a little bit of almost, I don't know. I don't think we're proud enough. And this also speaks to things like optimizing your resume.

[00:25:48] It's like shout, shout just shit from the rooftops. Like you should be like, wow. Like this is awesome. Look at all this cool stuff that I did. And so I think we need to embrace that a [00:26:00] little bit and select your case studies based on all like something that you're super proud of, something that was super cool, something that was super unexpected, and.

[00:26:09] Utilize that as a way to demonstrate your passion, because I have had a usability test that I used as a case study that seemed super basic, but I was like, wow, this was such a complicated recruitment, and I am so proud of myself for like nailing that recruitment. And getting it done.

[00:26:27] **Amy:** Yeah. And that's another way to think about it is doesn't make for a good story. Yeah, it can be like a very straightforward or seemingly straightforward project or methodology or whatever it might be. But perhaps there are things within that experience that are going to show that you have. Skills that are required to do research well or collaborate with others.

[00:26:47] **Nikki:** One of the biggest mistakes that I see and something that I'm, I really ask people not to do is do not take your user research report and present it as a case study. It is not relevant. So I don't care about your insights as a hiring [00:27:00] manager. I care about your process and you demonstrating how you've done things before. Because again, I'm trying to plop you in our organization and say, will this work or will it not work?

[00:27:11] And if you just tell me about insights, I can't make that decision. Think about your audience, do not use your user research report. Use your process as a way to demonstrate what you did, why you did it, how you did it, who you did it with and go from there. We don't care about insights. Impact. Yes. Insights. No.

[00:27:30] **Amy:** Yeah. Think about what your audience needs to make a decision. If you present a strong case study, they're gonna probably go ahead and assume that your insights were great, blah, blah, blah. But what was your impact that's gonna be most relevant. What's your process? How do you work with other people?

[00:27:45] Also research reports in organizations are designed in such a way that they're meant to also be documentation of the work and have a lot of details, and they're not really helpful for presenting information in that same way [00:28:00] to an audience during an interview. I think it's a great thing to start from, but to take out or to tease out the things that you need for the presentation.

[00:28:09] Let's talk a bit about resumes. You have to have one We don't learn how to do them from anyone. We're going to, start from scratch and try to, just do our best and look at what other people do and copy that. And hopefully it works out. And there's no one correct way of doing resumes. There's some good variation in there. But of ways to do it. Of course, there are some best practices and you have one of the best guides to creating a UX research resume that I've come across. It's something that I've shared with many people.

[00:28:40] I think it is one of your top most viewed posts on Substack as well. It's very comprehensive and it's cool because what you did was you laid out the your own experiences with designing a resume over the years, starting with the one that I came across like probably [00:29:00] 10 years ago, which had a picture of Zelda on it. And your subsequent iterations over time. I'm, I'm curious yeah, what are your, what are the biggest lessons you've learned over the years for designing a good resume?

[00:29:14] **Nikki:** Yeah, don't make it into a, something that's, looks like a horrible persona template. That's what I did. It's so cute though. Yeah, cute doesn't get you that job. People are like, oh wow. This is interesting. Don't do that.

[00:29:32] **Amy:** We'll put a link in the show notes so you can see not only that resume, but also the article that we're talking about here.

[00:29:38] **Nikki:** So I learned by failure, which I think is a really great way to learn. I don't think that we should be scared of failure. And as a perfectionist, I know that it's really hard to fail, especially if there's a, you put a lot of self worth into something like your job or your skills or your craft or, your ability to get a job.

[00:29:57] I totally get that because I went some time in [00:30:00] between jobs or getting my first job as a user researcher. And I know that terrible feeling, but failure is one of the best ways to learn as long as you're failing and getting feedback and iterating. Something that I learned along the way is, my resume is going to people who are looking at it really quickly really quickly and deciding.

[00:30:26] Should we talk to this person or not, right? And because like, when we sit down to write a resume, we're oh, shit, what are we doing here? Okay we're just staring at a blank page, what am I doing? And what I realized is, A lot of the confusion or a lot of the sitting and staring at that stupid blinking cursor is that I didn't understand what the goal was.

[00:30:48] What was I trying to do? What was the point of my resume? And cause we can go into this stuff and just be like, yeah, we need a resume. Okay. Here's a resume. Here's a template off of Canva. Let's fill in the template, but it's again, what is the goal? What [00:31:00] are we trying to accomplish and who are we talking to and what message are we trying to get across?

[00:31:04] And once I learned or had a better idea, at least for myself, what that goal was, then I was able to actually cater my resume. So what I mean by that is, again, somebody is looking through this really quickly and they are trying to assess. Is this person a good enough fit based on this, small amount of data for us to want to talk to them.

[00:31:26] And usually what they are looking for is, would this person be able to come in and make an impact at the organization? And how do we know that? By them telling us on their resume. That they have made an an impact in the past and then we can project a little bit of okay, this person has collaborated with stakeholders in this way and educated them in this way and had this impact. Who could they do it at ours? At our organization, right?

[00:31:51] So think about what am I trying to get across? What is the goal of this? And what information do I need to convey in my [00:32:00] resume to help achieve that goal? Think about it as a research study, as a product.

[00:32:04] **Amy:** Yeah. Your audience, the message, like he said, and the level of fidelity of information. It doesn't have to be all encompassing. It might not even have every single thing or every single major project that you've done in a particular job. But you want to be specific enough. Yeah, I, I think that's great. And it sounds like common sense, but just, Pause for a moment and ask yourself, what is the purpose of this document? Or my LinkedIn, what what is the point of certain information on that?

[00:32:34] And a previous person we had on this show, Sally Carson talked about using the jobs to be done framework and applying that here. And I think that's a great idea. It's what is the job of the person that is going to be using my resume or, Viewing my website or any number of interactions that you would have. And then, take that and tailor each one to that particular user and their goals.

[00:32:57] One other thing I want to touch on about [00:33:00] resumes real quick is what is the best way to approach talking about your impact with UX? It's a little bit harder sometimes to describe our impact. Sometimes we don't have any impact, not for any reason of our own choosing, but maybe projects get canceled or we get laid off or whatever it might be.

[00:33:17] So how do you suggest people do that? So they're presenting something that is tangible to the person looking at the resume.

[00:33:24] **Nikki:** I would say that every action has a reaction. So everything that you do has some sort of reaction. You might not have increased conversion rate by 15%. Get creative because not everything has to be about product metrics, right? Did your work make recruitment two days faster, ? Did, the time from when you got a research request to when you started research, is that faster now? Metric that I actually started tracking was intake documents? How many intake documents were filled out successfully where we didn't actually have to have meetings, or [00:34:00] where I didn't have to return the intake document, ? Or, was your synthesis faster? Did you get better at affinity diagramming? Did you was your screener survey more effective?

[00:34:10] Like literally take every single, if you're struggling to be like, okay I didn't impact some sort of product metric because it either got canceled or nobody did anything yet. I got laid off. I don't know any of that stuff. Then take apart every part of your research process for that particular project and say, where did I actually have an impact?

[00:34:30] Was it in planning? Was it in scoping? Was it in recruitment? Was it in conducting it? Was it in the synthesis, the reporting, the workshopping? Like I had, I did effective research and, as an impact, I went from five workshop participants to 15 workshop participants. So I increased the engagement of stakeholders. over time. There is always an impact. You just need to just take off that product mindset and say, where did I make an impact within my research [00:35:00] process or within the research process? So get out there and think outside of the box because yes, for every action you have, incrementally move something forward with a study. I promise. You just need to think about it.

[00:35:13] **Amy:** That's a really great idea to break it all down and look at things one by one. Especially if you're starting from scratch. I also think that talking about hypothetical or intended impact can work too, ? Because sometimes we do these major projects and you and I have both been here. Probably every researcher has been here where you've. Done all of this work and you had some intended business outcomes some decisions that hypothetically you would be making based on the research choosing what to ship, whatever it might be and whether or not those things happened, you still did this really important work with the intention of some particular outcome.

[00:35:51] We've talked a lot about what it's like to be someone looking for a job, different materials that you're working on, some of the [00:36:00] pitfalls some of the advice that you have for making those as good as possible. And I'm wondering if you could share a little bit about what it's like. like To be on the other side of the hiring process. So as the hiring manager is trying to fill a role, what is actually involved on the back end that people may not be aware of?

[00:36:20] **Nikki:** I was so stoked to be a hiring manager. I was like, Ooh, I get this cool new responsibility. Like. Thanks. This is neat. I've always wanted to do this. And then I was like, Oh God, this is horrible. Because what, honestly, like it's terrible because what's happening is essentially you're sifting through all these resumes. And then you're rejecting people, which just feels terrible, even if you've never met them and you're just rejecting them on the basis of a resume.

[00:36:47] It feels like crap to do that, honestly. And then you're going into interviews with people and then you're getting to know them and then you're rejecting them, right? Which feels even worse, especially if they've made it quite far through the process. So I [00:37:00] promise you, It's hard because as a candidate or a job seeker, the hiring manager can feel a little bit like a bad person sometimes or get some kind of a bad reputation maybe.

[00:37:13] But what people are looking to us as hiring managers to do is fill a role with the perfect candidate and that is solely based off of hypothetical information like we are, we, it is one of the worst and hardest things to do is to take a person who has talked about things that they may or may not have done in the past so that's also something that we have to be skeptical about and say, yeah, this person will fill all of our gaps and work perfectly in our organization.

[00:37:45] And so there is a lot of stress behind the scenes of trying to figure out how to assess whether or not that person is a fit. So when you're a job seeker think about that hiring manager and what they are trying to [00:38:00] accomplish and try and alleviate that stress because as a hiring manager, I don't

want to reject anybody, I want everybody to have a job, I want everybody to have a chance, I want everybody to have a great experience, I want everybody to try it and figure it out and have a job within user research, ?

[00:38:16] I have cried rejecting people before because I feel really bad and I am not telling you that you are bad. I am not telling you that you are not worth it. I'm not telling you that you suck at user research and that you should run away from this. And never returned to the industry. What I'm telling you is given the circumstances in which our organization is operating, you probably wouldn't be set up for success here. And what I don't want to do is put you into a environment in which you might fail. And that's why you are getting rejected from this.

[00:38:56] **Amy:** Yeah it's really hard for any human I think [00:39:00] to look at something objectively and go, they're not rejecting me as a person. I don't need to take this personally. It's a very human thing to take things personally, especially high risk. things that affect our livelihoods and ability to pay our rent and all of that. And especially in this job market, trying hard to land a role, getting fewer responses. And it's not what it was two years ago. So I do think there is a lot of stress there, but that is an important reminder that it's.

[00:39:28] It's not a personal thing. It's a fit thing. It's a this one other candidate had this one other thing that, we wanted. And that's what it comes down to. And I think it is important for everyone to know that there's stress on all sides. This is not an easy thing for everyone.

[00:39:44] Hiring managers, not just the hiring process, but everything it takes to even get a budget for the role to begin with and, taking in all of the opinions of everyone else about who should be hired and what they should be working on. It's a great [00:40:00] burden that you have to go through to hire just a single person, if not build out an entire team.

[00:40:05] **Nikki:** Yeah, because what happens is usually the most stress comes from that first person, because if you're a user researcher trying to build a team, and you make an incorrect first hire, your dreams of a team are probably gone, because it's just Thank you very it's the same thing where if something bad happens with user research with a stakeholder who's never done it before and then they're like user research is dumb because that's the only, experience that they've had with it.

[00:40:33] So it's a very careful, intentional, and scary moment for everybody involved. And I do appreciate that High risk, putting yourself out there, being

vulnerable as a candidate can be really hard and scary, right? But everybody is vulnerable in this situation. So maybe if you're having a hard time, just remember that everybody is in a vulnerable state and always think about, yes, as a hiring manager, I'm assessing if you're a [00:41:00] good fit, but take the time as a candidate to assess it.

[00:41:02] I'm a good fit. For you, if I'm asking you questions where you're sitting there being like that's weird. That's a red flag. And think about if that organization and the person or the people that you're talking to are actually a good fit for you too, because you might find out, that's not the case.

[00:41:19] **Amy:** Yeah it's almost worse to end up in a bad fit job even these days than not having a job. And I don't say that lightly. I mean that so many people go into roles where it is toxic. It's traumatic. There's some huge mismatch and we have to be careful about our choices as to whether or not to take a job if there are some strong concerns about it.

[00:41:45] Okay. You will either end up in a position that you don't like so much or continue waiting for something that's going to be a better fit. So definitely something to keep in mind.

[00:41:54] **Nikki:** Yeah, one of the roles that I ended up in, which was a really bad fit. I took it because I was [00:42:00] desperate and I wasn't sure how I was going to pay rent. Like I was at that point where I was like, I don't know. You know what? Even though I saw some red flags and I don't think this is going to be a good fit, I'm going to take it. And it was that desperation that got me into that situation. And yeah, I got two months of salary, but I also had to miss a family friend's funeral because I didn't have PTO built up yet. I understand the desperation and I get it 100%, but also keep in mind that, it's sometimes not worth it because the overhead that had to go into that and the stress that went into it completely ruined me for quite some time.

[00:42:40] **Amy:** Yep. , this is a really challenging time for, So many people in research, in other specialties of UX and just in the general tech job market, things are pretty hard right now.

[00:42:52] What would you let's say you were going through the job search right now, like, how would you take care of yourself? during this time.

[00:42:59] **Nikki:** It's [00:43:00] funny. I am in a way because I've restarted my consultancy business here in Jersey. So I am in a way going through the job process. And I do have to take care of myself because I'm looking for clients.

[00:43:09] I'm doing a lot of cold outreach and looking for people who are interested in engaging with me as a consultant. And one thing that I realized is we've already touched on it is to really not take this personally because it's, They are saying no not necessarily to my skill set. They are saying no to a situation, ?

[00:43:29] So something that I've had to put into perspective is that, okay, you're not rejecting me. And then from that kind of understanding, I've actually taken a step back and thought of, let me product ties. My skills, what does that look like? What am I selling people? What am I trying to get people to accomplish? What is the value? What is the benefit of them working with me? And you can do this as like a within a full time role as well It's what are the benefits that you're going to bring to them?

[00:43:56] And so something that has helped me with self care is [00:44:00] objectifying that process a little bit so that i'm not as attached To the outcome, ? So that has really helped me with any sort of rejections, but it's also helped me clearly be able to articulate benefits and value adds that I bring to the table in a much more effective way that's not as emotionally charged.

[00:44:20] **Amy:** Yeah, compartmentalizing in a way, ? You are still a person. There are a lot of frankly unfair things that we have to do as a job seeker or small business, ? Whatever it might be when we're trying to get some money to pay our bills. But at the same time, if you can compartmentalize and go, I got a rejection. All right, moving on. Yeah, that client wasn't interested in hiring me for this project. All right, moving on. It's it takes some practice, right? Especially if you maybe are a recovering perfectionist. Uh, like, I think both of us can, claim that title. And yeah, you, learned to do it better over time.

[00:44:55] **Nikki:** And I would say that it's okay to feel fear, anxiety. It's okay to feel the bad [00:45:00] vibes, it's not like I sit there and I'm like, oh, whatever. Like I, I had I cold emailed a bunch of people, and when nobody got back to me, I was devastated, ?

[00:45:10] Because I'm like, shit, like I need to. Do this. And so there was fear and anxiety, but I try to as best as I can time box that. So I'm like, okay, I will spiral. I will allow myself to spiral. I will allow myself to feel this like fear and anxiety, but for a certain amount of time.

[00:45:28] And especially if I like email somebody and they don't email me immediately back, I need to check myself because not everybody's It's on email, all the time. And so maybe something that you can do is you can say, okay, it's

okay for me to feel this way. Is there a certain amount of time that I take to recover from this?

[00:45:47] So if you get rejected from a job, if you're like five interviews deep in a job and you get rejected, that might take a little bit more time for you to recover from than okay, the recruiter said no to me. So just think about okay, if I had [00:46:00] time, I think this what is it? In Sex and the City, they're like, Oh, it takes half the time that you've been dating somebody to get over them, right? So if you've been dating somebody for six months, it takes three months, like some stupid quote, like that. But think about it. It's okay, like, how long on average is it taking me to recover from this and feel the feelings?

[00:46:17] And, but time box them and say, okay, it's okay for me to be anxious right now. But then go back to like, all right, how might we, how might I move on for this? How might I quell this anxiety? Like maybe that's a walk. Maybe that's applying for another job, but do the things that feel as okay as they can in that current moment, right?

[00:46:36] And feel the things and then move forward.

[00:46:39] **Amy:** Yeah, totally human legit response to these challenges and it's important to not burn out either, if you keep trying and trying that's, good and all, but, Really being aware, I think, observant of how things are going for you, how you're responding or reacting and taking some time, taking a bit of a [00:47:00] break every now and then and making sure you're taking care of yourself throughout the job search process in times like these is more important than ever.

[00:47:08] **Nikki:** Yeah, it's, you asked me about Pokemon lessons so when you have a roster of six Pokemon that you use at one time, and when all of your Pokemon faint, you get transported back to the most recent Pokemon center that you've been at, or the most, or the closest one, I can't remember, and it's, that's just me, I'm like, okay, we got knocked out, go and heal yourself.

[00:47:30] Because the Pokemon Center is where you go to heal your Pokemon and they rest and they recover and it's okay, you get knocked down a little bit, go back to that place of healing, right? Go back to something that heals you, something that, feels good for you and you don't need to sit in it.

[00:47:43] **Amy:** That's a great Pokemon lesson or metaphor to close on. Thank you so much for joining me today. This was fantastic. And before we end do you have any pluggables you would like to plug?

[00:47:56] **Nikki:** Yeah, of course. Please follow me on Substack. I [00:48:00] write a lot of stuff and talk about a lot of stuff on my Substack. That is a place where you can find content like my resume guide. I also have a guide on case studies there too and job interviews. I'm actually going to be writing a lot of content.

[00:48:12] Actually, I will say something on here before I will say it anywhere. Ooh. Yeah. I'm writing another book. Ooh. Yeah. Yeah. I'm actually writing more of a career guide based book. So if you want to see some of that content, I'm going to be trialing some of that content on Substack. So if you're struggling with the job process, check out my Substack and then my membership and mentorship. You can take a look to work more closely with me.

[00:48:39] **Amy:** All right. And would those be found at User Research Academy on your website? Yep. On my website. [Userresearchacademy.com](https://userresearchacademy.com)?

[00:48:46] Yes, that is it. All right. Fantastic. And yep. Don't forget Nikki's book about having impact that's available on Amazon as well.

[00:48:55] And that is all the time we have for today. If there's a question or topic you'd [00:49:00] like us to discuss, please reach out to me on LinkedIn. And if you're so inclined, we'd greatly appreciate your support for the podcast by leaving a rating and review on Spotify, Apple podcasts, or wherever you get your podcasts.

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