



A Day in the Life of a Community Program Owner

 **SNAPSHOT**

SPEAKERS

Colleen DeLory (Elsevier), Heidi Hume (Worldwide ERC), Kendra Jackson (Qualtrics) & Kelly Schott (TheCR)

COMPETENCIES

Community Management

MATURITY PHASES

CMM1, CMM2, CMM3

HIGHLIGHTS

1. **Looking for advice on how to move into a director-level role?**
This call yielded 5 lessons learned, which also served as central themes throughout the call.
2. **Interested in the top skills needed for community leadership?**
The Panelists shared 10 skills they believe to be most valuable.
3. **Want to know how to leverage your resources?** Kendra shared 2 best practices.

OVERVIEW

- **Background Heidi Hume, Worldwide ERC.** Heidi is the Director of Community and Engagement at Worldwide ERC, which stands for the Employee Relocation Council. They are a trade association that specializes in helping companies relocate their employees.
 - Heidi has been with Worldwide ERC for 19 years. She began in the research department, then worked on the website, then went to marketing and then to the community.
 - Heidi went to her CEO to ask for the community job. Her CEO wasn't sure she was the right person for the role as Heidi was a Senior Manager in marketing at the time. The CEO wanted to hire a lower-titled person for the role, but Heidi made the business case for why it should be a director-level role and why she would be a good fit. Heidi was hired and since then, her role has changed again. Now she oversees the membership side of the business, as well, which includes community engagement.
- **Background Colleen DeLory, Elsevier.** Colleen is the Director of Community Marketing. Elsevier is the largest global scientific publisher. They are moving towards becoming an information analytics company in the health and technology space.



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OVERVIEW, CON'T.

- Colleen has an MBA in Marketing and Management. She has worked primarily in marketing communications, which has led to this role in community marketing. Colleen was a Senior Manager when, through a reorganization, she began to report to the VP. Colleen's strengths are editing, writing and content marketing. As a Director, she has been involved in many large-scale programs, vendor management, procurement and employee management. Her forte is establishing new programs from scratch. Given her positive track record with the company, this gave her the perfect opportunity to, like Heidi, ask for the role.
- There are 3 distinct external audiences in the company. Colleen's focus has been on academic (university and college) librarians. They create a global newsletter in conjunction with a thought-leadership content marketing program. It consists of 36,000 subscribers, 24,000 people in their webinar channel – which was non-existent prior to Colleen starting with the company – and about 30,000 social media channel followers.
- The newsletter was initially a print newsletter. It is now completely digital and incorporates all the social media channels. The goal now is to deepen advocacy. They are looking to move from a push model where content is simply provided to a model that focuses on product certification programs to create external product advocates.
- **Background Kendra Jackson, Qualtrics.** Kendra is the Head of the Digital Support Team. Her journey to this role began in higher education, then leadership development. She went back to school to get her MBA. She then worked in operations, which is her basic mindset. She has had to learn about marketing, SEO and related functions, which clearly impacts the operational effectiveness of the community.
 - Qualtrics is a tech company. Historically, sales businesses are afraid of negative community conversation. Kendra spent a great deal of time trying to pitch the idea of a digital support channel.
 - They are mainly a support community. Kendra has a team of 4 people who focus on all digital content from support documentation and the community. They see that as a lever because those questions and answers become public-facing documentation about their software.
 - Kendra's journey to community was strange in that by trying to figure out a way to get more leverage from their online resources, her research pointed her in the direction of community as a great way to deal with tail-end use cases for their software.
 - Kendra and her team pitched the idea of online community, even though the company wasn't ready for it. It took Kendra 6 months of road-showing the business case for it. With only one person managing most of the community programming, it yielded a very good ROI for helping people to get answers to their questions. They are currently at almost 5000 community users.



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OVERVIEW, CON'T.

- **Deeper insights into the Panelist's roles.** Panelists were asked to describe their current roles in detail.
 - **Kendra.** Kendra started out with a team that consisted of herself and one other person. Fortunately, given that they are part of a larger support organization in their operations group, she was able to pull in what they call “product specialists,” who are customer support professionals. They know the company’s software very well and they know how to talk to the customers. They have a strong pulse for what gets customers frustrated. That’s important because those are the skills needed to revamp all the documentation.
 - Over time, they’ve been able to prove value through a metric that they call “ticket-to-answer.” Basically, that means that people have received an answer to their question in the community vs. calling into their support second tier, which is a cost north of \$20 per call. It represents a great deal of savings for the company.
 - As a result, they have expanded to 4 people, including one full-time writer for the documentation. The writer has been a great addition because the role ties well to the community. Someone is focused on content creation and giving feedback to the community in a way that’s succinct and clear and creates good messaging for community members.
 - They also have one full-time community moderator. They don’t write in the community. They expect customers to help each other in order to make space for community dialogue vs. strictly support. They really want the community to feel unique. Moderation is a way to ensure that the conversations move in the desired direction.
 - They have many competitions for customers to earn swag, along with competitions for the in-person summit held annually. This has helped to create engagement.
 - Lastly, they have a program that reviews support tickets to glean information for online documentation to help keep that connection with customers who call into support. This ensures real-world interaction between support professionals in the community and the online documentation space.
 - **Heidi.** Heidi currently manages the community on her own. There are a few colleagues who manage their own groups within the community, but overall it resides with Heidi. They are now working to take on more of an engagement membership role. Heidi manages those parts of the business, as well.
 - She now manages one employee, who is primarily focused on the membership side of the business. From a community standpoint, it’s everything from growth to budget to how users complain to how they use the community and how they can make it better.



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OVERVIEW, CON'T.

- It is still a very green community. Being fully transparent, Heidi feels that they are still very focused on the tiny details vs. the big picture strategy that includes a cohesive playbook.
- **Colleen.** Colleen has one direct report, who took over the content thought leadership program from her. Colleen was asked to launch a certification program aimed at deepening engagement by creating more product advocates. This has involved a great deal of work with vendors, roughly 8 in total for this advocacy program. That's the bigger part of her management role as it entails the creation of contractor agreements and statements of work, all the invoicing and budgeting and meeting with them to go over the project on a daily basis.
 - Their big programs are the global community engagement program and the more selective certification program. Next they'll focus on modeling that for other user groups. They are currently investigating a community cloud as a platform for the user groups so that they can continue to engage with users after the certification program.
 - The certification program has also involved researching a learning management system. Luckily, someone in the health sciences area had already engaged Canvas. As a result, they were able to take advantage of that and not have to go through the vendor selection process. They can just partner with health sciences for the usage.
 - This year the focus will be on transitioning certification into more of a usage advocacy drive so that it has more of a program outline.
- **Central themes of the discussion.** The discussion yielded 3 prominent take aways, which are evident in the best practices and corroborated in the lessons learned:
 - For community careers, the waters are still murky. A title does not make a director as the markets not aligned. Some community strategists are doing director-level work without the title to show for it.
 - Ask for what you need and advocate for yourself.
 - Learn how to scale resources with part-time headcount and advocacy programs to help transfer the day-to-day community management tasks. This will help to free-up time to focus on strategy.



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BEST PRACTICES

- **Understand the top skills needed for community leadership.** The Panelists shared what they believe are the top 3 skills needed for community leadership.

Kendra	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Influence and the ability to sell your story through metrics and a short elevator pitch. 2. Good follow-up skills that help you to close the loop with the customers in your community. It helps the community to connect with the company because they feel that they are heard. When something is done for them, they are more likely to give back in the form of engagement and feedback. Relationships are built this way. 3. Act on the feedback and make the appropriate changes quickly. Adaptability is critical.
Heidi	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Be an advocate for the community, both internally and for staff. 2. The ability to collaborate with all departments across the organization. Listen to their pain points and help others to achieve their goals through community. 3. The ability to focus on customer success. If you can focus on customers by helping them to achieve their goals, they will continue to engage with the community.
Colleen	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop deep customer knowledge in order to stay current with community members. 2. Project management skills. Often there are many large-scale projects on the go with different groups. The ability to manage projects is essential. 3. Leadership skills that encompass collaboration and communication. If you want visibility for your community, you have to communicate up and make sure that people know what's going on. 4. Be comfortable with technology. If you're not comfortable with technology, you're in the wrong spot.

- **Learn to leverage your resources.** Kendra shared 2 best practices for leveraging resources:
 - Recruit others to help part time. While it may feel like a pain to onboard them, it is incredibly valuable and also offers worthwhile input.
 - Explore community member moderation. Turn to your super users in the community who you would trust to moderate your community. Super users are very willing to take on that responsibility.



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LESSONS LEARNED

- Participants offered their advice for making the move into a director-level role:
 - Make a case and ask for it.
 - Look to other companies because sometimes you may have to make the move to another organization to get what you want. Keep in mind that the title does not always reflect the work.
 - Articulate your value with proof points.
 - Hillary advised others to recognize the need to start planning and stop doing the day-to-day tasks. Create plans and show leadership that you have forethought and the ability to strategize.
 - Find ways to level up what you're doing by pushing down the work that's easy. What's uncomfortable about growing your career is that you no longer get to check off several boxes on a "to do" list. Find a way to push some of the work down so that others can have growth opportunities, as well.

- Participants and Panelists discussed what takes up most of their time on a daily and weekly basis:
 - How to engage with the content and spark conversation.
 - Policing to ensure that service providers don't try to sell in the community.
 - Administration.
 - Increasing membership.
 - Convincing people to use the community and take part in the programming.
 - Product development that comes out of the community.
 - Training and development of staff.
 - Content development.

- Colleen admitted that it is very difficult to step away from the tasks that she is good at – such as content development and writing – in order to focus more on strategy and the development of, in her case, the certification program. It's just too easy for her to take on the daily tasks in the belief that she can get it done faster.



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LESSONS LEARNED, CON'T.

- In order to get people on board with the community strategy, take the time to decide on the pitch. What is the why of the strategy? How does it align with the business goals so that the community can support these business goals? Convince others that community is not more work. It's just working in a different, more productive way.
- Don't be afraid to ask for what you want. Colleen and Heidi made the business case for why they felt they should be in their current roles. Heidi focused on her experience and her relationship with others in the company. A new project like community management needed that experience and relationship strength. Colleen focused on her previous achievements with a list of success-oriented proof points.
 - Colleen added that if you are vying for this role, don't be afraid to negotiate for more money. It's not just a title change. She also negotiated an extra week's vacation.
- Kendra explained that there were 3 key things that helped to get her community up and running:
 - Help others to understand the point of the digital support team.
 - A cut and dry business case as to why it was valuable. The ROI. They went with relatively low-cost software. They only had to get to a 3% deflection rate, but they are actually closer to 10%. Consequently, it has been a great investment for the company.
 - Kendra created a cross-functional advisory board called the "steering group" to help pick the vendor. There was a lot of politics on the vendor search that she wasn't expecting. One of the ways she was able to pull out of all the politics was with this steering group. They met monthly to help with the various approvals and decisions needed through the implementation process. The steering group consisted of a valuable set of senior leaders who felt tied to the decisions made and were supportive.



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ADDITIONAL INSIGHTS

- Kelly asked participants to share their dream role:
 - For one participant, her dream role is not in community, but she keeps getting dragged back into community.
 - Another participant would love to lead the intersection between learning and work by using collaboration to empower learning in the workflow.
 - Using customer engagement as a strategic growth strategy for companies. Hillary also shares this passion, i.e. customer support/happiness in a mission-based organization.
 - Another participant has a short-term goal to be a strategist and a long-term goal to be a director of community.
 - For yet another participant, her dream role is to be the full owner of the community program with a community manager, admin, and the moderation team reporting to her.
 - Others were on the call to learn different career paths.

RESOURCES

- As discussed in the chat: [Careers Resource Bundle](#)
- As discussed in the chat: [Community Careers and Compensation Research](#)