

# Bringing It Back From The Brink: Re-Engaging An Underwhelming Community

## HIGHLIGHTS

- **Wondering how Sam approaches the concept of community?** Sam shared her 3 basic goals.
- **Looking for engagement best practices?** Sam shared 6 easy-to-follow best practices that have helped improve engagement for not one, but 2 communities.
- **Want to improve case deflection, but still maintain engagement?** Admittedly this will be easier with a support community, but Sam still offered 4 great ideas to help with this point.
- **Curious about which mindset will help you improve engagement?** This little change in mindset will go a long way in helping you increase engagement.



### SPEAKERS

Sam Pirok (Extreme Networks) and Kelly Schott (TheCR)

### COMPETENCIES

Community Management, Culture

### MATURITY PHASES

CMM1, CMM2, CMM3

# OVERVIEW

- **Background Sam Pirok.** Sam is the Community Moderator for Extreme Networks. They are known for their wireless support, most notably for the Super Bowl. They are also a global company with a large community of close to 39,000 community members.
  - When Sam first joined the company, they had a huge community base, but less than a 1% engagement rate.
  - Sam's first community prior to this one was an interesting experience. It had also been a very quiet community that had been in existence for about 5 years. By the time Sam got there, it had been neglected for about 3 years.
    - Before moving to this community, Sam worked in technical support. They needed someone technical in the community. The person who was responsible for community quit half way through a migration from Get Satisfaction to Salesforce. Sam didn't have any community experience. The company wanted Sam to run the community, but the company didn't even know what that meant.
    - They ended the migration without moving any content over, no user records, no points, etc. Basically, they started the community from scratch. The old community was put into 'read' mode for a year and then deleted.
    - Unfortunately, Sam started with an angry user base that was shoved into the new community without warning and without resources.

## OVERVIEW

- After 3 years, they enjoyed a 20% case deflection rate and a customer satisfaction rating of 80 when the industry standard at the time was 50. They definitely turned the community around, but it was an onerous process.
- Without the needed experience, Sam approached the job from a common sense standpoint, i.e. “Why are they coming here and how can I help them?” They are a support community and do wireless and wired networking. Therefore, Sam figured that the users were likely network admin or end users. These users don’t know where to go for these types of questions and they are hoping someone will be able to answer them. Sam saw her job as giving them the help that they needed. Setting up the channels to get them help was her first step. Her support and technical background was a big help. Sam approached this new community with the following goals:
  - Meet the basic needs first if the need has not been met yet.
  - Work to improve the experience. Sam’s job was to help them help themselves, i.e. self-service resources, knowledge articles, training for people coming to the community without framing it as training, etc.
  - At the end of it all, she wanted a functioning community. She improved it as much as she could, but she still wanted to make it fun. This would help improve the satisfaction rate.
    - Sam also used this approach with her current community, since it was so successful the first time around.



# BEST PRACTICES

- **As a starting point, send out a survey to your community members.** You may not know what they want. It's not always obvious. Even if you do know and aren't anticipating any surprises, it's a way for the users to feel heard.
  - Sam's first step was to reach out to those who left comments in the survey. It was a great way to introduce herself and it affirmed that an actual human being was listening.
  - Sending a survey has a lot of positives, but it could also shed light on some negative points. Sam wanted to find those pain points so that she could solve them quickly and easily, i.e. grab the low hanging fruit. That is a great way to build trust.
  - In Sam's second community, she also sent out a survey. She learned of a huge pain point that was mentioned by almost every survey respondent, but she couldn't do anything about it. It was a company policy that was beaten to the ground and no longer up for discussion by the time Sam arrived. So, keep in mind that that is a possible downside to sending out a survey, but at least you will be aware of the issue moving forward. Focus instead on satisfying other pain points.



# BEST PRACTICES

- **Find your super users.** There will still be people out there fighting the fight. You don't need to wait for your membership to start being more engaged to find your super users. Super users appreciate being heard, so it will be to your benefit to reach out to them, thank them for their service and let them know you are there for them.
  - Reaching out to your users offers a personal introduction and lets them know that you've noticed them. It's a win/win.



<https://network.communityroundtable.com/browse/resource-bundles/memberleadership>



# BEST PRACTICES

- **Set expectations.** If you say to a member that you are going to talk to them soon, soon means completely different things to different people. Instead, give a timeframe, i.e. by the end of the business day. That sets an expectation instead of the user getting angry because his/her definition of soon was half an hour, not several hours. Once you set that deadline, be sure to honor it, whether you have a solution or not. You don't have to meet that deadline with an answer; it just needs to be communication. Let the user know what you've been doing to try and resolve the issue and let him/her know when you will reach out again. Keep setting and meeting deadlines. It is a wonderful and effective way to build trust.
- **Communicate often.** Make sure it's constant. Be annoying if you have to, but let them know that you're there and you're working on the problem. Don't leave anything to an assumption because the assumption won't be in your favor.

# BEST PRACTICES

- **Build trust – that is your job.** You are there to build trust with your members that someone is going to answer them. If no one is answering, they won't post. Your goal is to build a relationship with your members and super users. Let your super users know you see them out there engaging in the community and thank them for their efforts. Reward your super users by bringing them into any beta tests to get their opinions/feedback. Involve them.
- **Show, don't tell.** This is a personal motto for Sam. Show them that you are going to help them by actually helping them. Meet deadlines and show them that you're there. Don't just say it and then not come through for them.

# LESSONS LEARNED

- Sam uses InSided currently, but they are looking for a new tool. Sam looks at every question that comes in through this channel, which could be 50-100 per day on average depending on what's going on and whether or not a new release has been launched. Fortunately, it comes to her from one channel, but the members have different boards for posting their questions.
  - One participant is working towards having one channel because she wants her members to know that she's listening. It's very easy for questions to fall through the cracks with more than one channel. She is trying to get other community managers who own different places to help, but they are very busy and don't have the time to monitor questions. It's a pain point for this participant.
  - Sam added that she works with support technicians. They have cases and calls that they have to answer and quotas to meet. They already have a full time job and she acknowledged that it is a struggle. She tries to let them know that if they take the time to answer questions, their return will be exponential. But yes, it is a constant struggle.
    - For executives – especially in those communities that have paid contracts that need support and those that do not pay for support – the ability to rid the case input of repetitive cases through knowledge support articles will free up the tech's time for the paid customers and the more complex cases. Emphasize this point.



# LESSONS LEARNED

- In Salesforce, Sam measured case deflection. Members went to a page to fill out their case and as they entered their subject and description, a side panel popped up with knowledge articles based on the key words that the member entered. If they went to the page to fill out a case and clicked on a knowledge article instead *and* didn't come back for 24 hours, it was considered a deflected case. Admittedly it's not foolproof, but it does give them an idea. In the end, their deflection rate was 20%.
  - The article knowledge base was obviously a key factor, but they also used conversations and/or anything that helped them bounce away from the case creation and back into the community.
  - They approached this by analyzing the cases coming in and then writing knowledge articles about those subjects. The articles that were the most popular were basic problems.
  - If you can't have your community and support ticket in the same place, at least have your case page connected to your community resources.

# LESSONS LEARNED

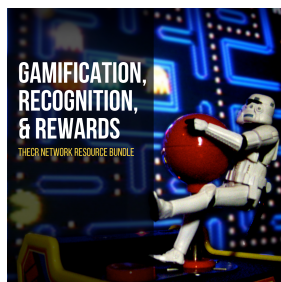
- Recognition has been a big motivator for Sam's super users. She thought that she would have to give them more, but recognition was a huge factor on its own. Saying thank you and helping where she could went a long way. Giving them input into upcoming projects was also a big motivator and trust builder. Now she is looking at gamification when she has the budget.
- Sam does use templates to reach out to users, but she ensures that the language is friendly so that it doesn't come across as robotic. In order to avoid over-using the templates, she picks the actions that deserve a more personal response. People know that she can't personally reach out to 38,000 people so there will be templates, but she tries to make those templates as friendly as possible. Receiving a template isn't horrible – it's still an acknowledgement – but if it's a real accomplishment, the personal response will be very much appreciated. For instance, someone who earns 100 points in a day. That person is obviously very engaged and enthusiastic and deserves to be personally acknowledged. It comes down to quality vs. quantity in the engagement.



# LESSONS LEARNED

- When building engagement, form a mindset that you are not alone. You have people out there who are using your product and want to tell you their opinion. You have super users, so get their input. You'd be surprised at the type of meaningful ideas that can be brought forth.
  - Sam also reaches out to frequent employee users in the community and asks for their opinions. She also asks what other communities that they belong to and what they like/don't like in those communities.
  - You'd be surprised at how helpful the users in the community can be. This also helps them to feel more invested in the community.
- If there are any changes coming down the pipe, let your community know ahead of time. Give them time to ask questions. If you can, let them see a demo beforehand. No one likes change, but people in IT, ironically, hate change even more than the average.

<https://network.communityroundtable.com/browse/resource-bundles/gamification>



<https://network.communityroundtable.com/browse/resource-bundles/engagement>

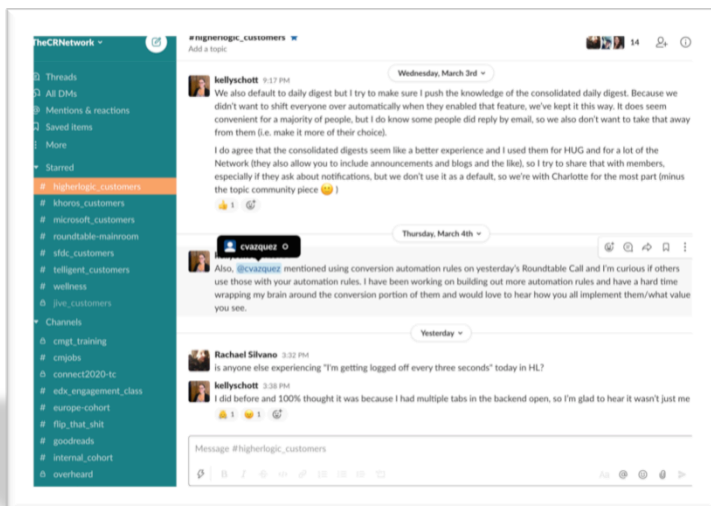


# LESSONS LEARNED

- Kelly asked Sam how she deals with the naysayers in the community and those who absolutely refuse to accept any change. Sam replied that it depends on the personality. People like that usually just want to be heard. Answer their concerns. Let them rant. That is usually enough to calm the conversation down to the point where you can at least have a conversation.
- One participant tries to use behavioral economics for her online classes. She plays on limited time and deadlines and a sense of urgency for enrolment in her online classes. Higher Logic has some generic inactivity notices that can be customized. This participant used their generic “we miss you” and tweaked it for each of her online classes.
  - For anyone who doesn’t log in for a week, this participant sends a “we miss you” notice. She sets up the conversion rule to pull which community she wants to receive the notices. For instance, this participant has Canadian students and US students who have different deadlines and receive, as a result, different messaging.

## LESSONS LEARNED

- Finally, set up a conversion rule to track the metrics to see who you are converting. This participant set it up so that if the student receives the notice and they reply, they reply directly to this participant.
  - This participant turns the notices on about a month before the deadline. She keeps them up almost to the end. She is amazed at the amount of interaction that she receives from these notices.
  - Keep in mind that if you do this, you will receive many emails. This participant takes about 5 hours a week to respond to these emails. It is a lot of work, but it pays off.
    - Sam added that you can leverage your super users to help with these emails.



#higherlogic\_customers:  
[https://app.slack.com/client/T04NXSHV8/  
CL9PMR1R7/details/](https://app.slack.com/client/T04NXSHV8/CL9PMR1R7/details/)

# LESSONS LEARNED

- Sam wanted to address the problem of gaining so many new users that it lowers your engagement rate. There isn't anything that you can do in the moment to make it look better. Make your executives understand that you are driving people in and that's why the percentages are technically going down. Show them what it would look like if this didn't happen, which might take some math on your part. Just know that you are going in the right direction, even though it may not look like it and may mean additional struggles.
  - One participant added that perhaps this isn't a good metric. It's like moving from a small town where everyone knows each other to a large city. What percentage of that city is participating and if new people are coming in, what is the percentage of new people who are participating? There are different metrics, but they may not be as interesting. It's something to keep in mind.
  - Sam stated that the metrics she uses need context. The individual metrics don't look great on their own, but if they are explained in context, it makes more sense. Sam believes that metrics need context.
    - Engagement is a tricky metric. Sam feels that she had an advantage because she is a support community. There is an obvious need to be filled when people come to a support community. She also thinks about invisible engagement. They come to the community, they find what they needed and then they leave without posting or saying anything. That's great, but it's difficult to capture.

# LESSONS LEARNED

- If someone inherits an under-performing community, Sam's advice is to focus on the little things. They take minimal effort and help a lot more than you would think. One foot in front of the other is a great philosophy.
  - When Sam inherited her community of 37,000 users, she felt overwhelmed as to how she was going to move that many people in the direction she wanted, especially if they weren't even participating in the community any longer. Getting the 18 super users didn't seem like it would make a big difference, but those little steps helped a great deal.
  - As well, basic recognition – public or private – is incredibly effective. These little steps may not move the mountain, but they will help create momentum from which you can continue to build.




## LESSONS LEARNED

- The most notable resource used by Sam in the beginning stages was the super users. She also relied on the technicians, took the time to recognize them and build a relationship with them. They are going to help her with their internal-facing gamification system.
  - Recognize the people who help you. Make sure that your executives know the value of community.
  - Sam's support community is all about finding answers. If they can help themselves, it is the ultimate win. Obviously, she wants engagement. However, if these users can come to the community and find the answer they are looking for, they will be much happier. Documentation and knowledge articles have been a huge point of development for Sam. If there is a question, it should be documented. People need to be able to find answers.

**(Report) Power Up: Building Relationships with Super Users**

10-24-2019 08:00

  
Kelly Schott

If you're thinking about building out a super user/champion/advocacy program, this is the Roundtable Report for you.

On this call, @Nilsa Fragoso (Verizon) and @Tuvy Le (Alteryx) shared how they built their super user programs, developed strong relationships with their super users, and created some productive outputs.


Read this report to learn more about:

- Best practices associated with developing super user relationships
- Four keys to success of a super user program
- Motivators that earn you loyalty from your super users

<https://bit.ly/30EOFLG>

**(Report) So You Want To Launch A Super User Program?**

05-27-2020 09:40

  
Kelly Schott

Showcasing the framework that she's used to build out and implement a super user program for her community efficiently, @Anne Larsen facilitated this Roundtable Call to give a look at the overview of how you might launch a super user program.

On this call, Anne talked about a variety of topics, including:

- Four key responsibilities that encompass the super user's overall purpose
- More than eight basic points for setting up a super user framework
- Rewarding super users through different means

If you're interested in super user programs and seeing one in action, [download the Roundtable Report below.](#)

<https://bit.ly/3qLE4sO>