



Avoiding Community Manager Burnout



SNAPSHOT

SPEAKERS

Maria Ogneva ([Salesforce](#)) & Hillary Boucher (TheCR)

COMPETENCIES

Community Management

MATURITY PHASES

CMM1, CMM2, CMM3, CMM4



TOP THREE TAKEAWAYS

Participants discussed the causes of community manager burnout and steps to help prevent it. The highlights of the discussion are noted below:

1. **Causes of burnout:** Participants began the discussion by sharing what they thought were causes of burnout:
 - a. The role is a never-ending cycle.
 - b. Feelings of guilt.
 - c. Continually dealing with the same issues when trying to get others involved.
 - d. Common perception of community (that it should be free).
2. **Learn to pass the torch:** In order to avoid burnout, it is important to learn how to pass the torch, so to speak, and delegate to others.
3. **Avoid feelings of guilt.** Learn how to avoid feelings of guilt by understanding that there is only so much that you can do on your own. Furthermore, if the organization is not willing to provide the necessary resources, that is out of your control. You cannot and should not feel guilty for things that are out of your control. Additionally, try not to internalize issues within the community. Remind yourself that community conflict is not a personal attack. There is nothing wrong with conflict as long as it is creative and constructive.

OVERVIEW

1. **Causes of Burnout:** Maria asked participants to share what they felt were the causes of burnout:
 - a. ***Never-Ending Cycle:*** For one participant, the cause of burnout is the fact that the job is never-ending. It is non-stop and due to the nature of the online connectivity, there is no real way to get away from it without being obvious that you are trying to get away from it. That leads to feelings of guilt. So, it is very difficult to know how to or when to disconnect when striving for some type of work/life balance
 - b. ***Guilt:*** Guilt is a huge contributor to the feeling of burnout. It comes down to setting expectations and/or metrics as to what is considered “doing enough”.
 - i. Society has high expectations for a quick response because they have been conditioned by the immediacy that social media offers in general. Therefore, community managers feel the need to be able to respond immediately, although that is an unrealistic expectation. The end result is a feeling of guilt.
 - c. ***Continually Dealing with the Same Issues:*** This is exacerbated when you go on vacation and come back and nothing has been done within the community. The frustration felt when returning to work only to find that nothing has been done within the community in your absence leads to burnout.
 - d. ***Perception of Community within the Organization:*** Another participant added that a mentality still exists that community management should be free; free time and free effort. It begs the question of whether or not these types of efforts should be tracked to prove value, but the tracking in and of itself becomes a problem and a time thief.

BEST PRACTICES

1. **Learn How to Delegate:** In order to avoid burnout, it is important to learn how to pass the torch, so to speak, and delegate to others. Maria asked for best practices by those who have learned how to do this successfully. Specifically, this involved creating an internal framework, acting as a consultant and creating collaboration spaces.
2. **Establish a Triage System for Responding to Inquiries:** Maria and one other participant explained that they have established a type of triage system for responding to inquiries within the community. For one participant, this is used to foster engagement. For Maria, she had the opposite problem in that she had to pull back asking eager participants to wait at least three hours before responding to best practice type questions so that the community did not become disengaged; it cannot always be the same people answering questions. However, if something is broken or if it is a technical question or if there was some type of company error, that is a very different conversation and it has to be addressed quickly.
 - a. Another participant felt that this depends on the type of community and the type of industry. In her company, due to heavy regulation and privacy laws, it would not work because they need to respond quickly to all inquiries. Furthermore, in order to respond to an inquiry the responder needs to be an authorized spokesperson.
3. **Scale Using the Hub and Spoke Model:** One participant explained that they use a true Hub and Spoke Model in that each business unit is responsible for having one authorized spokesperson and one back up person. Each person is thoroughly trained.
4. **Learn how to Avoid Feelings of Guilt:** Participants offered some solutions:
 - a. Re-direct responsibility back to upper management. If the demand is too high and the case has been made that it is too much for one person to cover, then the community manager should not personally take on the guilt. He/she has brought it to the proper authorities.
 - b. It comes down to relationships. If you have tried to be realistic with your manager and you're still not getting the support you need, make a decision as to whether or not to continue with the organization. You'll be more respected if you set boundaries and do not work beyond the boundaries that you set. Then people know what to expect from you. That might be the only way to avoid succumbing to unwarranted guilt.

BEST PRACTICES, CONT.

5. **Be Careful About What You Put in Writing:** Participants discussed the issue of venting their frustrations when feeling overwhelmed or burnt out:
 - a. One participant explained that she has made it a rule of thumb to never complain publically about her company or any company for that matter. First of all, you never know when that company you just complained about could become a customer or a potential employer.
 - b. Another participant added that having a network internally where he can vent has proven invaluable so that he does not feel the need to vent in public.
 - c. Hillary shared that she is cautious about where she goes for support. She has noticed that the more and more that she works online, the more she prefers to get her support from face-to-face interactions.
 - i. The bottom line is to be careful with what gets put in writing. This is important even with your internal network, but it is especially true externally.
6. **Try Not to Internalize Problems:** Maria shared that it is a harmful thought process to internalize issues within the community. It is easy to feel caught in the middle between community members and upper management. Therefore, a best practice for Maria is to remind herself that it is not a personal attack. She makes a conscious effort to realize that she cannot fix everyone's problem.

LESSONS LEARNED

- Maggie explained that TheCR Research Team sent out a qualitative, fill-in-the blank online survey asking members to describe the top challenges that they faced as community managers within their organization. It was an optional question, but most people did fill it out. Most of the challenges centered on three things: lack of limited resources, lack of executive support and resistance to social technology within their organizations. Delving a bit deeper, the quantitative data shows the stress levels (burnout) of community managers. Furthermore, the community team size does not vary by the size of organizations (a small organization might have the same number of community managers on their team as a larger organization). Needless to say, burnout was a topic that resonated.
- Maria asked participants to describe their organizational structure because oftentimes the reporting structure can dictate the metrics:
 - One participant stated that his department is a corporate resource that sits primarily in marketing. Part of his agreement also includes internal collaboration and community building.
 - Another participant shared that he used to report to support, but now he reports to customer success. Therefore, they are independent of support, but still work in parallel with them. He likes this reporting structure because they are next to support and can follow their metrics (such as cost avoidance), but they do not report directly to support.
- Hillary asked participants to share which solutions they would take away with them today to help them avoid burnout. Participants shared the following:
 - Hillary stated that she is going to take the time for regular exercise to ensure that she takes a break from her routine and gets out of the house (since she works from home). It is such a refreshing best practice and helps clear her head, which leads to increased motivation and productivity.
 - One participant shared that taking lunch out of the office was a goal. Maria added that we need 30 minutes of sunshine each day to replenish vitamins, so a walk outside would be beneficial on so many levels.
 - One participant stated that he plans to re-set routines and plan programming.
 - Stepping away from electronic devices was shared as a goal, but difficult to achieve.
 - Shutting down all screens by 9:30 pm was also shared as a goal.

ADDITIONAL INSIGHTS

Hillary asked participants when their last vacation was and whether or not they were able to completely unplug from work:

- Most of the participants have had a vacation in the last six months and, fortunately, were able to unplug for the duration of their week-long holiday. For one participant, she stayed unplug for a couple of days, but since there was WiFi on the beach, she succumbed to checking her email.