



Melissa: Hi - Welcome - How are you!?

Great, lets get started!

YOUR SPEAKERS

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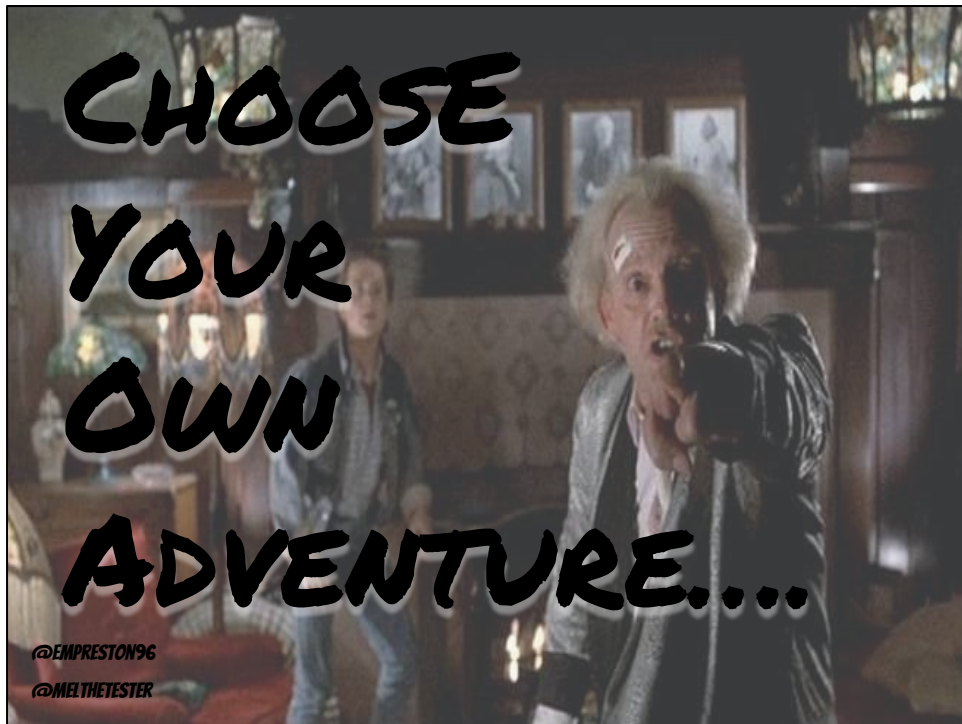
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Em: Hi there! My name is Em Preston and I am a Product Owner at Flux Federation in Wellington, formerly a Test Analyst. A bit about me, I have been working in Wellington for about 4 years, but I live a few hours away in the Wairarapa. This is my first ever conference talk and I am super excited to be here speaking with you all today!

Mel: And I'm Melissa Eaden - I've been working with Ministry of Testing for about two years now as EditorBoss, previously I worked with ThoughtWorks and next month I'll be working with Unity Technologies as a Tech Lead.



Melissa:

Today, we want to talk about our experiences around our careers, and the mentors we've had along the way. These experiences have shaped the people we are today, in our professional communities and in our personal lives. We hope that by telling our stories from our past we can show how you could establish future career growth. A career can be like Choosing your own adventure, and you have to figure out how to level up along the way. Hopefully our stories can help you no matter what career you are in. But everyone has to start somewhere, so, Emma let's start with Level One.

LEVEL ONE:

Starting Out & Asking For Help

- ★ Asking For Help Is OK
- ★ Receiving Help Is OK
- ★ Challenges & Change Is Normal

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Is anyone here new to their role? Firstly, we wanted to talk to those who are starting out their career or are recently new to a role. Looking in the right places for help and realising that making mistakes is not only okay, but is actually a key way of learning.

If we realise early the importance of being a good mentee, it can change the course of your journey entirely.

I remember my first few months of being a tester, feeling confused, a little out of my depth and overwhelmed with so much new information. I'd just come from being a CSR in the Call Centre and moved on to testing with very little information on what the IT industry itself was actually like.

LUCKILY, I learned the hard way the importance of asking for help when you're struggling, but ironically I developed this skill outside of my IT career.

For years and years, I had this massive fear of needles. By massive, I mean I would be out cold every single time I had a vaccine or a blood test. I built myself up with anxiety so much, that whenever I came face to face with a needle, I would faint. No joke.

As I got older, this got more and more embarrassing. I would try to ignore it, close my eyes and hope for the best, but I could never overcome the fear of an injection. A wee while ago I had some health issues, which lead to me needing to go the doctors A LOT. For a while they didn't know what was going on, which meant lots of blood tests, which meant lots of fainting.

The first few times I needed a test, the nurse would almost always say, "You okay, love? You're looking a bit pale" - and I would nod and pretend I was fine. They would learn about 30 seconds later that I wasn't fine.

There came a time when I got summoned again for a blood test, and I'm not sure why but this time I decided to talk to the nurse and apologise for the upcoming fainting that was inevitably going to happen. Before this, I was too embarrassed to admit my fear, but I was SO over it by this point that I told her I was going to faint and that she'd better prepare for an unconscious woman in her exam room.

She looked at me, flicked me a smile, and said "Right, let's figure this out." She told me that she'd seen this many times before, and not to worry. She made small talk with me as she got the needle ready, and told me she was going to count down, so that I was prepared for the needle. She started to count. Really slowly. "3" - Massive pause. "2" - Massive pause. "1" - "You're holding your breath." "Huh?" "Yep, you're holding your breath, you have been for about a minute. That's why you faint."

It seems SO stupid, and obvious, and I can't believe I didn't notice it, but she was right. I was barely breathing the entire time I'd been in the room.

She then walked me through the process again, but this time she breathed with me, and used the old 'in through the nose, out through the mouth' technique.

I've had about 3 blood tests since, and I haven't fainted once.

You might be thinking, "Congrats, Em. But what has this got to do with my new role?"

WELL, the importance of asking for help can change EVERYTHING.

People don't always know you're struggling until you reach out and admit you're not doing so good.

Secondly, being open to receiving help and feedback is key to learning how you can improve. You might not know you're doing something wrong until someone tells you that you are.

Melissa: Stories like Em's really show how someone can mentor someone through a difficult situation, or lead them to learn how to deal with a difficult problem. When we are dealing with ever-changing technology, it can cause a feeling of anxiety and nerves because of the challenges we face due to changes. This is OK. Changes and challenges are a normal part of this industry. Because of techs very nature, no one will know everything, it's impossible. You should feel comfortable enough to ask for help, and if you see someone struggling, you should feel comfortable enough to offer help.

This situation could have turned out differently if Em had decided she didn't want the Nurse's help. We need to be open to helping each other find our way through tech issues, or any issues, trying to understand them, together. We all have experiences which can provide information towards a goal. Em's story is about learning to breathe when you need to, while this was a personal situation for her, to someone else this story could give them information to reach their own goal whether it's personal, career or business oriented, it's only a matter of circumstance. You can ask for help. You can call on a friend. You can offer help to someone else. You can be the mentor someone else needs or allow for someone to be the mentor you need. Thinking like this can open so many doors and opportunities for everyone involved, especially when it comes to your career.

LEVEL TWO:

Growing A Career

- ★ Don't Be Afraid To Add Your Voice!
- ★ Don't Let Imposter Syndrome Stop You
- ★ Help Others Believe In Themselves

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Melissa:

Level two takes us to Growing a career. This can be tricky stuff. It's important to put yourself in a position that allows opportunity. I recently had someone tell me that every year is about one thousand hours worth of work towards a career. When you reach ten thousand hours, you're considered an "expert" in your career choice or you're considered crazy passionate about something you've stuck with for so long. How do you get to that level? Part of it is being open to new ideas and new ways of doing things.

I've been in testing for a while. I've been working in various domains and businesses. It wasn't until I started attending events and following folks on Twitter that I really saw my career take off.

By a show of hands, tell me if this is the first conference you've ever attended - you'll like this story...

I'm a writer. It's actually my first career before I transitioned into the tech industry. I was working as a tester and I saw a essay competition for a free ticket to TestBash in New York, sponsored by Richard Bradshaw, who you all heard from earlier today. I had been reading up on Ministry of Testing and TestBash for a while, but living in Texas can make getting to the UK rather

expensive. They finally sponsored an event in the U.S. and the essay competition was something I knew I could do fairly well. I submitted an essay and I won one of five tickets. For me it was like finding a golden ticket. The company I was with at the time didn't have a conference budget. I got myself to New York by saving up for a couple of months, buying a plane ticket on sale, and I stayed in the cheapest hotel I managed to find.

It was a magical day for me full of awesome talks and conversations with a lot of people. I also started my twitter account that day, having no idea how much twitter would open up my opportunities for mentors and career goals. Afterwards, I joined Slack. I created a personalized, professional email address. I started writing more. I later started a blog. I started attending meetups like Women Who Code. I submitted to conferences. I started speaking.... I've had job offers... I believe these all happened because I was open to possibilities and networking and learning.

I've continued doing these things, creating a larger network, and crowdsourcing my learning opportunities. Being connected to the communities around IT can give you a very solid pulse of the industry too. Reading things people write, writing about your own experiences, sharing knowledge and mentoring others with your knowledge can put you on a fast track with your career, and it can help someone else along the way.

You don't have to wait until you've worked in the industry for years and years. And if you have been in the industry for years and you feel like you are missing something, putting yourself out there can get you all kinds of great information and feedback.

You can start writing now, you can start tweeting now, you can start having conversations and doing podcasts and vlogs now. Don't be afraid to add your voice to the mix. Get a group together and make it a group project. Be open to feedback. Be open to learning from mistakes. No one is good at any of this right out of the gate. It all takes practice. If you read some of my first blog posts, they are all over the place. They have some OK bits, but over the last few years, I've gotten better at crafting a message, at conveying my thoughts and ideas. Don't be afraid of learning.

This industry can make you feel like a loner in a crowd. It doesn't have to be that way. Adding your voice to the community means you can add your perspective and then you can have someone give you a different one, which

allows you to learn from someone else. As long as we aim for feedback to be helpful. As long as we aim for helping each other rather than tearing each other down, we are all going to find opportunities together, to learn from each other, to help each other and reach goals.

Before I went into my role as a PO, I was a little lost. I really felt like I needed to grow and I wasn't sure how I was going to do that. I was really really scared to apply for a speaking position at this conference, because I thought I wasn't good enough to speak in front of a bunch of intelligent people that probably had more experience than me in the area I am presenting about! It wasn't until my manager at the time showed me there was value in my experiences that no one else has ever had before, and sharing those not only helps me to realise my own value, but it provides value to those who are also in my position. Don't let imposter syndrome stop you from growing, because feeling like you don't deserve growth will ultimately stop you from growing. You do deserve to share your story and experiences no matter where you are in your career, and from that almost always comes new opportunities.

Learning to believe in yourself is something really hard to do, however, but teaching others to believe in themselves is easy.

I was watching a TED talk recently. The speaker was a teacher, and she explained that "Every child needs a champion". She told a story about how she recently taught a child that had very little confidence. She gave a test, 20 questions long, this kid missed 18. So she put a big '+2' next to an even bigger smiley face. When the child received the mark, he spoke to the teacher after class and asked "Is this an F?" when she said yes, the child asked why she'd given him a +2 instead of a -18? She responded with "Because you're on a roll! You didn't miss them all, you got 2 right! And when we review this next time, you're only going to improve." She goes on to explain that -18 sucks the life out of you. +2 says "it ain't all that bad". Confidence that our mentees can and will improve, is key to allowing them believe they can and will improve.

It's a cycle. You might not believe in yourself until someone believes in you, but you can help others to believe in themselves by believing in them. Just like Mel said "we are all going to find opportunities together, to learn from each other, to help each other and reach goals." This takes us to Level Three....

LEVEL THREE:

Bringing Folks Along For The Ride

- ★ Remember What It's Like To Be New
- ★ Seek To Understand Before Being Understood
 - ★ Growing As A Learner
 - ★ Growing As A Mentor

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Who here considers themselves a mentor or a coach in their day to day? I can guarantee there are people in this room who have had a day where they've got to work in the morning, made themselves a good cuppa, sat down and realised there's a million things they needed to do that day and by 5 o'clock they achieved 0 things from that list. Not because they're lazy, but because they are a mentor. In our experience being a good mentor means putting yourself back on the skateboard and remembering what it was like to be brand new at something. Everyone in this room remembers someone who mentored them and what it was like to be mentored. We can learn from this, learn from our own experiences and recognise the ways you can make the life of your mentee easier. We all started somewhere, we were all new once.

I'm not saying to neglect your job every day to help the person next to you answer their million daily questions and it is totally okay to be "busy right now", but if we really want to minimise the amount of questions our mentee asks us (not only for our benefit, but for theirs too!) a great mantra is "seek to understand before being understood."

If we don't fully understand the question, we can't give a fully comprehensive and helpful answer.

Along with understanding questions fully, another great way to make our mentees lives easier is to provide them with the tools they need to do the job THEMSELVES.

In my last few years of school, I had really taken to performing arts, particularly Drama. I loved being up on stage and grew a passion for Shakespeare.

I was approached by the music teacher after he'd watched a performance of mine, and he asked why I wasn't studying music or taking part in the schools musicals.

I'd NEVER read a sheet of music in my life and certainly wasn't sure I was up to singing in front of crowds of people, but he told me he'd help me get there, and not to worry.

I auditioned for the school musical and got the part of Toby in Sweeney Todd. I was STOKED until I realised he had 3 solo songs... Uh oh.

In the following weeks, my more than enthusiastic music teacher organised vocal lessons and helped me one on one with my performances.

I had multiple breakdowns thinking I'd gotten in over my head, but 6 weeks of practise and I was singing and dancing on the school stage in front of hundreds!

I then decided to study music the year after and auditioned for many more musical performances afterwards.

Em's experience is familiar to me in the fact that I try to tackle things myself and have that sudden panic, that fear that I've taken on too much.

Impostor Syndrome looms large for US at times because we often don't trust ourselves and what we've learned and how we can apply it, and what else we can learn from it, but once I get past the initial fear, and the voice in my head telling me all the hateful things I can think of, I can move on. Sometimes it takes someones encouragement to kickstart that learning mode, but that's what mentors and peers you trust are there for.

I recently had someone tell me that every year is about one thousand hours worth of work towards a career or interest.

If we are spending 30 to 40 hours or more every week, we need to be learning something. Whether it's a skill, or a tool, or how to communicate with our coworkers.

My testing career started with regression tests, my first month as a matter of fact. About 8000 of them...actually it was more like 800, but it seemed like 8000 at the time. They were poorly written and most of them wrong in a lot of ways.

I tested, I rewrote tests, I worked 120 hrs in two weeks before I was finished. I learns some things, but probably not what you expect - I learned that what you write matters, especially for the next person. When I started learning automation, this idea was amplified ten fold.

Some tests are there only as a metric, and a poor one, no one had looked at these things in a really long time and our system was a labyrinth I had yet to really explore.

There were easy bits we could have automated, but we hadn't for whatever reason. There were hard bits we could have automated, but we didn't. I wanted to dig in and do more than just check boxes.

This prompted me to go back to school and figure some of these things out. I took C, SQL, C++, Technical Writing... etc. Working with self proclaimed "old crusty IMB dudes" - they taught me the basics of programming.

I learned bits of ruby automation and database queries.

My next job built on those skills. The one after that give me more hands on with pipelines and microservices.

The one after that gave me more leadership skills.

All of that got me to ThoughtWorks.

Learning Consulting skills was probably my toughest challenge to date. Technical department, I was meeting other challenges... API testing, check, Mobile Testing, check, different Automation frameworks and pipelines, check, Performance testing, check, rudimentary search engine analysis, check....

I did all of that in two years - could I do it again? yes, am I an expert at any of that absolutely not, but technical skills are breeze compared to consulting, but in the end, I managed to figure a few things out about how I could be a good communicator and mentor.

Now, I'm jumping into Modern Testing @ Unity feet first. I kinda know what might be out there but I still have a lot to learn and so much to practice.

An expert is supposedly someone who has reached ten thousand hours of learning in a particular profession or hobby. If you think you are one of them maybe you could take a breather. I might have the time in, but I'll never consider myself an expert. I think that way breeds complacency that I'm unwilling to accept for myself.

With practice and more understanding, taking on more complex challenges and ideas, I can look back and see how far I've come, how well I am able to do things now and all the things I can continue to learn.

When you are trying something new, when you are learning or teaching the familiar loop of panic and confidence happens. It happens to everybody, even if they don't show it. It's OK. It means you are growing, as a learner, or as a mentor. Right Em?

Em: We really wanted to drive the message that learning as a mentor and learning as a mentee are just as difficult but just as rewarding as each-other. I'd like to point out how many mentors I have had up until this point, from the Wetest organisers who enabled all of us speakers to be up here doing our talks, my manager, Peach, who was my encouragement and made me believe I had valuable teachings, and finally Melissa, who managed to write this talk with me from halfway across the planet! All of these people have shown mentorship in many different ways. It's important to recognise when it's time to be a mentor and when it's time to be a mentee, the skills you learn from doing both will open up a huge amount opportunities.

Melissa: It's really hard to ask for help sometimes. It's really hard to approach someone to ask for help, especially when you see them as a leader and they aren't especially open to it. Some people don't know they are seen as leaders, so they might not be thinking about what they could do to help and it would only take someone asking to change their approach.

On the other side of the coin, be Ok with letting someone tell you no. For whatever reason they are not in a position to help you. Life can be tricky sometimes like that. If they tell you no, ask them to recommend someone else. If that doesn't work, go back to your network and ask. Our community is awesome like that. We all tend to be helpful to a fault based on what I've seen.

If you are a leader, whether by your own standards, or because of the position you are in, you need to put yourself in a place for folks to ask you for help. Especially if you are willing to be helpful.



Melissa:

This talk was the brainchild of the organizing folks here at WeTest. When I was contacted that my abstract was accepted, they were excited about my topic, but they also had another speaker with a similar topic who would be speaking for the first time. They asked if I would be interested in pairing with her and combining her topic with mine to create a new talk.

The mission of WeTest, they explained, is to help facilitate learning, and mentor those new to the speaking community. This opportunity, they said, would give them a chance to show mentoring in action. I was very open to the idea and had very few reservations about moving forward. I knew it would be challenging, but I was willing to give it a go.

Em and I started talking in June, sharing ideas and thoughts, and continued to meld our ideas together into this talk, while working, while in dealing with weird timezone issues, and daily life in general.

I'm amazed at her courage and capability. And as her mentor on this journey have no doubt that you'll be hearing more from her in the future.

Emma:

There was a time in the planning of this talk where I was VERY close to backing out. Imposter Syndrome got me good and it wasn't until Mel and I had our very first video call that I realised I was SO excited to share this experience with her

and with you all. She made me believe I was capable, listened to by ideas, understood what I wanted to say and gave me feedback based on her experiences on how we could improve.

Mel and I were trying to figure out a good way to close off our talk, that related back to all of our ideas and key takeaways. It was then we realized that being up here was a real life example of the things you can achieve when you're pushed in the right direction.

If anything comes from this talk, and what we can teach you from our journeys, my hope would be that we give encouragement to someone in the audience to step up and be a mentor. You might find yourself reaching out to someone, you might find yourself up on stage giving a talk, you might find yourself on a video call with someone in America! But remember, a mentor doesn't have to be someone you work with every day, or someone that you have known for years. You can find support and guidance anywhere, if you're willing to look for it.



Ask us anything!