Remember what it's like to be new to GNOME?

Melissa Wu

>> So today I'm here to talk about what it's like to remember what it's like to be new to GNOME? Hopefully I'll provide you with an "oh, yeah, I remember that moment." First, let me share a little bit about me. I'm from Pasadena, California, I studied sociology and business I received a graduate certificate in technology and certification. After that I went to work for Public Safety Technology and after that I went to work for Woodlyn Travel and then a friend introduced to GNOME. A few things that you did not hear me say was free software, Linux, coder, and programmer. I come for a very limited technical background. When I first started in GNOME was minimal. I knew that I had to get up to speed very very quickly. So in the last six months I've done everything I could to get involved in the community. I visited GNOME.org and the link get involved. I connected with community managers and joined listeners. I hosted and attended community webinars and Facebook and LinkedIn. I became a friend of GNOME and I met lots and lots of people. Needless to say, the last six months has been like drinking for a firehose. It's a lot of information all at once but now I know a little bit more. And my knowledge and information has increased.

Along the way, there's some challenges that I had and ones that I want the community I guess to consider. For me, joining the community introduced me to a new vocabulary and way of thinking. I learned about FOSS and different organizations like KDE and places like GitHub and GitLab. I also had to consider what images to use, were they copywritten and feedback. Things that I didn't actually consider before. I also had to figure out what resources were available. Where to go to to find these resources. The resources are out there but they're not always easy to find. And sometimes you have to dig and search to get the ones that you need.

There are also lots of chat rooms and different courses but where do you start? Sometimes following the conversations isn't the easiest. In fact, there was one person I was trying to get ahold of. I asked somebody do I actually have the correct information for them, and they said, yes, but you know what, go to Telegram, they're very responsive there. And within seconds I had a response. I also found that you don't know what you don't know. So like search engines, if you don't necessarily input or and the right questions you may not get the right answers. And this makes it hard for those that are new because they don't always know the right questions to ask. The other thing that I found within the community is that there are many points of entry. Unlike other organizations, where there's a point of resources the GNOME community is very open. This is one of the benefits of the community. You can enter the community, but what this does it makes it hard for those individuals that are new to find a path and for us to engage them in the long-term.

I also found that who you know matters. I was very very lucky when I joined to have a few individuals that basically held my hand the first two months and continue to hold my hand now. They have been extraordinarily patient in helping me in navigating the community and walk me through some of the things that I assume they thought were very basic. I've been truly lucky to meet people willing to help me and to answer my questions. But I can only assume that not everybody has the same relationships and may not be able to find the same connections that I had -- that I've been able to find.

So, how can we help these new contributors. People come to a community looking for a place whether it's a shared interest or a desired for friendship or just needing a place of connection. People come looking for a place to fit in. And they're a number of ways we can welcome and engage a number of contributors. Here are some resources that have been successful in other communities. I want to mistake a point to say that I listen to these things because they're important, they're important to remember. This is just a highlight of what I think will welcome and engage new contributors. On an individual level, patience, patience, patience. Not everyone knows that this is offensive because it's a free software. We want to remember what it's like when you started and be open to suggestions and able to guide new contributors in ways that we already know.

We also want to make sure we share our knowledge. We don't want to assume that the individuals know what you already know. So we have to be patient with them. They were always available to me via e-mail or chat or phone call. This was very valuable in my community. My mentors also did everything they can to introduce me to community members whether it's providing me a little bit of background or say this person is a board member and this is how they came to the GNOME community. It was really helpful in getting to know individuals a little bit better and made me feel very comfortable when I didn't know anybody.

The other thing we do is check with different contributors. Sometimes you can get lost and a point of check in is incredibly helpful. We want to make sure and then within an organization there's other things that we do. GNOME has many resources that are available. It does take a little bit of digging to find them. So potentially streaming resources can be helpful to a new contributor. The get involved page is really really helpful in providing content as well as a basic road map with basic areas. New contributor and networking and social events whether in person or events are also helpful in forming new connections and maintaining relationships. I know that it's sometimes hard to go into a new environment when you don't know anybody. So as a mentor or a welcomer of new contributors, sometimes a personal invitation, hey, are you going to be there? Yes, I'm going to be there. I know we've done this in the past and it's been a little bit of a challenge within the current environment, but this is something helpful for new contributors. We also want to create a point of entry for newcomers. I'm wondering if channels like the newcomer channel that we currently have is something that we can continue to guide people to or even orientation for newcomers so they can become familiar with the organization and the resources available.

I'm sure you're asking this all sounds great and wonderful, but why does this matter? It'll matter soon. I assure you. So it's important because for several years the free and open software sector has struggled to attract and maintain the number of high-quality developers that the GNOME project needs to drive. This is something to keep in mind. The other statistic that I've been using quite frequently is one that it's a little bit outdated but that's 64.5 percent of engineers do not contribute to open source projects more than once a year, compared to 55.5 percent the year before. Why is this important? Companies that Excel at onboarding and employee retention experienced 2.5 times the revenue growth and 1.9 times the profit margin of companies who struggle with these two criteria. If you treat others well, they can strengthen your team and help retention. A successful community has all kinds of people in different kinds of roles. Embracing people from different backgrounds and technical capabilities makes it more inclusive.

But in the end, new contributors need to walk through the door themselves and we can help them by giving them a key and a road map and welcoming them with open arms. Thank you very much for coming today and here is my contact information should you wish to get a hold of me. Before we go into any questions, we have a couple of other sessions that I'll be a part of. There's

cocktails and mocktails with Woodlyn Travel this afternoon. I'm also hosting a social hour travel talk-do you miss traveling as much as I do? And be sure not to miss the community engagement challenge winners announced. I hope to see you guys if one of these future talks.

Does anybody have any questions?

>> Thank you so much, Melissa. I'm looking at the chat here. Someone says, please can you share your slides.

>> Sure. Once I figure out how to do that, I'll be happy to.

>> Great. I don't see any more questions but there are some comments there.

>> Which channel?

>> It's the chat.

>> All right. I'll check it out. If anybody has any follow-up questions or wants to connect with me here are my contact information and also, I'm happy to put my slides in GitLab which I'll do, and they'll be up there shortly.

>> Thank you.

>> Thank you.

>> I'm not sure what else to do.

>> Yes, no worries. I'll just change the presentation. And that's it.

>> Great.