Talking Point Notes

**Work History**

* WITN: Tools testing and test pass creation. Xbox, PS3 cert testing.
* Guardians of Middle Earth: Usability testing
* Z2 QA: Wrote test passes, worked on a variety of titles.
* Tech Art: Technical artist / Producer on **Trade Nations: North Pole**. Prepped assets for use in game, assisted in streamlining the art pipeline and tracked the majority of work needed to ship the title.

**Shadowslayer Dawn of the Light Forge: Tech Art**

* Automated a 2d art pipeline using JSFL and Python Photoshop. Allowed the game to ship with much armor/weapons and enemies than it could have otherwise. I had started working on 3d tools just before transitioning to a Producer Role
* Key Takeaways:
  + Learned about interacting first hand with artists, their needs and their often silent concerns.

**Live Ops / Dev Ops Producer**

* Created and enforced processes for releasing of new clients, cut down on downtime and released bugs. I also helped spin up/take down servers when there was increased user load, wrote some internal dev ops software for sales tracking and tasked and prioritize the dev ops team. The dev ops team was extremely talented and for the most part my job as a producer was being a buffer between them and people who wanted to endlessly shift their priorities. I learned a lot about what it takes to have good up time, cadences about when to schedule downtime and what it takes to consistently create smooth releases.
* Key Takeaways:
  + Learned a lot about live ops and dev ops from a tech side
  + Learned how to maximize the efficiency of already capable devs.

**Paradise Bay: Scrum Master**

* I got the opportunity to be scrum master because the producer who took over that project (was also previously the lead producer of Paradise Bay) had left for a job at Arena Net and appeared to be burnt out. This wasn’t uncommon for people at Z2, the C level leadership prided themselves on getting everyone to work very hard and they didn’t pay as well as many other game studios. When I started on the project it was in a pretty big mess to be honest. There wasn’t much work being tracked, people weren’t clear about the direction of the project and there weren’t a lot of expectations set for when things would get finished. I had to rebuild the backlog of work from the ground up and established many positive changes to how the team operated. This led to the developers feeling like they had more voice on the project, less overtime and a very positive overall attitude about the direction the project was headed. The last retrospective that I ran had people rating the production, game direction and work satisfaction higher than any other team at the studio. They shipped to a test market release the day I left. I’m extremely proud of that team for course correcting from the place it was at when I started. That was to this day one of the most talented teams I had the pleasure to work with and their eagerness to fix issues and the enthusiasm towards the game made my life feel easy once we had fixed the underlying issues that were holding them back.
* Key Takeaways:
  + Creating a backlog from the ground up.
  + Course correcting a team that was headed in the wrong direction.
  + Servant Leadership and protecting a capable team from negative external forces.
  + Soft launching an ambitious project.

**Treasure Bounce: Product Manager**

* Treasure bounce was Ember’s attempt at making a game like peggle for the mobile market place. I started on that project when a lot of it was already completed but I spent a lot of time working on how to improve monetization and retention with a very limited number of people working on the project and not a lot of time. It was plagued with issues that we ended up shipping with and given the size of the studio they only wanted a single programmer working on it. Ultimately it felt like Ember didn’t want to give the game a fair shot and that was reflected in how we handled releasing it. Felt more like kicking it out the door and wiping our hands clean than it did trying to do a legitimate release. I spent a lot of time working on tools to track analytics on a level by level basis and tried to dig into how to make a better profit off the game. In retrospect, we needed to ship with about 10 times the number of levels we did ship with and make the game much easier. There weren’t strong compounding loops and the game lacked any sort of multiplayer element to keep people engaged when they got to the end or to get people to use more of the power ups we wanted to sell them.
* Key Takeaways
  + Casual game monetization and retention goals.
  + The need for better analytics.

**Empire Z / Commanders: Product Manager / Producer**

* Commanders was created to broaden the user base who interacted with Empire Z. The development was started in Early 2015 and the game shipped worldwide in last 2015. It was a reskin of Empire Z and came out exactly one week before Mobile Strike. Once Mobile Strike was out we were unable to create any return for our ad spend. Most of my time on that project was spent focused on sale processes and task tracking. When the stakeholders of the project were having, trouble setting a direction or deciding what shipping worldwide should look like I ended up stepping up to make those calls. By becoming a central hub for the direction of the project it allowed us to ship must faster and hit some very aggressive dates, which ended up being necessary because of the impending Mobile Strike juggernaut that we did not know was coming. Because a lot of the tech was shared between Commanders and Empire Z I ended up doing a lot of sale and event evaluation for both projects.
* **Key Takeaways:**
  + Getting a team to hit aggressive goals through shared vision and down-scoping where necessary.
  + 4X gameplay monetization strategies.
  + How to develop good analytics and sales tools.
* In November of 2015 the company made a dramatic shift in direction and moved most of the studio off Empire Z to work on a new IP that has still not launched. This push also culminated in creating a brand-new engine from the ground up that will ultimately fix many of the issues that plague Empire Z live ops / dev ops and future development. Because of this shift I found myself in a prominent role on Empire Z. Of the original leadership on Empire Z there was only one employee left who was part of that initial launch. In Early 2016, he went on a sabbatical and I ended up being the only stakeholder of the project.
* In March of 2016 I found myself in charge of a game with 3 junior programmers, 1 programmer with a few years of experience (who was not interested in being a lead programmer), 3 designers who did not want to play the game and 2 full time artists, neither of which were leads by any means. As a result, I ended up having to take ownership of every decision that went into the game, prioritize everyone on the team and I even learned enough about the tech to implement features. The hardest part was that our DAU was in a nose dive and no one previously on the project had any idea why. I ended up doing a lion’s share of the investigating that led to discovering why players were bored with the game and set to work to correct it. By mid-July, our DAU had stabilized. Even though we were still trending downwards in revenue the game was going to survive the year, it would not have otherwise. We added a lot of new content, focused on the deeper syncs that players invested in, created new self-contained game loops, expanded on features that never felt fully implemented and created new cadences for how we released that I dubbed “campaigns”. It was extremely successful and we generated a lot of revenue in 2016 in spite of losing programmers and having absolutely no marketing budget. During Halloween of 2016 we got the first of our two features that we’ve had since I took over the project. The second one was much more prominent and happened earlier this year. Empire Z has a much more stable economy and much cleaner tech. I was also able to convince the owners of the company to divert some resources back into Empire Z allowing me to expand the team and install a true lead programmer to oversee the tech.
* I also set the work getting people excited about the game. In late 2015 and early 2016 revenue and DAU were dropping like stones. I evangelized the idea that Empire Z could be saved and set to work inspiring the team to share that vision. Through meetings, calling out successes, sharing some of the impressive numbers of Empire Z and by significantly reducing churn I was able to get the team excited again to work on the game. This year we’ve started every other week brainstorm meetings so that everyone can share their ideas for the game and I can ensure everyone has a shared vision for what’s to come. These meetings also are an important reminder to how big and exciting Empire Z is. Last week as a group we called out everything in the game that we felt like our players would consider game play and expanded on some of the ideas that were more prominent. That conversation lasted 2 hours and I had to break it off before we were even finished, everyone on the team really enjoyed knowing they were a part of something so big, exciting and enjoyed by so many people. Everyone on the team plays at least every work day and we have plenty of rich discussions about what people find interesting in the game.
* **Key Takeaways:**
  + I’ve overseen every decision in Empire Z for a year and a half, comfortable in this role
  + I can maximize productivity of junior devs of all skill levels.
  + I can effectively discern game issues while a project is live and correct them (literally by programming the fix if I have to)
  + Fighting for more resources where necessary.
  + Very hard lessons about prioritization.
  + Getting a team excited about working on a project when there is the perception of more exciting stuff going on.
  + Excellent deep game loop mechanic creation.
  + Importance of compounding loops to mid/hard core audiences.
* In addition to my other duties I’m making pitches to undisclosed IP holders. Both of my pitches are past the first stage. One pitch needs to be built into a full game design doc.
* I’m also starting to evaluate machine learning algorithms and trying to figure out how I’ll have the time to create a production quality model to improve sales. Clustering users by need based off of common purchasing habits and sending the appropriate sales.

**Best Traits:**

* Comfortable wearing just about any hat (Live Ops, Dev Ops, Designer, Server/Client Programmer, FX Artist, UX Designer, QA, Data Analyzer)
* Drive a singular vision home to a large team of developers as well as inspire them to want to make that vision. This was especially difficult with Empire Z after it had been out for many years.
* Successful and comfortable being the final decision makers on all things for a game.
* Able to balance both mature and new game economies.
* Voracious appetite for learning.
* Refusal to fail, I’ll learn whatever skills I need to make what I’m working on successful.