Alissa Brodsky

The Role of Production in Game Development

About me

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I went to graduate school in NYC at **Manhattan School of Music** with a degree in Voice (Opera) and performed in Musical Theater and Children's Theater.

My "day job" with the **SciFi Channel's website**.
First producer role opportunity. Managed online original content.

Worldwide Biggies **online virtual worlds** for kids. I managed the development of thirty-two consecutive games.

Disney Mobile leadership role on Where's My Water? 2 and digital learning

PC/Console games with Oddworld: Soulstorm as the Senior Producer.
Free Range Games - PC/Console games as a Senior Producer then Production Director

VR game, Trip the Light, for Dark Arts Software.

Let's Talk About Game Production

- ❖ Responsibilities
- ❖ Shared Vision
- ❖ Qualities
- ❖ Soft Skills
- ❖ Career Path
- ❖ Trip the Light

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What About VR/AR/XR Game Production?

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Honestly, the production responsibilities are very similar no matter what platform you're on.
Development roles on the team are specific to the medium, so get familiar with the new tasks.
Some elements of the game are very different, especially:

UI - How does the player see what to do next?
No persistent HUD - elements are diegetic, or flat screen appears, or character speaks to player.

UX - What is the user journey or flow? Literally user experience.

Playtesting
Not everyone having a headset - lack of market saturation
Physically take to conferences / events so people can try it live
Early release in the Meta Store

Production Responsibilities

The Producer Role

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WHAT do we want to make - understand the creative idea, or new mechanic, or story.

HOW we get from here to launch.

Break the design down into high-level **FEATURES** - then get "back of the napkin" estimates on effort.
Lead brainstorms/detail meetings/spreadsheets to get to those answers.

Pre-production/prototype - but don't get lost in the fluff of what it could be…we can prototype forever.
Then create **TASKS** that are timeboxed! Or we'll end up crunching.
Work with the ICs when planning small segments (2 week **SPRINT**)

As you learn more, assess if it's **POSSIBLE** to accomplish what we'd like to see in the constraints of
Time + Budget.
Quality is pretty much a given.
Scope is a lever we can pull, so talk about reducing. Beware "Wouldn't it be cool if…"

Methodologies

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Lean/Agile/Scrum
Iterative: try something, get player feedback quickly, see what's not working and pivot
Rituals that help inform the team of what others are doing. (death by process)
Commitments to complete something in a specific time frame/Sprint.

Waterfall (oh no! Don't say that word!) I say dependency-driven.
Some things just have to happen in a certain order. This is very true for the Art discipline.

Transparency - with JIRA, Trello, Spreadsheets, Asana, whatever works. Team access.
Track meeting decisions and action items - turn into tickets in your task tracking method of choice.

Able to understand, **"are we on track?"**
Have tentpole milestones, work backwards, Gantt chart. Timebox.
Don't share a detailed, long-term schedule with the team because it will always change!

Shared Team Vision

Get to the Castle

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In a game, showing the primary objective like a castle gives a player direction to "go that way." Team metaphor.

Have the keeper of the vision (usually the Creative Director) *frequently* communicate the game that's in their head. Pitch to the team with a high level walkthrough. **Goals**, so we can all march toward them together.

Context for the **WHY -** they're doing a task; how it fits into the bigger picture. More than just a cog.

Also, **good ideas can come from anywhere** as long as there's a culture of encouraging them.

Qualities of a Successful Producer

Be Motivating

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When you're involved in a meeting or discussion, bring your authentic **energy** into the room, not necessarily positivity in the face of reality, but with a fire to inspire the team to keep moving forward.

Producers are not cheerleaders - we're the halftime **coach**.

For years I called myself a cheerleader because I root for success. Then one day I realized, A) that's horribly sexist and B) a cheerleader is not on the team. They're on the sidelines.

I am not a cheerleader. I'm the coach, calling plays and inspiring the team.

Connect the Dots

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Pay attention!

Daily standup meeting

Notice patterns

Active listening

Get help and clarity if someone needs it

Understand different roles on the team

Have Resilience

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Be able to live in the **"I don't know"** place, and at the same time keep moving the team forward.
Don't get precious about your plan.
Be flexible.
It's hard.
Making games is hard.

Words of wisdom from Michael Fitch, with regard to games:
"We ship them because we have to, not because we are done."

Optimism
Self-belief
Control of Self
Willingness to Adapt
Willingness to Be Flexible
Ability to Solve Problems
Emotional Awareness
Social Support
Sense of Humor

Resilience

Soft Skills

Teamwork - 5 Dysfunctions of a Team, Patrick Lencioni

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Trust One Another
When team members are genuinely transparent and honest with one another, it forms a safe environment that creates and builds vulnerability-based trust.

Engage in Conflict Around Ideas
With trust, team members are able to engage in unfiltered, constructive debate of ideas.

Commit to Decisions
When team members are able to offer opinions and debate ideas, they feel heard and respected, and will be more likely to commit to decisions.

Hold One Another Accountable
Once everyone is committed to a clear plan of action, they will be more willing to hold one another accountable.

Focus on Achieving Collective Results
The ultimate goal is the achievement of results, unlocked through implementing the model's principles of Trust, Conflict, Commitment, and Accountability.
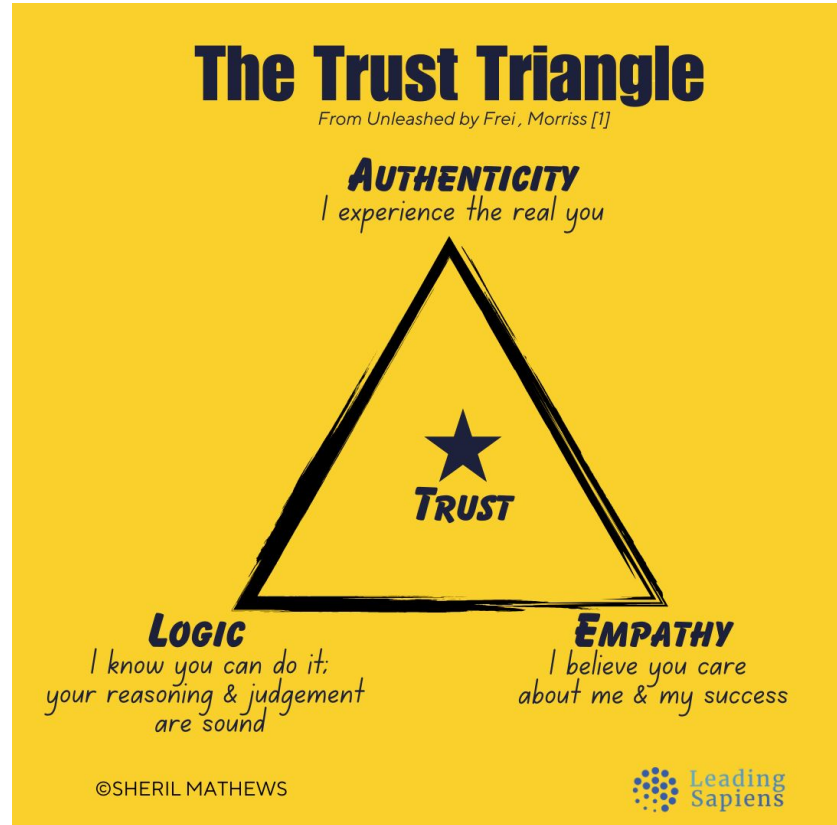
RESULTS

ACCOUNTABILITY

COMMITMENT

CONFLICT

TRUST

Encourage Trust

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Watch **How to build (and rebuild) trust**
TED talk by Francis Frei -

Trust = empathy, authenticity, logic

https://youtu.be/pVeq-0dIqpk?si=xMmQeM
RfIG4ItXeS

Value Individual Strengths

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How do you bring together people with different **points of view**, with different **communication styles**, with different strengths and weaknesses?
Understand yourself, and learn about others' strengths/weaknesses.
Encourage teammates to delve into learning about themselves.

Free online quizzes.
CliftonStrengths: what are yours?
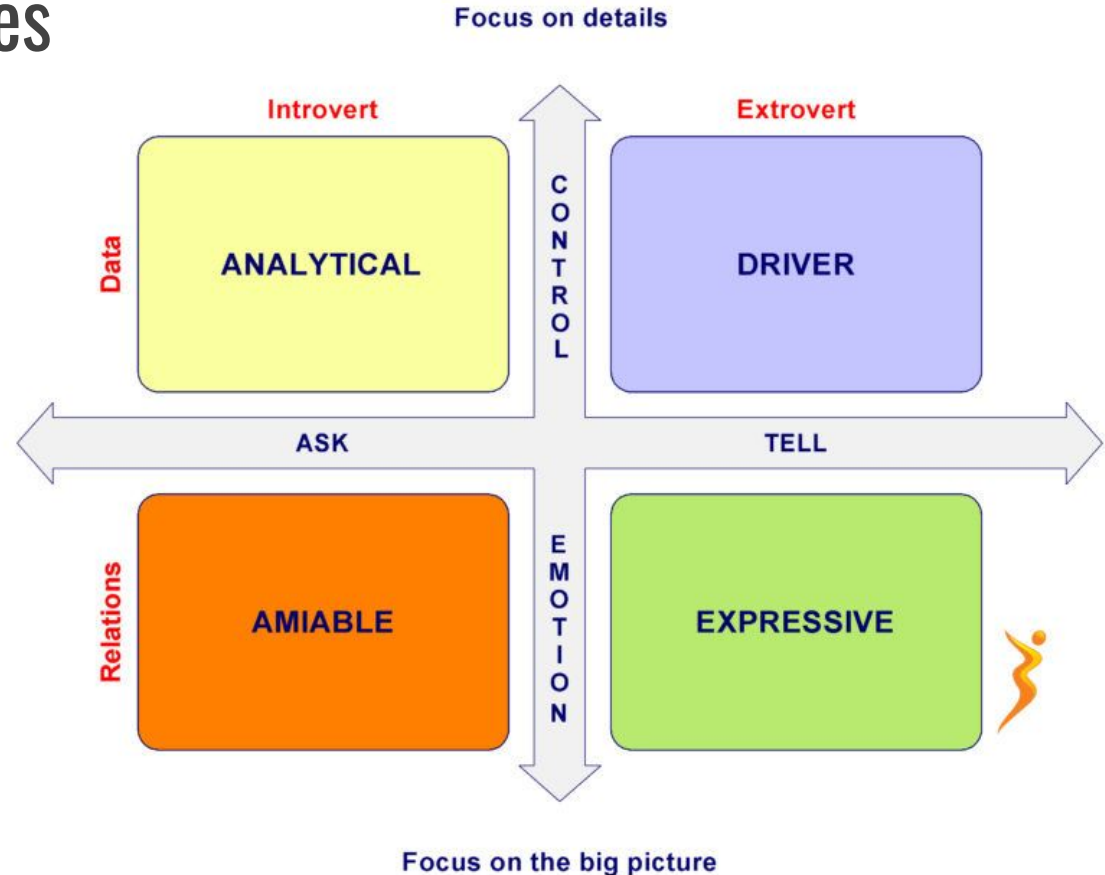I lead with relationship building - My top 5 (out of 32)

❖ Empathy - sense feelings, people feel I understand them
❖ Communication - put my thoughts into words (I'm a talker)
❖ Developer - cultivate potential, and I love to see people's skills grow
❖ Activator - turning thoughts into action
❖ Positivity - enthusiasm that's contagious. Can get others excited about something

Communication Styles

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Give out information in multiple ways for different learning and communication styles:

- ❖ Documentation
- ❖ Spreadsheets
- ❖ Miro / FigJam boards
- ❖ Presentations
- ❖ Meetings

Focus on details

Introvert | Extrovert

Data

ANALYTICAL

DRIVER

CONTROL

ASK | **TELL**

Relations

AMIABLE

EXPRESSIVE

EMOTION

Focus on the big picture

Create Positive Culture

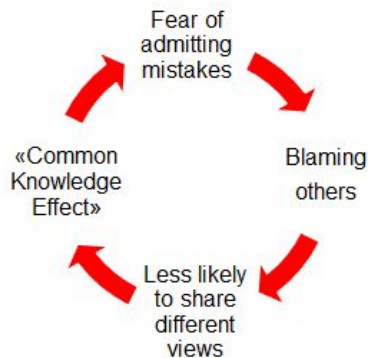— — —

Create Connections -
especially in a remote / distributed team

- ❖ Weekly show and tell - celebrate! WooHoo! Even if it's work-in-progress.
- ❖ Turn. On. Your. Cameras.
- ❖ Take time for pleasantries. Why I don't schedule 15 minute meetings.
- ❖ Fun Slack channels - music, food, *pets*!
- ❖ Laugh together (authentically)
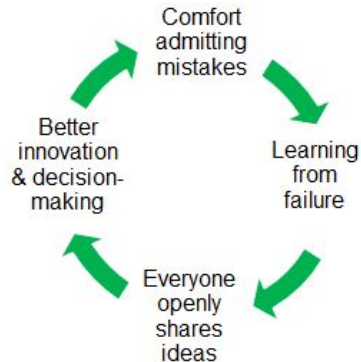- ❖ End a meeting on a positive note. Maybe a ritual.

Psychological Safety
Be a safe place - empathy, compassion, understanding, non-judgemental. Learners mindset.

Psychological Danger

- Fear of admitting mistakes
- Blaming others
- Less likely to share different views
- «Common Knowledge Effect»

Psychological Safety

- Comfort admitting mistakes
- Learning from failure
- Everyone openly shares ideas
- Better innovation & decision-making

Burnout

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Burnout is NOT just working too many hours!

High **pressure** work conditions in only 4 hours a day can lead to burnout. In yourself and your team.
Accountability without authority.
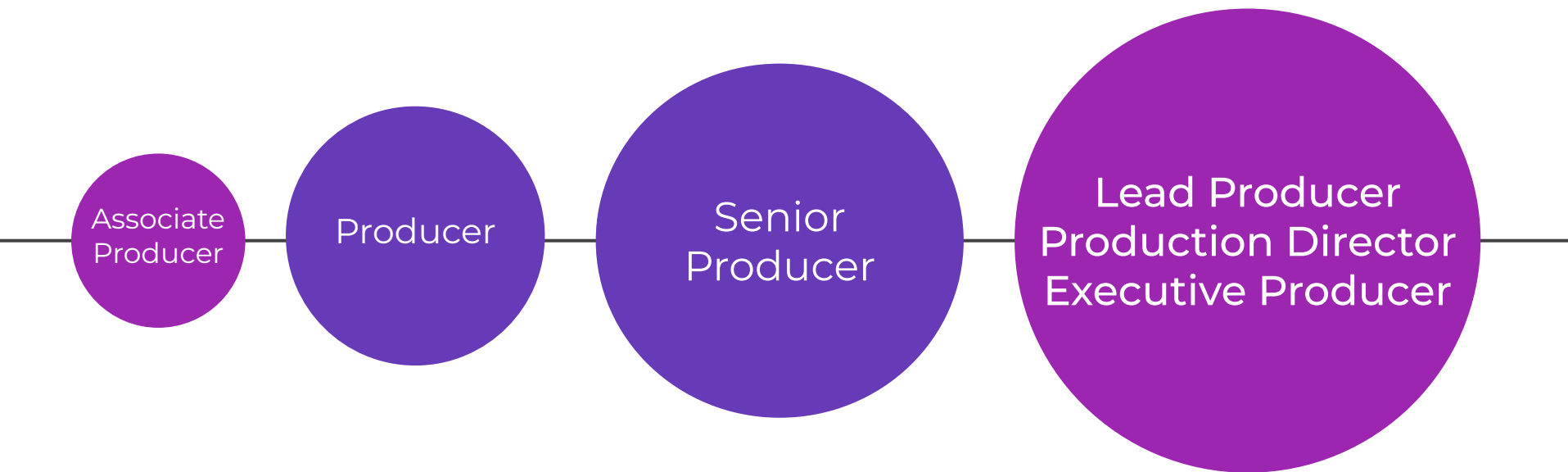**Gaslighting** - if you aren't feeling heard or believed, that's a recipe for a rough stress environment.

How to **prevent** it: Deal with the stressors.
Find someone who believes in you and can help.
Maybe a teammate can take some of the weight off.
Move to a different position in a company or team.

Reach out to friends and don't just vent - actually do things that bring you **joy**.

Signs of
Burnout

Exhaustion

Dreading work

Trouble sleeping

Depression

"Drowning"

Short temper

No time for
non-work-related things

PsychCentral

Producer Career Path

Production Roles

Associate Producer

Producer

Senior Producer

Lead Producer
Production Director
Executive Producer

Based on experience. Greater responsibilities, oversight expands, mentorship grows AND leadership skills become more important. Be a safe place. You may not get management training (probably not). Read books, watch videos, talk to people at that higher level.

Inclusion in the Gaming Industry

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I'm a woman in games.
At a management level in games. I am very often the only woman in the room.

Things are getting better...but slowly. More of the underrepresented hires (of all kinds) are happening at the junior level - to grow. Looking for someone "with experience" puts people with a more diverse background at a disadvantage since the opportunities for that experience have been few. Catch 22.

32% of game developers are women, while women make up 51% of all video game players.
In every business, data shows that companies' profits increase by 33% with a diverse workforce.

It's not just about recruiting.
Is the company a safe space for underrepresented individuals?
Are people calling out microaggressions?
Is unconscious bias training taught and addressed?

"How Do I Get a Job in Games?"

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The most common answer is **go make something**. Game Jam. Personal project. Have something to show.

But know that the market is really rough right now (since 2022). Budget cuts, layoffs, studios shutting down.

Leverage skills from **other mediums**: digital production/project management, art (concept, 3D), programming (Unity and UE), animation, writing, etc. Probably a junior role.

Networking! Most jobs come from "who you know" not a job listing.
Go to **conferences** - when saying hi, do NOT start in with listing your resume.
AWE (we'll be in Long Beach), GamesBeat, GDC, PAX East (Boston): May 8, 2025 - May 11, 2025

Get active on **LinkedIn**. Follow top voices. **Engage** in content. Create relationships.
Ask for a meeting for a reason/information, and just talk, get advice. You may find someone who clicks and can become a **mentor**.

Current Project

TRIP THE LIGHT

Partner Dancing AR/VR
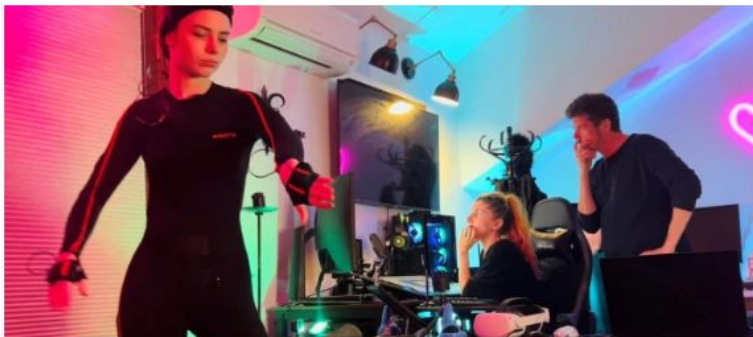*Dark Arts Software -*
darkartssoftware.com

Dynamic Partner Dancing

You really lead your partner around the dance floor - we're starting with Salsa. They are reacting to your cues. Scoring for style, combos, etc.

Mirror Me

Match your partner's movements. Hip Hop, Pop, the latest social media dance crazes, and challenge modes.

Partner Dancer

Our first character, Vironica, was art directed by Veronica Lyn Esque, who also did some mocap.

Partners - Real People

Based on real-life, talented dancers / artists contributing directly to the project.

Live Playtesting

My favorite metric by far is that everyone who plays our game has fun – **SMILES**

Preview

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Life Lesson

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It's not possible to know everything about making a thing. Anything.
You start from **not knowing**, and you know more and more as you go along. Learners mindset.
And even after years of knowing things, you still won't know everything. It's ok.

You have the right to:

❖   Make mistakes.
❖   Ask for help.
❖   Be imperfect.
❖   Ask why or why not.
❖   Express how you feel.
❖   Forgive yourself and those around you. Try. Fail. Try again.
     This is so hard to do when there are deadlines and expectations.

I have a sticker on my phone stand that says "sight-reading through life" and I think that's kind of perfect.

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