

James Robert Lay:

Hey guys, it's James Robert, and I'm excited to share Amy McGraw's Digital Growth journey story with you here in a moment. Amy is the VP of Marketing and Chief Experience Officer for Tropical Financial based out of South Florida, and she's been a member of the Digital Growth program for the past five years. When listening to her story, it's just so good to reflect on the progress that she's not only made with her financial brand, but also all the progress that she's made on her own personal journey of growth. Enjoy this episode.

James Robert Lay:

Greetings and hello. I am James Robert Lay, and welcome to another episode of the Banking on Digital Growth podcast. Today's episode is part of the Digital Growth Journey series, and I'm excited to welcome Amy McGraw to the show, because she really has such an archetypal, prepare for the worst, hope for the best story that's been unfolding over the past four or five years. And as we are in these strange and dynamic times-

Amy McGraw:

Evolving and dynamic.

James Robert Lay:

Evolving and dynamic. Welcome to the show, Amy. Thanks for being here.

Amy McGraw:

Thank you.

James Robert Lay:

So Chief Experience Officer, VP of Marketing at Tropical Financial. What is one thing that you're excited about? And it sounds like a funny question, but I think as financial brand leaders, it's important that we maintain a positive mindset during times of chaos and crisis, because we have to lead with courage, because courage is contagious.

Amy McGraw:

Yeah, you're absolutely right. It's sort of strange to think how far we've come, is all sort of being up ended in a way with what is happening right now with the coronavirus, COVID-19 throughout the world. But I also know that, especially when I have my meetings ... I have a daily meeting with my team right now, since we're all obviously working from home, about not losing sight of what we've started with our Get Beyond Money platform. And I think that it's taken us four years, not only in terms of getting HubSpot and workflows and emails and our members as contacts in our HubSpot system, talking to our data warehouse. All of that has happened over time, but it also has positioned us perfectly to respond what is still yet to come with people's finances really being decimated by what's going on in the marketplace and the economy. So it really ... The one thing I think that is hopeful for me and for my team is the fact that we are perfectly positioned to help our members now and going into the future with what we've built so far.

James Robert Lay:

And you bring such good points there because it's been a journey. It hasn't happened overnight. It's built upon the foundation upon foundation upon foundation. And really at the heart of all of that is a purpose. A purpose that for you personally, for your team, for Tropical Financial, that has transcended

the promotion of dollars and cents and commoditized products, but a purpose that's been built around. I think it's got to be more important as we move beyond this COVID-19 health crisis and into the COVID-19 financial health crisis, one that puts you in a really good place. What is that purpose?

Amy McGraw:

It's interesting because years ago, before we really created the Get Beyond Money mindset and movement, our purpose was educate first, sell second. That was something that was put into place internally three years ago. So creating the idea of getting beyond money and getting beyond the stress of money was what Get Beyond Money was created for. Now more than ever, because people right now are at a completely different level of stress than they were just two weeks ago. And right now the stress is physical, mental, emotional, but then is easily going to lead into financial. There are so many people who are losing their jobs and even those who haven't lost their jobs, they don't know what the future is going to look like. What is the new normal going to be? So that stress of all those other things, and then add on top of it, how am I going to pay my bills after the money from the government runs out? What's going to happen next? That is going to cause more havoc to their emotional, to their physical beings going forward.

Amy McGraw:

So that's where we can take everything that we built up to this point because the concepts are going to remain true in terms of how to save money, how to not have it rule your life. How to set goals, how to take ... Even today, we were talking about the fact that if one of your things was how much money you spend on coffee every week, chances are, you're not spending that right now. So what are you doing with that \$5, \$7, \$8 every day? And what are you doing with that money that you could possibly put away and make it work for you? Those concepts are still going to remain true. It's just that we can take that content and repurpose it for a new situation.

James Robert Lay:

When hearing you walk through this, you and I were having a side discussion before we started recording. And we talked about, and you mentioned this, the mental state, the emotional state, the physical state as financial brand leaders, whether you're in marketing or sales or just the leadership team, it's important to understand what's going on inside the brains of the people within the communities that we serve. And something that I shared with you was a modified version of the Kubler-Ross model. Because digital growth is a lot about change management.

James Robert Lay:

Well, there's seven stages of grief and those are, we begin with shock. Then we move into denial, anger, bargaining, trying to find a way out, depression. Then we're going to test some new solutions. And finally, hey, we're going to accept the new normal. Not only are we dealing with this massive change internally at this time, the people that we're helping are also dealing with this personally, family, I mean, community, small business. So you've been through that. You've lived through kind of those seven stages of transformation on this digital growth journey. If you can go back in your mind, four or five years ago, what was it that helped you guide yourself, number one, but guide your team? Because this is not something that you can do alone, if you're going to lead your team through this chaotic and time of crisis.

Amy McGraw:

I think one of the things I can point to right away is that, don't be ruled by fear. That I've always said in terms of failure, failure shouldn't be feared. It should be something that looks ... that you look ... It's

simply the isolation of that which does not work. That's what I always tell my kids, my team, it isn't something to fear. It is something to put your arms around, to learn from. That's a learning experience. We all go through those things. Nobody's perfect. So there's so much to do when you want ... when you're making a digital transformation. And it's not something that you can go, okay, here's my check off list of things to do, and then when I check out this last thing on my list, I will have digitally transformed. Because as you check off things, there are more things are being added.

Amy McGraw:

It is a journey. It is not a destination is the goal. The goal is the journey. To just stay on top of it and keep moving. But if you, at any point in time, encounter something on your checklist that scares you, or that you were afraid isn't going to work, or you don't believe in, or you're afraid to move forward. If you stop there, yet things continue to add to your list, you're done. You're dead in the water. You cannot let yourself be ruled by fear. And you have to make sure that the team, your team that you're leading as well as your fellow leaders, also are onboard, full 100%, and don't dip their toe in the water and want to run the other direction. And there are ... I mean, yes, there are little tactics along the way that you may have to go dip the toe in the water, it's not working, run the other way. Those little things are okay, but learn from them, pivot, try something different, but don't let it stop you, stall you out from continuing to move. So fear is the number one thing you cannot be ruled by. Courage would be the thing that you have to put your arms around, hold tight, and like you said before, it's contagious. You show it, your team will show it.

James Robert Lay:

Yeah, I talk about this circle of chaos, that a lot of financial brands I feel like are stuck in. Where they look at digital as something that they're dabbling in, but they're confused, they're frustrated, they're overwhelmed. They're living in this state of conflict. And there are four steps that I call clarity, courage, commitment, and ultimately that will lead to confidence. And so one of the things that I'm hearing from you, and I've watched you over the years, is your commitment to learning. You are a life long student because as you move forward, the environment's going to change very quickly, in some cases, as we're seeing now, with this COVID-19 crisis. But also when you talk about failure, you've mentioned, you've tried this Get Beyond Money thing, two years in a row, and it was a struggle. So talk to me a little bit about learning because even you, like Adam Sandler, you've gone back to school.

Amy McGraw:

Yes, I have. It's actually quite an eyeopening experience being someone in their mid fifties in grad school where the majority of the students truly are coming right out of college. But that's a whole other story. But yes, it is a lifelong learning process. And when I think back to the Get Beyond Money, what we tried to do. It was actually, this is our third ... we're coming into our fourth year because we've almost had a full year of working on Get Beyond Money. But prior to that, we had two other platforms that we were working on with different agencies, but they couldn't grasp the idea. They couldn't get where we wanted to go and they were creating things that already existed. Well, that doesn't help. And so we had to cut ties with both of those other two agencies and literally go back to the drawing board with my team because we were not going to be deterred.

Amy McGraw:

We knew what we wanted to do. We knew we could establish it. We knew we could launch it. We knew it would be successful. At least we hoped, you're right. But we needed to be able to find some entity to help us get it to where we needed it to go. It took a while. We got there. Granted, with your help. We actually ... You were the one who really helped put us on the right path for us to be able to do it

ourselves. And I think that was part of it too. We were trying to say, this is what we're thinking to Mr. Agency. Go, so we can work on other things. The way that you helped us approach it was, I'm going to help you think about the blueprint, but you guys are going to have to do it. It's yours. This is something that you've put your heart and soul into and only you know what you really want to do with it. You're the only ones who really know your market. So here's the blueprint, now you guys do it. And that's what we ended up doing. And it worked and it's working now.

James Robert Lay:

Well, I think that's the biggest learning of all of this is, start with the end in mind. What does the ideal future look like for a financial brand? If we can come to a common agreement of, hey, this is where we'd like to be. And that's one of the reasons I ask this question. Let's assume that we're having a conversation. We're having coffee, cocktails, two years from now and you're in a really good place. You got a smile on your face. What has to happen between now until then for you to feel good about the progress that you've made on your journey?

James Robert Lay:

And if we can get into that, then we can determine what are the roadblocks that are going to stand in your way, and then what are the opportunities that you'll be able to capture along the way? That provides so much clarity, those three simple questions, but really deep thinking, facilitation around that. But most importantly, when I think back of the progress that you've made personally with Get Beyond Money, is you went and you talked to people. And it really comes back to the purpose, to begin this conversation. You went in, well, what's bothering you? What's keeping you up at night? How can we use this platform to educate, to empower, to elevate you? And now in this time of crisis, it's ... Golly, the opportunities are somewhat endless.

Amy McGraw:

Yeah, it's interesting because I think one ... The mistake that I made the two other times was I had put my full faith and force into a digital solution, but I didn't take the time to talk to people about the human context that digital was going to be put in. I actually saw a Ted Talk just yesterday. I was watching a Ted Talk and I cannot remember the woman's name, but she was talking exactly about how people, so many people put so much faith into big data to solve all the world's problems, but they don't think about the human context that has to be added in. The thick data, as she referred to it. As in, if you don't take the human, if you take human completely out, you're not going to be able to have a solution meant for humans. So you have to be able to put the human back in.

Amy McGraw:

And that was what we did this time. We kind of went, let's start from the very beginning. And we held multiple focus groups, both online and over the phone with individuals that we were targeting and asked them series of questions. So it wasn't just a survey of check this, check this. It was literal conversations with individuals that were in our target audience to find out what is it that they want? What is it that they're looking for? And it comes down to, the very first platform, we were trying to create a college online course of financial education. That's not what they want. They didn't want that at all. They want somebody to help them with their unique situations, but not wiggle a finger in their face and say, you got to do it this way. They don't want that. They actually pushed back against that. They want to do things their way. They just want to be told, how can they do what they want to do and be effective at it with the resources that they have. That's what they wanted and that's what Get Beyond Money is all about.

James Robert Lay:

I think another thing that has made Get Beyond Money so powerful, and it really has the transformative potential, not only for what you're doing at Tropical through marketing, but also culturally as the Chief Experience Officer. Even within the communities, and this is something that's you learned through your studies going through your Master's program, the unifying idea, the central idea from story-scaping.

Amy McGraw:

Story-scaping yeah, yeah.

James Robert Lay:

The unifying idea, it's such a powerful, three word, four word, almost actionable, call to action. We spent so much time here studying story and narrative, but you really are calling people to action to three things, Get Beyond Money. So talk to me about how you're applying this purpose, not only externally with marketing, but as you're moving forward internally, culturally. Because people have to be at the center of this yes, externally, but don't forget, we also have our internal audience as well.

Amy McGraw:

Well, right. Well, we had to do, when we launched Get Beyond Money, we did training inside because there's a part of the Get Beyond Money, money coaching session, where our employees are interacting with these members or potential members to create a plan for them. So that was important that they had that training. But we hadn't started doing the whole cultural change yet because we needed a proof of concept. We needed to be able to pilot this thing and see, it doesn't actually resonate with the market. Really hard to know. You go in with your data. You go in with your ... the results of the focus group and you build around that. But it doesn't necessarily mean what you build is actually going to work considering no one's ever done before, so it's really hard to know.

Amy McGraw:

So we created the proof of concept. We piloted it for three months and it was working. It was resonating and people were signing up. They loved the quiz. They loved ... It was just, it definitely was working. The next step though, because there was a disconnect of actually getting people into the branches to speak with the member service reps. So now we're ... before we put out another big push out in the media, now we're working on internally. The idea of Get Beyond Money as part of our culture. What used to be educate first, sell second is being replaced with helping people get beyond money. So even to the point where we're not there yet, but at some point, even when somebody is walking in the door and sitting down with you or pick up the phone, thank you for calling Tropical Financial, how can we help you get beyond money today? Those kinds of things, those little things, that can help really integrate the platform, the idea, the movement into who we are at Tropical Financial Credit Union.

James Robert Lay:

You talked about the pilot program and I think that's such a great lesson to consider and take away at other financial brands. Because how much ... If we look at legacy operations, we spend all of this time, effort, and energy thinking that we're going to launch something and that's going to be ... that's going to be it. We're going to just, we're going to get behind it. And in today's fast paced, ever changing, exponentially changing world, driven, not only by digital, but consumer behavior, competition, and now things like the environment. How have you been able to pivot quickly to deal with this change and almost kind of throw out previous plans?

James Robert Lay:

I think you're almost ... because I know how you operate your program that way, because I know one of the diagnostic tools we use is Kolbe, and it looks at the way that you operate, it's your OS, your operating system. You have a nine Quick Start, so you can really rapidly adjust to changing environment. But talk to me a little about what's going on right now and some of the changes that you're having to make and how you're having to communicate that to other people.

Amy McGraw:

I think it's interesting because when you say right now, right now is such an odd time because literally if we'd had this conversation a month ago, it would be completely different than what I would be saying today. And a month from now might be completely different again. The thing that I love about my particular team, the marketing team itself, is that we all agreed change is something that is to be embraced. And we are ones that really love change and can adapt to it very quickly. When we're having our daily meetings now, because they used to be weekly meetings, now we're having daily meetings. We're talking about what we can do to help our members down the line. We are doing our checklist for today. The definite, what branches are closed, what branches are open, what hours are there, blah, blah, blah.

Amy McGraw:

All that absolutely is necessary and all that communication, avoiding fraud, avoiding scammers, that's all very, very necessary. But we also are doing those checklists little things, but also looking weeks, months down the road of what's going to change. And it's guesswork because, let's face it, nobody ... This is unprecedented, nobody knows what's going to happen. But we're trying to anticipate what's going to happen and what those needs are going to be beyond the emergency loans and things like that, to keep people level set and stable. Some stability, rather than feeling like they're going to be lost in swimming in a sea of the unknown. So there's ... I think it is a very positive that my little team is very, very good at change.

Amy McGraw:

Now, expand that out to the Credit Union in general, there will always be those legacy people who are holding onto the past for dear life and we're encountering that. And we're dealing with that one-on-one, a lot of just coaching, a lot of coaching. That's another part of our culture now is there's a ton of coaching going on, to get people in the mindset that this is the new normal. You can't go backwards. Backwards, yesterday is never going to happen again. Learn from yesterday, but don't hold on to yesterday. So there's a lot of coaching going on about embracing this new reality and this new future. And I mean that not only with the whole COVID crisis, but also with just the Get Beyond Money and this whole idea of culture, of helping people to get beyond the stress of everyday money to get to the more important things in life.

Amy McGraw:

So it's an ongoing conversation. I do it with our leaders every quarter. We have a quarterly managers meeting with all of our leaders and then I'm also going into the different departments. Our team is actually going to different branches. Before this all happened, anyway, it was a once a week or every month, each one of us will have visited at least one branch, if not more. Hopefully we visit all the branches every month to reinforce the Get Beyond Money messaging that we're doing as well as answer any questions that they have. It's a process.

James Robert Lay:

So when you think about everything that's going on right now, if you reflect on where you've been over the past four or five years along your Digital Growth journey, you've made progress every step of the way. What is one thing that you can recommend to other financial brand leaders, their marketing teams, their sales team. Because look, the future's bright. I feel there's a lot of opportunity over the next six, 12, 18, 24 months. But what is one thing that you could recommend to them as they look to move forward and make progress along their own Digital Growth journeys?

Amy McGraw:

One thing would be just to believe in yourself and believe that you can do this. Doubt is something that can absolutely destroy plans and destroy goals. Now I understand, you might have to move things, change things in your journey. Understand that, that's not the same thing as doubting yourself. Just keep believing. Look to other people who have been successful. Look to them, like a mentor almost, to come in and sort of help guide you, or at least encourage you along your journey. Because if you give up. Like remember that checklist, I talked about it, and it's going to keep growing because there's no end. And if you begin to doubt yourself and stall yourself out, it won't happen and you'll be your own worst enemy. So just don't give up, believe in yourself, and look to others who've been successful to help encourage you along your way.

James Robert Lay:

Well, you've done that today in today's conversation. And I know that you're such a positive force both internally and then just across the industry as a whole.

Amy McGraw:

Thank you.

James Robert Lay:

How might someone just be able to get in touch with you? If they have a question, they just want to connect with you. What's the best way for them to connect with you?

Amy McGraw:

Best way is you can always check me out on LinkedIn. I don't spend a lot of time on LinkedIn nowadays, just because of what's going on, but also anybody at any time is welcome to email me at the Credit Union. I'm more than happy to reach out to anybody and that's the fastest way, because I'm always checking my email at work.

James Robert Lay:

Awesome. Awesome, Amy, thank you so much. Thanks for joining me. Great story, great conversation, and I know that you and your team will continue to do well. Your financial brand will continue to do well in the weeks and months to come as we all get through this together.

Amy McGraw:

Thank you. Appreciate it. Stay safe.

James Robert Lay:

Yeah. Until next time. Be well, do good, and wash your hands.

