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CTRL+CLICK CAST #45 - Teaching UX Design with Leslie Jensen-Inman

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Lea Alcantara: You are listening to CTRL+CLICK CAST. We inspect the web for you! Today we are talking about teaching with UX expert and educator, Leslie Jensen-Inman. I'm your host, Lea Alcantara, and I'm joined by my fab co-host:

Emily Lewis: Emily Lewis!

Lea Alcantara: Today's episode is sponsored by [Visual Chefs](http://visualchefs.com), a versatile web development agency with expertise in content management system and custom web application development. Through partnerships with designers, agencies and organizations, Visual Chefs propels the web forward. Visit visualchefs.com to learn more.

[Music ends]

Emily Lewis: Before we dive in to today's topic, Lea and I want to give a huge thank you to our listeners for [nominating CTRL+CLICK for The Net Awards!](#)

Lea Alcantara: Woohoo!

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: We are incredibly honored and excited to be up for Podcast of the Year for the third time. [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: We're like Susan Lucci. [Laughs]



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Lea Alcantara: I know, exactly, exactly. It means we're still doing something right, hopefully, even after almost four years of podcasting.

Emily Lewis: Voting is open until mid-July and we would [love your vote](#). We'll have the link in our show notes. Now, let's get to the business at hand ...

Today we're talking about teaching, specifically teaching UX design, and our special guest is Dr. Leslie Jensen-Inman. Leslie is a designer, speaker, author and educator. She's also a co-founder of [Center Centre](#), a user experience design school that is the first and only of its kind, a brick and mortar school offering a two-year full time program in UX design. Welcome to the show, Leslie, we're excited to talk with you!

Leslie Jensen-Inman: Thank you! I'm so excited to be here with you all today.

Lea Alcantara: Awesome! So Leslie, can you tell our listeners a bit more about yourself?

Leslie Jensen-Inman: Sure, let's see, I live in Chattanooga, Tennessee, which is really beautiful. If you haven't visited here, it's a great place to visit, a great place to live, and we do have the fastest internet access in the Western Hemisphere.

Emily Lewis: Oh, wow!

Lea Alcantara: Yeah, you guys have that Google Fiber, isn't it?

Leslie Jensen-Inman: No, actually, it isn't. So ours is from our local municipality.

Lea Alcantara: Oh.

Leslie Jensen-Inman: So our Electric Power Board was really forward thinking and put this into play way before Google had their fiber.



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Emily Lewis: Wow!

Leslie Jensen-Inman: And actually, Google came and visited Chattanooga to find out how we were doing it so they could learn from what we were doing, so that they could do it in other cities.

Lea Alcantara: That's amazing.

Emily Lewis: That's really cool. [Laughs] You almost never hear about things like that.

Leslie Jensen-Inman: It's pretty unexpected. A lot of people don't think of the Southeast as that progressive, but Chattanooga is just this wonderful place where we are, and it's very tech and innovative. Our mayor says the word "innovation" quite a lot. [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Leslie Jensen-Inman: We are in an innovation district. We're really working on bringing people together to solve really tough problems and using technology to do that, as well.

Emily Lewis: Wow, that's exciting. That sounds like a great town.

Leslie Jensen-Inman: It's so nice, and I live on top of a mountain and there are birds and bunnies outside ... so it's like I've got 1 Gig up, 1 Gig down to the house.

Lea Alcantara: Wow!

Leslie Jensen-Inman: And yeah, I live on a mountain, it's pretty amazing.

Lea Alcantara: Oh, I mean, that sounds great. I mean, I'm sure we'll talk about how that was part of the reason why Center Centre is situated where you are as well, but before we jump right into that, let's start with the basics, how did you start working on the web?



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Leslie Jensen-Inman: So I started really with design, and I started in print design. There wasn't all that much, in a lot of ways, of the web that we know it today. I remember building things in tables, using spacer GIFs and Flash sites, all the things that we really look at as pretty big no-nos today, but it was the only way we could do things or the way that we could do things and actually have some design control. So I got started – I don't know – with design, my mom would tell you that I've been designing or thinking as a designer since I was at least five when I was obsessive with typography.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Leslie Jensen-Inman: And my poor mom, she'd have to go and buy like extra pads of paper because when I was five, I would just practice my letterforms over and over and over and over again.

Lea Alcantara: Wow!

Leslie Jensen-Inman: Yeah, and then I would have to get the letters perfectly spaced, and my mom in the last few years, she's like, "Oh, I get it now, you were kerning." [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: That's awesome.

Leslie Jensen-Inman: So it was pretty neat, so I've been doing it ... that's kind of just been part of me as far as long as I can remember, and then I moved into the web. I was always sort of around it. My husband, Shaun Inman, he was really instrumental in creating a lot of things for the web back in the – I don't know – I feel like it's the Wild West days when we only had web safe colors and web safe



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fonts. And we wouldn't do this today in the same way, of course, but back then, he created something calling Inman Flash Replacement. They give you control over headline type, doing some pretty fancy stuff. And I saw what he was doing and I was a little less afraid in some ways to get into the web and do a little bit less print just because he and I are extremely competitive.

Emily Lewis: Oh.

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Leslie Jensen-Inman: And it's nice to be in similar spaces, but different enough that we weren't in the same space. But then it just was just clear that this was just another medium, it was another tool, and I needed to know more, I needed to do and get my hands dirty with it to learn it myself, and it was great because he was there to be helpful and understanding, "Well, how do you do this?" And I always seeing him push himself ... it was really inspirational and we're able to collaborate on all kinds of things together and it's just been really great. It's nice to have another designer in the house that gets your obsession with getting the details right.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Emily Lewis: Yeah, I know what you mean. My boyfriend and I are very much the same way, and I'm so lucky because I run my mouth nonstop of all the details of a given project. [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Leslie Jensen-Inman: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: And he listens. And not just passively, but actively listens.



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Leslie Jensen-Inman: It's really nice, and Shaun and I, I think in September, it might be sixteen years together.

Lea Alcantara: Wow, congrats.

Leslie Jensen-Inman: Thank you! And our design skills have grown, and I think throughout the years, of course, as they do if you're practicing, but it's also because we push each other a lot.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Leslie Jensen-Inman: And so it's just a really neat thing, and if you can have somebody in your life – if it's a spouse or if it's a really good friend, really good colleague – it's just really helpful to have people around you that gets you and want to help you push yourself even further than you think you can.

Lea Alcantara: So speaking of pushing yourself, is that what got you involved in education, specifically web education?

Leslie Jensen-Inman: Yes, it's sort of ... I was at a crossroad. I was living in Baltimore, Maryland, and I just had done a bunch of design work for a film with Nicole Kidman and Daniel Craig film called *The Invasion*. And so I did all the on-site graphics for the whole film.

Emily Lewis: Cool.

Leslie Jensen-Inman: Yeah, it was really cool, but it was also really insane.

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Leslie Jensen-Inman: As a designer, I was on call 24 hours a day.



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Emily Lewis: Ugh!

Leslie Jensen-Inman: Yeah, in some days it was like, “Okay, well, we changed the scene and now we need this graphic and it needs to be like designed and on set and printed and gotten on the set within 15 minutes.”

Emily Lewis: Oh wow.

Lea Alcantara: What? [Laughs]

Leslie Jensen-Inman: Yeah, hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of graphics within just a couple of months, and I realized is that I totally could do it. My confidence as a designer went up. So I’m like, “Wow, I’m really making this happen. I can work through having 102-degree fever and being under my desk with like an emergency blanket and then get up and design and go back to that.” But I decided that wasn’t quite what I wanted to do. [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Leslie Jensen-Inman: And I felt like I was doing good work, but I wanted to do more and I’ve always been extremely service-minded. I’ve been a Girl Scout my entire life since first grade – because they didn’t have Daisies back then – and I’m still a lifetime member of Girl Scouts and my mom really instilled a very good sense of service. That part of what we’re put here on Earth to do is to give back to our communities, and my grandfather had instilled that in me too, and so I felt like teaching ... I felt this calling, but I figured, “You know, this probably won’t happen – I don’t know – until like I’m sixty.” This is one of those things where you’re just like, “Well, I’ll probably just be in the profession and I’ll just keep my professional practice.”



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But then Shaun spoke at a conference in Chattanooga and we fell in love with the city. And that was 2005 and we were so in love with Chattanooga that we decided ... like Shaun said to me – we were given a tour by somebody – and he said, “We’re going to move here, aren’t we?” I said, “Yeah, I think so.” And then we moved here and then the people at UTC found out, which is the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga found out that I was moving here, they asked me to apply for a lecturer position at the university. It was really interesting because I was interviewed by the community, not just the other academics because my position was being funded by community foundations here. And my position was really connected with the community, and so it feels like a perfect fit, and it was. And so that position turned actually into a one-year lecture position. It turned into me being at the university for five years as an assistant professor.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Leslie Jensen-Inman: And when I realized there’s only so far I could take things with what I knew my students needed, that’s really when I realized I needed to step away and figure out how to bring education in a way that really make sense to students to be able to get real jobs in the industry, be completely industry ready. And so that’s how I moved into creating Center Centre with Jared Spool.

Emily Lewis: Well, before we get to Center Centre, what do you feel like was – I don’t know if “missing” is the right word, but what wasn’t connecting right in traditional education of web industry skills that didn’t necessarily get you ready for the job?

Leslie Jensen-Inman: So I was teaching within an art department, and the focus really was creating more art even though it was a design program. And I’ll say I had an amazing head of department and was given a lot of leeway, but I knew that to prepare students to be industry ready, it called on resources and structure that aren’t really available in a traditional academic environment.

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Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Leslie Jensen-Inman: So I had the best world I could have at a university setting ... really supportive people and great students, and all of the good things. So a couple of things happened, I taught a summer class and it was a 5-week course instead of a 15-week course and the students and I met every day for like four-plus hours every day.

Emily Lewis: Wow.

Leslie Jensen-Inman: And I realized the students were picking up HTML and CSS extremely, way faster than meeting Tuesdays and Thursdays for 2-1/2 or 3 hours because between Thursday and Tuesday, they have a lot of dates ...

Emily Lewis: Yeah.

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Leslie Jensen-Inman: ... to not really be practicing those skills with somebody that knows what they're doing.

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Leslie Jensen-Inman: And so they can go in, they would go off and do their own work from Thursday to Tuesday, but if they went down a bad path or like a path that was really frustrating, there was just no one there because the resources aren't there or to have me to be able to help to support



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the students learning in that way. They could go five days without me knowing something was really off. And that's really hard, and it's not very sustainable, that's not very effective learning.

Lea Alcantara: I feel like that puts almost so much impetus to the student to be so aware of what their limits are. Because back when I was teaching as well, I was thinking like, "Well, why didn't they just ask me when they were having a problem?" The thing is part of being a student is like you're trying to like work through the problem to learn, but if you're not in between to actually intervene and be like, "Okay, you don't have to bang your head for eight hours at this one problem. Here's the direction you should go. Now, continue." It's like we don't have that when you just have like that one 4-hour class or two 4-hour classes twice a week.

Leslie Jensen-Inman: Absolutely, and when you're starting off, you don't know what you don't know. You're in that learning stage of unconscious incompetence. You don't know that you don't know these things. And you don't know what word to look up; key words to Google. And I think a lot of times, you need to be around other people to help you learn, and especially it's more effectively, more efficiently, quicker. And so that's one of the things I think a traditional academic environment doesn't really allow for in most cases. There are always exceptions, but I haven't really found that many, and I can't actually think of an example to give you right now.

But then the other thing I found out ... there was a certain class, it was a professional practices course. And what I did with the students was I have them work with local non-profits and work on real projects. So for example, there was this project that we did that's called Take Root. It was a tree-planting initiative for downtown Chattanooga. This was all the way back in 2008 and the students came up with a logo, they came up with all the design stuff, and they worked on the website. It was more than just a website because I was in graphic design department where the students were



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learning all types of visual design as well, and so they created these materials. They were actually the first people to donate to the tree-planting fund, the first ones to plant a tree. And what I realized is, the students, they had a real client; they saw the real outcomes of their work. So the students, they helped raise the money to get a city forester a second position in the government here. They employed somebody; they helped that. And that is so powerful that a lot of those students from that group are still here in Chattanooga. A whole bunch of them run a design conference now together here in Chattanooga.

And so I just feel like there's something so valuable to work on real projects. But it's not about the grade, it's about doing something meaningful, creating work that really has an influence on the people around you, and that you can see the results and it's not just about trying to grade grab or get As. It's really about the design and affecting people's lives.

Emily Lewis: Yeah, I think it's that kind of seed of passion that get instilled in someone that makes them not only proficient at what they do, but just really enthusiastic about what they do. I think, for me and Lea, it's why we choose the kind of clients we choose to work with because we really care about their successes.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Emily Lewis: The business is always a priority, but we feel like we're helping them make something that's valuable for their community. I don't know, but it's why I love what I do and I think it's amazing to be able to instill that in your early part of your learning of this field. That was not my experience. My experience was trying to teach myself stuff, signing up for the ad-hoc classes here and there, trying to get what I could out of it, but not really seeing the big picture of what it could mean that I see now twenty years into it.



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Lea Alcantara: Right, yeah. I feel like context sometimes is missing with a lot of not just web education, but just general education itself. It's like drilling down into, "Here's how you learn HTML. Here's how Gestalt works and color theory works." But then when you are actually with a real client and real project and real context and real people, then I feel like the learning tools and everything like that, it actually sticks because now there is an actual association to why you're even learning these skill sets.

Leslie Jensen-Inman: Oh, it's so true. There is a ton of learning theory about just that. It's basically when you apply theory, then that's when you actually learn. We learn by doing. We're humans that ... when we do something, what we've done sticks better than if someone just talks at us about something. But if you learn a lot about a theory and you can apply the theory, that's even stronger. So sometimes in traditional academic environments, people might call someone like me who really focuses on like, "Let's get the application right. Let's understand the greater context," a lot of times you can be called "vocational" because ... a traditional academic environment – it depends on a kind of university you're going to – but with the liberal arts school, there is a lot of focus on learning how to think critically, and thinking critically is great. Although I think we're using these words without much meaning right now, but it's more how can you take that ability and apply it to your work so that you can have a really meaningful career, a great job to be able to be sustainable. It drove me crazy.

I believe that students should be able to graduate and have really great careers and have jobs right away. And I'm not talking like senior position, I'm not like talking about being the next Paula Scher or Jony Ive, but I'm talking about to go out and to be a junior designer, to learn from people that know more than you, to be humble and understand you have so much else to learn, but to be willing to try and learn new things, to do many things, to be a team player, to understand what it means to



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collaborate with other people. In a lot of traditional academic environments, it's cheating if you work with somebody else.

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Leslie Jensen-Inman: But, my gosh, we work together all the time.

Emily Lewis: You mentioned you started Center Centre with Jared Spool, and I'm gathering it's because you saw a new way to do these things where you saw that it wasn't exactly working. So can you expand on, like, why you started, why you partnered with Jared? I'm assuming Chattanooga being a great town was also part of getting that established?

Leslie Jensen-Inman: Yeah, I mean, it just makes sense if you're going to create a user experience design school to do it with one of the people that created, really, and shaped the field. And so every day I'm honored to have Jared as my co-founder.

It's so interesting, we come at things completely differently and we end up with very similar, if not the same solutions to things, so it's just fun. He comes from it where his clients that he's working with – and he works with a lot of big, big name clients. They were – and still are unable – to hire really great design talents, especially user experience talents, just because there is just not enough talent. There are a lot of really talented people out there, but it's not enough to fill the need, and we're seeing an increased need for this as people start to understand that design isn't just about making things pretty. It's about making things work and being useful and being in a way that really allows for better business incidence and better business outcomes.

So he was very frustrated that he couldn't help his clients find the talent they needed, and I was really frustrated because I wanted students to learn the things that they needed to learn to be hireable for the



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types of clients that Jared has. And so I resigned ... I actually resigned from the university before I knew exactly what I was going to do because I know my skill set. I knew I could find or create what I needed to, but I kind of left myself open to opportunities. I wrote blog posts, and of course, I've tweeted about that, and within four minutes of me tweeting like, "Hey, I've resigned," Jared direct messaged me and said, "We need to talk." And as soon as he did that, we started talking and we haven't stopped talking since. We haven't stopped listening either.

We've really just been working so hard together to create this school, this better kind of learning environment, and it's really because we see the potential of what education can be and we see the need and we know that people are hungry for this kind of education. Our student applicants are amazing and they want this so bad and they want a program that really dives deep into the very different areas of user experience and they want something that's more than a 10-week program. They want something that's more than reading books and learning on their own. They really want to be engaged with the community in a much deeper way and learn from very experienced people.

So to create this program, the first thing we did was actually go and interview a whole bunch of hiring managers from big companies and we asked them, "What makes a good user experience designer? I mean, what's the best? What make this? What separates a good person from the best?" And it turns out every single person answered soft skills or a version of soft skills. So it's communication, it's facilitation. So our program is very heavily based on learning how to be a really great professional and a great communicator, a great facilitator.

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Lea Alcantara: I think that's very important. Like a lot of people always focus on the hard skills. You have to learn code. You have to learn like design and typography and all those kinds of things, but if



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you don't know how to communicate your ideas to others in a way that convinces them that your idea is how you should move forward, then there's a problem.

Emily Lewis: Or like Leslie alluded to, be able to listen.

Lea Alcantara: Oh yeah.

Emily Lewis: That's also an incredibly important skill, to be open to other ideas and thoughts that may contradict your own.

So can you talk a little bit more about the program? Actually, before you do that, I just have a question, why Center Centre? And for our listeners, its Center is C-E-N-T-E-R and Centre is C-E-N-T-R-E. So, why that name?

Leslie Jensen-Inman: So there are a couple of different reasons. Basically, user experience design often sits at the center of business. We might not think of it that way, but it is a place where money decisions are being made. And those kinds of business decisions – design, development, you've got analytics coming in to it and copywriting – there are all these things. And UX sits in the center, so we want it to be a centre of things that are in the center.

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Leslie Jensen-Inman: And we are committed to being downtown in Chattanooga in the city center ... we are in the downtown city center, which is a really different kind of way to approach things in Chattanooga. We wanted our students to be around business professionals. Our landlords are the chamber of commerce and we have the entire fourth floor at the Chamber of Commerce building here in Chattanooga. And it's pretty neat, because you walk in on any given day and there is a dignitary,



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the governor ... there have been these people, and you get a sense that, “Yes, I better dress professionally. I better understand what it’s like to walk professionally in everything.”

Emily Lewis: It almost sounds immersive.

Leslie Jensen-Inman: Oh, absolutely, and the entire program is completely immersive, and it’s 75% project based. It’s all the learning by doing stuff.

Emily Lewis: So I mean, what makes your program effective? How did you put together the curriculum and decide how the program should proceed? Because it’s a 2-year full time program, that’s a lot of, I imagine, work to get a curriculum established even before you get the students.

Leslie Jensen-Inman: You are so right. It is so much work.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Leslie Jensen-Inman: There are often days I’m so glad I didn’t know all the things I didn’t know.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Emily Lewis: Yeah.

Leslie Jensen-Inman: We’re getting into this ... I don’t know, I think if I had known and chose to do this, it would have been a little crazy. But it’s really interesting because we’ve had to work with the State of Tennessee. We are authorized by the State of Tennessee, the Tennessee Higher Education Commission, and that’s such an interesting ongoing process. And because we were so different, I give them a lot of credit for really working with us to figure out what we’re doing in a way that makes sense with the way they have to approve things because we’re not traditional in any kind of way.



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So it has just taken a lot of work upfront and that's okay, as our curriculum is really a killer. So we have two-time full time facilitators, Thomas Michaud and Jess Ivins, and they – along with me – have been really working on the curriculum and we actually go through an extremely intensive process. And the book name might be just slipping my mind, I think it's Creating...

Lea Alcantara: *Creating Significant Learning Experiences?*

Leslie Jensen-Inman: Thank you, yes.

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Leslie Jensen-Inman: I already sent you the name of the book.

Lea Alcantara: Yes. [Laughs]

Leslie Jensen-Inman: It just slipped my mind and I realized I have it at home and not in the office. I couldn't just quickly look at my book shelf. So that book is amazing, but it is created for traditional college environments, but we've been able to adapt it and really push it beyond what the author – I think – had intended. And we are using it as a framework to build out our curriculum and every course ... if you could see the worksheets – and one day I think we're going to hope to share that information – but the worksheets to get to just figuring out, well, what are the learning outcomes. And we constantly ask ourselves the question, "What do we want students to know two years after they graduate?"

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]



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Leslie Jensen-Inman: That's a really different way to teach when you're thinking, "What is the information we really want them to retain" versus maybe in a traditional environment, it will be like, "Well, what is the information we need to test on." We don't believe in that kind of assessment in the same way. We do a lot of reflection for students to see what they're learning, and we believe that assessments themselves should be opportunities for learning.

So if we give a test, the reason we would be giving a test was because we think it would be an opportunity for the students to learn more, not to cram and do well in the test, but to actually learn something that they could use two years down the line. As you might imagine, we have not planned for any, if at all, not really any test at this point. Now, that might change, but it would only change if it serves the students in their learning.

Lea Alcantara: So I'm curious since we're talking about just in general assessments, what do you think makes a good teacher for the web industry?

Leslie Jensen-Inman: Somebody that loves to learn.

Emily Lewis: Very good. Yeah.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: I couldn't agree with that more, yeah.

Lea Alcantara: So then what makes a good student?

Leslie Jensen-Inman: Somebody that loves to learn. [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]



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Leslie Jensen-Inman: That's actually what we're looking for our student applicants. We're looking for tenacious, really lifelong learners. They don't actually have to have any background in code or design, but we ask them questions, "So tell me a really significant learning experience ... sometime you taught yourself how to do something that you didn't know how to do. Tell us about that experience." And so that could be rebuilding a car engine, learning construction. It could be learning how to cook, and it's all these different things. Those are perfectly great valid answers because they're the same kind of skills that it takes to learn how to build a website, to learn how to design well, but they're just applied in a different way. So we're looking at history of somebody's learning.

Lea Alcantara: So do you kind of also self-select them for motivation, because I do find that – because in my own experience of teaching – just seeing someone who's actually just as interested in the subject versus someone who's just this is an option that I have to take so I'm just studying or whatever, like has a total dramatic difference in terms of the outcomes for that particular student. Like I remember one girl emailing me before she took my course, she was really nervous because she never took or like she never coded in her life. She didn't know any HTML whatsoever, but she liked it, like once she started learning, I could tell that she liked it. And then by the end of the course, she was like testing media queries and all of those things, advanced things that none of the other students were as motivated or even trying at all. I'm not saying that she was a perfect coder at the end, but she wanted to even try.

Leslie Jensen-Inman: Yes, I mean, motivation plays a huge part in it. Now, that's something that's harder to assess for I think in an interview process, but you do get a sense of it. But it comes back again to finding out do they have a history of being motivated. So somebody can fake an answer in an interview, but if I go and ask some specific questions about the time that they have taught



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themselves something, and “Did they come to a time in that process where it was really frustrating?” – and almost everyone says “yes,” because that’s actually part of learning something new – and well, “how did you work through that part?” And those answers to those kinds of questions are so telling. And then the other thing we do is, we actually call references and have very in-depth reference checks. So we’re not just taking letter references, we actually go through a process and we check the references and we make sure that what the applicant is saying lines up with what the reference is saying as well. And you can find out a lot about somebody’s motivation by asking some good questions with the reference.

Emily Lewis: So you’ve mentioned that it’s important in the, I guess, application or selection process for a student to understand how they have taught themselves something in the past. So I’m curious of what you think, I mean, obviously, being a learner is important, but what’s the benefit of pursuing a formal education versus continuing with that self-teaching?

Leslie Jensen-Inman: I think both are valid paths. And even if you have formal education, let’s face it in our fields, you’ve got to keep being a self-learner, otherwise, you’re going to be left behind. I think the difference for us at Center Centre is the way our courses are structured. We bring in industry experts to teach industry-grade workshops every three weeks for two days at a time and we have partner companies that come in. There are partner company mentors that come in during those workshops and learn with the students, and also they are scouting students, but they are also mentoring students.

So really with our program, the students are building relationships over two years. As long as the students work hard and that they’re good people and they’re good at collaborating, all of those things we know that make good team member, make good employees, they’re going to be extremely



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hirable. These people from the partner companies, both them and the students, will know what they're getting into before extending an invitation to be hired and/or accepting one. They have already known what it's like to work with that specific team because they've worked on real projects with them before. So they're getting this access to, like all the time, not only the facilitators which are full-time faculty who are experts in this ... in the different UX areas. They're getting access to industry experts, like the top of the power group people in our guild, the people writing books and the people at the conferences, those are who we are bringing in. They get access to the partner companies and the mentors and the real projects.

And so it's just like a different level of access and they're learning in a really safe environment how to be better professionals, and I don't think a lot of junior people are getting that level of support right now in a professional setting because the senior people are so overwhelmed because there's such a crunch for talent that it's really hard to level up your junior folks when you're just trying to keep your head above water.

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Emily Lewis: Wow, it sounds like that is the program I was looking for back in 2000 and couldn't find anywhere. I knew I wanted more formal education for myself, but I couldn't find it, like I couldn't find the kind of program I wanted. I had to do like professional development where you get like a certificate at the end and it's just a couple of hours after work. Oh gosh, to go back in time.

Lea Alcantara: You don't even have to go back in time! With like traditional curriculums and stuff like that, it's just not as immersive. And I know, for example, in the university that I taught at, they did have like a professional lecture series where they did try to get one or a couple like professional people to talk about the industry and stuff, but then that's just a lecture. They're not actually doing



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immersive discussions or having an interaction with the students to actually even know if they know what they're talking about or see their processes or anything like that. It's just always like, "Here's an hour or two of your time to talk to someone in the industry. Now, see you in several months." Or never, right?

Leslie Jensen-Inman: Yeah, ours is really a program that's about building long-term relationships, which to me, it's funny. I think I'm sometimes building the program I wanted when I was a student, and I think I'm also building the program I wanted as a teacher. But it's not really about me, but it's kind of, "Oh, this would be so fun," and then I go, "Oh yeah, I get to go to the industry expert workshops. This is going to be so much fun." And it's really meeting the needs of both the students as learners in their lifelong learning, but it's also meeting the needs of the hiring managers which then again serves the students because the students can go through the program and get really meaningful good jobs and be on the path to a very nice career.

Emily Lewis: It's incredible. I'm curious, but do you have any thoughts about ... more along the lines of self-teaching, but really through like an online curriculum like Treehouse or Skillshare? Do you feel like those are something that are effective for certain types of people or that they should be supplemented for this ... the one-on-one kind of experience that you get with other people collaborating and seeing how businesses work?

Leslie Jensen-Inman: I think like the Treehouse ... Treehouse is great, and I used it when I was at the university. We plan to use it with our students in supplementing their skills. But to me it depends on the student in the way they best retain information, but also the learner doesn't have to be an actual student, maybe student of life. It depends on the topic, so I think there are certain things that are way easier to learn online. Like it's very hard to teach someone soft skills and how to collaborate



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with a team in an online setting that's a video series. How do you learn how to work with a team? When you work with a team, you mess up some. With our students, they'll have a facilitator who'd say, "Hey, when you do this thing, it's not that effective. Maybe next time you try this other thing," and they got this guided mentor with them where you don't have that in an online series.

But to learn something like HTML, CSS, different kinds of coding and those kinds of skills, those tech skills ... I think Treehouse and some other programs, all you can learn is really great for some things as well. They do a lot more. The UX-related skills that are ones I think you can actually pick up in a 90-minute kind of workshop presentation format. I don't think all skills are created equally. I don't think we learn them in the same way. I think a lot of it, it is best if you can learn it by doing, but I think some of the text skills, you can learn online and you learn in person. I think the soft skills are really difficult to learn online.

Emily Lewis: So Center Centre tackles learning for its adults, really, but what do you think about that sort of education earlier like in high school or is it something that needs a more thorough approach than like in an option class?

Leslie Jensen-Inman: So, if you mean learning by doing, that I think should be started even at preschool. That should be started really early. I think actually what we're doing here would translate very nicely K through 12. But our current systems I don't think have the resources to support it and just to be able to support the teachers. Like we have really great teachers all around us and we've got systems that don't really provide the best opportunities for them and for their students.

So really I just would start getting sad because I feel like if we could just fix it all, it would be great, but it's not that way. But then I start thinking about this program, there's a new program in Chattanooga



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that's starting out. It's a forest school and it's for kindergarteners and they learn by doing stuff outside all day and they're like motto is something like, "There's no bad weather, there's only bad gear."

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Leslie Jensen-Inman: As long as it is not lightning, the kids are outside learning with, "Okay, like water with dirt equals mud? What does that about?" They're learning life and they're learning skills and they're not stuck in a boring classroom sitting in a table, told to sit still. Can you imagine?

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Leslie Jensen-Inman: I mean, most of the school, they're taking away recess these days and then it's like, "Okay, all the kids have ADHD." And like ADHD is a real thing. But if every single kid has got it, maybe it's us as adult that has something wrong with us. Let's learn by doing. Let's give them opportunities to really experience life in a greater context than what's in a classroom. And I really think our community should be the classrooms.

Lea Alcantara: I do feel like though with this particular question, I'm more curious. I know that as an adult now, I feel like it's kind of insane that high school students are almost forced to decide what to do at 17 or 18 years old as a career so they have a post-secondary option. So how do we get people to even understand what user experience is? Because I know when I was in high school, it's just "web design," but user experience as we spoke about thoroughly through this episode is a lot more than just that. Say I was just like a new 18-year-old graduate, is something like Center Centre even within my radar, or would it be something that you discover after you've done a different post-secondary option like university, let's say, or you've just lived your life a little longer?



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Leslie Jensen-Inman: It's interesting. The reason it's interesting is we have these conversations all the time here. We've been trying to figure out how do we let people know in the community, because we can start local and then figure out things where we can share those kinds of things with other people. Do we go into high school classrooms? So that's what we've been doing, middle school and high school at different parts. Different team members have been talking with different schools. We've got a girls preparatory school here, a GPS, and that's really wonderful. And we're really into trying to make a more diverse user experience world, and so we're very happy to go into schools that maybe are underserved and maybe that have more women, and so that's where we have been starting.

As we're talking with high school students, we are also talking with parents and people at really different kinds of churches, like there are all kinds of different ways to get involved in the community to sort of share what user experience is and that you can come from almost any background and get into it. If you're more interested in writing, there's a place for you in the UX. If you're more interested in human psychology, there's a place for you.

People sometimes if they go to university, sometimes they don't know what to do with their degree. We're just talking with another college in the area and they produce really great biology students, but some of their biology students find out they don't really want to go on to be vets or medical doctors. And so they were saying to us, "We think our students would be a really great fit for your program" because there are so much infomatics that go on within biology. If you have the domain knowledge of biology, then you know UX. I mean, right now you could pretty much write your ticket.

So these are the kinds of things. It's just having conversations. And I don't think there's a magic silver bullet to this. I think it's all of our responsibilities to reach back to the community, share what we



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know. Let people, let younger people, and people that are maybe like underserved or they don't know what options exist, and let them know about our careers.

Emily Lewis: So as we near the end of this episode, I wanted to get some of your thoughts on resources. For example, what would you say are some of the best resources for learning? You shared a few books that you use when crafting your curriculum for Center Centre, and I guess, are those the kind of things that are relevant to someone who's trying to become a better learner, or are those more relevant for people who are trying to help people learn?

Leslie Jensen-Inman: The ones that I've shared, those ones are more helpful to people that are educators or teachers, somebody who's thinking about the learning process for somebody else to learn. For learners, I think we still have such active people ... I know blogging kind of died for a while, but I think it's coming back.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Leslie Jensen-Inman: Or at least, I don't know, but articles through Medium.

Emily Lewis: Feels like it its

Leslie Jensen-Inman: Yeah, and so contests. Oh my gosh, that's how I learned so much.

Lea Alcantara: Hi. [Laughs]

Leslie Jensen-Inman: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Leslie Jensen-Inman: I listen to you all the time.

Emily Lewis: Oh, really?



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Lea Alcantara: Good.

Leslie Jensen-Inman: Yeah, of course! And then I [got inspired the other day by Denise \[Jacobs\]](#). I'm like, "Okay, that's right!" So I was cooking, that's what I was doing. I was cooking and listening.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Leslie Jensen-Inman: And it was like so perfect, and to me, those are the kinds of ways. And podcasts for me really work right now with my life because I can cook and listen to it or I can be on a walk or on the elliptical or whatever and I'm getting this good information on my head, but I'm not having to read at the same time because I love reading, but I read so much that my eyes start hurting so podcasts are a nice break.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Leslie Jensen-Inman: It's also nice just to hear people's voices, the human aspect.

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Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Leslie Jensen-Inman: So I think those are really great. And we've got so many podcasts going on in the different areas of our field. I love listening to yours, of course. And *Hired* with Cameron Moll and *Unfinished Biz*.

Oh, I listen to *Manager Tools*. If you want to learn how to be an excellent manager or excellent employee, there is this awesome resource, it's *Manager Tools*, and they have *Career Tools*, and those are just by far some of the best podcasts out there on how to be a really great professional, and



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we refer to them all the time at Center Centre. And that is probably one of the biggest resources, and they're great even if you're starting out in your career, it will really tell you how do you interview, how do you ask for vacation, like all these things that you would think somebody would tell you how to do, but nobody does.

Emily Lewis: They never do. [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: Yeah, I know, totally.

Leslie Jensen-Inman: I was into two of them. It was like how to go on vacation.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: Oh god. We need to follow that advice. We're still figuring that out. [Laughs]

Leslie Jensen-Inman: Yeah. I think I shocked my team today when I told them that I was actually going to go on vacation.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Leslie Jensen-Inman: That I was going to have my emails forwarded to somebody else that wasn't me. They're like, "I think that's a good idea, Leslie." [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: So what advice would you give someone who would like to teach someone else about the web?



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Leslie Jensen-Inman: Just get started.

Emily Lewis: Right.

Leslie Jensen-Inman: Don't try to be perfect. What is it? "Perfect is the enemy of the good" kind of a thing. Perfection in teaching, every time you help somebody else learn something, you will learn how much you don't know.

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Leslie Jensen-Inman: Don't let that scare you. It's okay. It's okay for someone else to know that you don't know everything.

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Leslie Jensen-Inman: Nine out of 10 times maybe even more. With our team, they really know that Jared and I are still learning things, and we share that every day in our stand-ups. We have a fifth question that says, "What's the most important thing you learned today, and how may have changed your approach in the future?" And every day Jared and I share with the team, "I didn't know this yesterday, but now I do, and this is how it's going to affect things I think in the future."

I think setting that culture is just so important and just having that mindset of it's okay not to know everything. It's learning how to actually find what you need to know and be resourceful, and you teach that.

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Emily Lewis: I feel like that's so true. I think Lea and I are experiencing it firsthand right now because we have an intern and we're trying ... I mean, we kind of created our own little curriculum for



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her for a real-world project and are trying to bring her through the various stages. And I feel like the most meaningful conversations I have with her are the ones where I tell her that she doesn't have to be perfect.

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Emily Lewis: And I try to tell her how this is a process of learning and look at how Lea and I are operating, and that we're still learning and just trying to let her know that it's not perfection that she should be seeking or that we are seeking from her. I love it when she learns something like a hard skill, something really practical.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Emily Lewis: But what really matters most to me is when she's feeling amazing about what she's learning.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah. Now ... like when she's reviewing a bunch of websites right now and then I just directed her to like other perspectives while she's reviewing it, and she was so excited when I pointed like, "Okay, what did you think about this?" So I wasn't even telling her what to do or what I already saw. I was just like, "Have you considered this and this?" And then it changed her perspective of that website completely.

Emily Lewis: She realized that things really aren't black and white.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah. [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: There is a lot of gray in this. There is no one right way for anything. So I feel like that that's probably one of the most valuable things you can teach someone, and like you said, Leslie,



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learn yourself. So what kind of advice would you give to a budding UX professional, I mean, other than to apply for your school? [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Leslie Jensen-Inman: Yeah, I would say before doing that, figure out if UX is what you kind of want to do. Are you interested with that motivation aspect? You can do some research. If you can, attend a Meetup or a UX group or UX book club. Start talking to UX professionals. Most of us are so willing to meet with somebody that asks professionally to have coffee for a limited time, “Could I meet with you for an hour, buy you a cup of coffee and just ask you about your job?”

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Leslie Jensen-Inman: And whenever anybody asks me that in a very professional way, and I can make it work, I say yes, because that’s part of my responsibility to help the next generation, you know?

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Leslie Jensen-Inman: And people did that for me. And it’s just so important to pay it forward, and so I think that’s really important. Just take a chance, get out there and meet more people, read, listen to podcasts, watch ... like so many videos now are free online too from the different conferences. Watch those, and just get excited. See if this is what you want to do, and then continue to push your skills in whatever way that makes sense. So that’s doing things online, if that’s reading more books, if it’s doing some freelance — although I think that’s really tough when you’re just starting out. I think you should always work with somebody that can mentor you.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]



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Leslie Jensen-Inman: So if you're doing freelance, if you can find someone else to basically mentor you, that's way better. Doing internships, trying to find some more formal education, and I think those are ways that you can really get started.

Lea Alcantara: Awesome. I feel like that actually answered our last question about best advice for students in general too.

Leslie Jensen-Inman: Oh, excellent.

Emily Lewis: I feel very inspired and enthusiastic. [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Leslie Jensen-Inman: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: I feel really excited for your students. I feel excited that what if this model becomes the standard in the future, and we have this, and we elevate how we educate within our industry. It's very exciting. I imagine this is really satisfying for you personally, Leslie.

Leslie Jensen-Inman: It's the true sense of the word awesome.

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Leslie Jensen-Inman: It's just overwhelming. It's hard, but it's rewarding, and you've got an amazing team and the student applicants are really, really strong, and it's a lot of fun and it's a lot of hard work, and I don't know ... there is something wonderful when you can have both. It's hard work so you know you're really working hard and it's rewarding, but it's awesome. It's so good to understand that maybe what you're doing is hope in the future, I guess.



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I couldn't be more satisfied or more happy. I feel very, very fortunate to be where I am. I know I worked hard to be here, but just every day I have to remind myself, those hard moments like, "Leslie, you are really lucky. This is the dream, creating something that could not only affect our fields and our industry, but this kind of education could work in others."

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Leslie Jensen-Inman: I just think we need people to be pushing and learning in new ways. I'm so excited.

Lea Alcantara: Absolutely. I think that's a great note to end this episode, but before we finish up, we do have our Rapid Fire 10 Questions so our listeners can get to you know a bit better.

Leslie Jensen-Inman: Excellent.

Lea Alcantara: Are you ready, Leslie?

Leslie Jensen-Inman: I'm so ready.

Lea Alcantara: First question, Android or iOS?

Leslie Jensen-Inman: It's iOS.

Emily Lewis: If you are stranded on a desert island and can only bring three things, what would you bring?

Leslie Jensen-Inman: I want to bring the [Starship] Enterprise ...

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]



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Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Leslie Jensen-Inman: ... the Next Generation and Shaun, just in case it's too far away to get Shaun from the teleporter.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: Oh my god, I love it. [Laughs]

Leslie Jensen-Inman: It would have everything I need. [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: So I wonder if this answers the next question, what's your favorite TV show?

Leslie Jensen-Inman: Okay, now, that's hard. I do love TNG [*Star Trek: The Next Generation*]. I really do and Jean-Luc Picard, I had a crush on him since I was a kid. [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Leslie Jensen-Inman: But I do. I really, really, really love *The West Wing*.

Lea Alcantara: Cool, very cool.

Emily Lewis: That's our second *The West Wing* answer.

Leslie Jensen-Inman: Oh, that other person must be really smart. [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Leslie Jensen-Inman: I don't know, Shaun calls it *Gilmore Girls* in suits. He said it's way to talk-y.



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Lea Alcantara: Oh my god, I love it.

Emily Lewis: Oh my gosh, it's the dialogue.

Leslie Jensen-Inman: Yes.

Emily Lewis: Yes, that makes total sense.

Leslie Jensen-Inman: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: So Leslie, what's your favorite dessert?

Leslie Jensen-Inman: Oh, anything really chocolate-y, like really, really, really death by chocolate kind of chocolate-y.

Lea Alcantara: What profession other than your own would you like to attempt?

Leslie Jensen-Inman: Okay, the first thought that came into my mind, oh that's weird, I didn't think of that.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Leslie Jensen-Inman: All of a sudden I thought like lawyer, but I have no idea why. Look, I think my dad maybe made aware of as a kid. He said I could talk my way in or out of my mischief. [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]



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Leslie Jensen-Inman: And so I don't know if that's actually true. It totally shocked me with that answer. Okay, I don't know, we'll go with that because it was the first thought that popped to my head.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: What profession would you not like to try?

Leslie Jensen-Inman: Ewww. Accountant.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Leslie Jensen-Inman: I'm just trying to get used to numbers.

Lea Alcantara: What's the latest article or blog post you read?

Leslie Jensen-Inman: I just reviewed one that we're about to publish actually. So Jess Ivins wrote it. It's about being productive, *Productivity as a UX Designer*. I'm really pleased with it. I'm very excited. By the time this airs, it will be out.

Emily Lewis: Out on?

Leslie Jensen-Inman: Oh, out on Center Centre. On our blog.

Lea Alcantara: Awesome.



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Leslie Jensen-Inman: So that's the last one I just read, and the other, like Center Centre one, it was in the Chronicle of Higher Education, and it's about competency-based education, but it was more of a video than an actual article, but I can send you that link too.

Emily Lewis: Yeah, absolutely. So next question, if you could have a superpower, what would it be?

Leslie Jensen-Inman: Right, let's see, I'd like to figure out a way to get the world better educated. I don't know.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Leslie Jensen-Inman: If that would be called, like not like better educated ...

Emily Lewis: Super teacher.

Leslie Jensen-Inman: I want to be, yeah, a super teacher and I want to help people be super learners.

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Leslie Jensen-Inman: Because I think it's not really about me, it's about them.

Lea Alcantara: What music do you like to work to?

Leslie Jensen-Inman: None. I don't like any. Because I'm almost always in meetings, and we have tech-free meetings so I don't like music on because I like to be able to hear the conversation. And when I'm not in meetings, I tend to be writing, so it's really hard for me to write with music, so none.

Emily Lewis: All right, last question, cats or dogs?



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Leslie Jensen-Inman: Neither, I'm highly allergic to both.

Emily Lewis: Oh yeah, I remember that.

Lea Alcantara: Oh no.

Emily Lewis: I remember you telling me that.

Leslie Jensen-Inman: Yeah, I think they're all cute from afar.

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Leslie Jensen-Inman: I'm always happy with a good dog or cat GIF. [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: Nice. That's all the time we have for today. Thanks for joining us, Leslie!

Leslie Jensen-Inman: Well, thank you all.

Emily Lewis: In case our listeners want to follow up with you, where can they find you online?

Leslie Jensen-Inman: They can find me [@jenseninman](#) on Twitter and also [jenseninman.com](#) and you can always catch me through [Center Centre](#) as well.

Emily Lewis: Thank you so much! It was so good to talk with you today!

Leslie Jensen-Inman: Thank you. I really enjoyed our conversation.

[Music starts]

Lea Alcantara: We'd now like to thank our sponsors for this podcast: [Visual Chefs](#) and [Pixel & Tonic](#).



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Emily Lewis: And thanks to our partners: [Arcustech](#), [Devot:ee](#) and [EE Insider](#).

Lea Alcantara: We also want to thank our listeners for tuning in! If you want to know more about CTRL+CLICK, make sure you follow us on Twitter [@ctrlclickcast](#) or visit our website, [ctrlclickcast.com](#). And if you liked this episode, please give us a review on [iTunes](#), [Stitcher](#) or both!

Emily Lewis: Don't forget to tune in to our next episode when our pal, Anna Brown, returns to the show to talk about using New Relic to diagnose performance issues with an ExpressionEngine site. Be sure to check out our schedule on our site, [ctrlclickcast.com/schedule](#) for more upcoming topics.

Lea Alcantara: This is Lea Alcantara ...

Emily Lewis: And Emily Lewis ...

Lea Alcantara: Signing off for CTRL+CLICK CAST. See you next time!

Emily Lewis: Cheers!

[Music stops]

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