Ep#365-Interview-Ben-Ramsey

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SPEAKERS

Wasseem Khayrattee, Ben Ramsey

W   **Wasseem Khayrattee** 00:00

Hi, and welcome to another episode of voices of the elephant Wasseem Karate, and today my special guest is Ben Ramsey. Welcome, Ben, how you doing? I am great. How are you?

B   **Ben Ramsey** 00:14

I'm doing great. I remember that the first time ever I saw you as I think back to Sunshine, PHP in 2015. And I was so excited to see you. You are someone who is always doing some task and not wasting any time. But I also remember that you have a faithful companion. It was sitting on your legs, literally next to you. Can you tell tell us about him? That's right. His name. He was a tiger. And his name is rawr. He was a stuffed animal still is that my son had. And I guess. So that was six years ago, seven years ago, almost. He's now 14. So rar is I think rar is still in his room. But he's up on a shelf somewhere. But yeah, I used to take raw around with me to conferences to as a way to communicate back and forth with Sean and Sean's the name of my son. And he, I would post pictures on a Facebook page for him. And Shawn got to kind of see where rar would go. So it was like a little travelling companion to keep in touch with my son as I was going to conferences.

W   **Wasseem Khayrattee** 01:33

That is, and the second time we interacted was probably back in 2017, when you organise the PHP test fest, and I was honoured to have been able to you got me on board. And it was the few little things that I did. But I enjoyed working with you a bit. It was great. And today, I'm so excited to chat with you mainly because for me you are if not the one person but amongst the first person in this small niche that is highly involved both in the community within the community outside the committee, as well as with the language so much highly involved. And it's a great pleasure today talking with you. I have a lot to ask you. Let's start by introducing yourself, Where do you live, what you do as a profession and what exciting projects you're currently working on? Sure, uh, well, my name is Ben, and I live in Nashville, Tennessee, which is kind of like in the middle east of the United States. And there's no oceans nearby or anything, we are way away from the water, it is very humid today, I went out and had lunch at my son's school, and I was melting.

Ben Ramsey 02:48

But it's only 82 degrees. So it's not very hot. That's Fahrenheit, obviously, it's just very humid. But I live here, I have been working from home remotely since about 2014. And right now I work for a company called Skillshare. And I'm a staff engineer there. I have been around as you're mentioning, I've been around PHP since about 2001. And I've been involved in the community since probably around 2003. And in some way or another. So I I know a lot of the people in the community, I know a lot of people who used to be in the community. I've dabbled, you know, around a little bit with core programming. And still don't feel very confident in my C programming skills, to be honest. But yeah, I've been around for a long time. And I guess the reason I'm still around, is because I've gotten a lot of value out of my interactions with the community. A lot of friends, a lot of knowledge I've gained my career has been successful because of it. So that's why I stick around. And as for projects I've been working on, let's see. So there's always the UU ID library that I have that I've been working on for years. And I just did a new release of that it was just a patch level release. But to support PHP 8.1. And there are several other libraries that I have that I've been working on that kind of support as well for 8.1. Also, some just tiny little side projects. One is I've started taking all of the data that's on the PHP wiki for the RFCs and trying to like compile it, and then machine readable kind of automated way, just mainly for fun, like there's no specific reason for it. But so that's on my GitHub repository, or it's the repository for that as I might get The Hub? Yeah, so there's, I feel like there's a lot going on, I could probably go on for a long time talking about all the little things I'm working on. You should have a lot on your plate regarding the probably too much.

Wasseem Khayrattee 05:19

Okay, we'll get back in a moment taking a step back. Was there an it influenced your childhood? How do you get into programming, and PHP? No, there wasn't really a big it influence on me when I was a kid. But I was interested in computers, I think that my interest in computers came because my grandparents had a computer. And I liked playing on it. And so when I was in fourth grade, which was in 1988, my mom went to a yard sale, and got this old Atari 400. I don't know if you know what an Atari 400 is. But it's, it's like this keyboard thing that you had an a cartridge slot. And the cartridge slot would be where you can plug in games, or, you know, whatever else. And it came with a BASIC cartridge bait, the basic programming language. And it also had a cassette deck, like a tape, you know, magnetic tape cassette deck, that you would plug into it, and you'd record programmes onto the tape player. And then you would play them back from that, to run them. So I started playing around with basic programming when I was in fourth grade, just to kind of play around with it. Then, later, when I was in high school, I started building websites, but I never really thought of it as a career. So it was not something I did not go to college to get a computer science degree.

Ben Ramsey 06:57

I have an English degree. Because I, I don't know, I didn't have a lot of foresight, I guess. So I didn't think that websites were going to be a career. But I was wrong. Learn out it's a great career.

Wasseem Khayrattee 07:15

It's a very different kind of twist from the actual language, English language to a programming language? Well,

Ben Ramsey 07:22

I don't think it was a huge twist. I mean, there's a lot of a lot of similarities, syntax and grammar. And I think that communication skills are very important, and software development. And so there was a lot of communication skills that I felt like I gained from that. And the ability also to communicate ideas in a logical and fluid manner, I guess is a good way to put it. But I think that those skills are sorely lacking in the industry.

Wasseem Khayrattee 08:20

I know you must have been asked several times, but how do you get actually started in PHP.

Ben Ramsey 08:28

That's a that's kind of a funny story. In 2000, I was building websites, I started out in Perl, and then moved to classic ASP. And our websites were ASP with a Microsoft Access database, which is just a file sitting on the server, right? So I was building websites like that. And I got put on a project that had been written in PHP three, and I needed to make some changes to it. So I started working on that I made changes directly to the files over FTP. So there was no like IDE or anything like that. I made the changes directly on the production server, as we did. Also, if we move forward a few months from that I had to start on a new project. And we were going to try to start with PHP on this project, mainly for money reasons. ASP had an issue where every time every time you built a new site, and you wanted to communicate with the database, you had to pay a new licence for the I'm not going to remember the name of it now, but it was like one of the drivers or the adapters to talk to the database. And so it was a per site licence or maybe a per CPU licence or something like that. But we had to pay and we didn't want to pay it. So we were looking for an alternative. And PHP was one of those alternatives came up JavaServer pages was also another alternative I was looking at. So I went down the path of trying to get PHP installed on the server. And this was an old Red Hat five or Red Hat six, I don't remember which number it was. But it was on a COBOL rack server. And this is like really old stuff. So I'm sorry, but going way back, okay. But the, we were actually running ASP site sites on this server, even though it wasn't a Microsoft server. And that's because we were using something called chilli, soft ASP, which ran on Linux. So I built PHP, and installed it and I built it with a patchy on that server. But this also was our production server, which another stupid thing I was doing. And I caused the site's to come down all the sites, all of the ASP sites, so we couldn't figure out why. For a long time, for like a week, our sites were down, we finally gave the guys that chilli soft access root access to our server to try to figure it out. They couldn't figure it out, either. All they knew is that when they disabled PHP, the site's worked. So they had to disable php. Many years went by and I realised later that I think what happened was, we had set up PHP, probably to parse every file, and not just dot php files. So it saw the ASP tags on the ASP files and tried to parse what was in those and tried to execute it. And of course, it couldn't. So I think that's what brought it down. But that was my first big experience with PHP. I did not scare me away, though, mainly because I started asking questions on the mailing list at that time, and it was the general mailing list. And everyone was so helpful. And that was something different from what I saw on other programming, mailing lists. So I stuck around because everyone was super helpful in getting answers to questions I needed. And this was before I could go to Stack Overflow and just look up the answer. So that was a really helpful first experience.

Wasseem Khayrattee 12:19

Regarding the user list that you were emailing to, was it like, there was a lot of people at the time? Or was

Regarding the user list that you were emailing to, was it like, there was a lot of people at the time? Or was it just getting started with the people?

B **Ben Ramsey** 12:30

That mailing list is still around, it's the PHP general mailing list. And as opposed to the internals, one that a lot of people talk about. It is not very active these days. But back then it was a very active mailing list. And I mean, it was one of the few places you could go to, for PHP help. That was an official source of help. There were a lot of forums and message boards around at the time. And I have some friends that got their start helping people on those forums and message boards. But yeah, it was a much more active mailing list at the time with a big community.

W **Wasseem Khayrattee** 13:11

Let's focus a bit on the GUI community site. Like I mentioned, you're the very first PSP people to have been kind of on the roundtable of the CCO committee members, and have been consistently adding value to and contributing to the community, as well as the language. It's safe to say that you're among those founding community members along Elizabeth Teramo.

B **Ben Ramsey** 13:36

I don't know if I would say I'm a founding community member, the community existed. Well, before I got involved, there are parts of the community that and there are some people who go all the way back to 1995. When Rasmus first posted this, there are still people who are active from that time. So I wouldn't call myself a founding community member, but I am certainly one of the longest, like active community members, I guess. Yeah, I don't really want to, like take credit for something like that. But I have been around for a long time. So and it's been a privilege to kind of get to see the community grow and evolve over time.

W **Wasseem Khayrattee** 14:26

You have been there since the year 2003. I want to get a glimpse of your memory during those early years, who was the key committee person at that time? And how did you integrate the community?

B **Ben Ramsey** 14:42

At the time, I think that the community was was different, but not a whole lot different. I think you have to kind of understand that. We didn't have all the frameworks back then. The biggest projects at that time were probably Joomla Well, it wasn't called Joomla. Then it was called Mambo. And it said, remember that name. Also, I think typo, three was around then. And PHP, BB was definitely around. And also WordPress was very new. So it was just getting started. And there was another thing called people who remember this might laugh, but our get a chuckle. But there was another project called PHP Nuke, which was very popular, and also became infamous for security holes. But so the community existed largely as, like internals, people who were like working on the language, and then people who were working on these other projects around the language. And also, there were others pair, as well, which had a really big community behind it. And then there was a bunch of other stuff going on, I've distilled it down to like,

really a few key things. But there were a lot of other pockets of communities around. So the community has always been big, and never, never homogenous and never all unified. So I think that's important to know, when, when we talk about like, parts of the community, or the community as a whole, that there are, you know, a bunch of different facets to it. We might group them all together, but there's no way that I could possibly know everyone across all the different communities. So I say all that as a lead up to try to answer your question. Now. I think that the people that I remember back then that were pretty vocal and prominent in the community, the one who kind of got me involved was Chris shift. And shortly after I met Chris, then I met Elizabeth Nevermore. And you know, a whole bunch of other people. I mentioned her because you mentioned her earlier. But I think Chris was kind of the, the one who really encouraged me and a bunch of other people, he brought in a bunch of other people together who did not know each other before. And so this was a project that he started, that was PHP community.org. And he wanted to create this as a way to bring the communities together, because there were all these different kind of factions around and pockets. This was an effort to try to bring a lot of them together, mainly so they could get to know each other. And through that, there can be innovation when people get together.

W Wasseem Khayrattee 17:42

Hello, Sue, it was Chris, who has created the php.org.

B Ben Ramsey 17:48

Yes.

W Wasseem Khayrattee 17:53

I want to touch a little bit about PHP Apalla. Cherry Tree. Am I pronouncing it? Well? PHP, Appalachia, Appalachian. For Appalachia, I guess, depending on where you're from, to have a Texas either way in the US? Yeah. Okay. Which you guys, can you narrate this a bit how it all started? And what was the objectives behind?

B Ben Ramsey 18:18

Again, this was through meeting all these people. We originally all met on IRC, and the PHPC channel on Freenode. That channel is still on Freenode right now, but everyone has left freenode to go to library chat.

○ 18:37

Can you talk a bit about this? It's the first time I come across this? Oh, sure. So freenode, for a long time was a place where open source projects could have official chat channels. And it was open for for specifically for open source projects. But this year, there was a buyout, or a takeover or something of the free node administration. And a lot of the staff who were not aware that this was happening, decided to leave.

B Ben Ramsey 19:09

Meanwhile, the person who was now in charge was kind of a jerk about some things, and they wiped out the entire database, which got rid of all the channels and everyone's accounts. So at that point, that's when I just said, Well, I'm not going to go back, because they're just doing all sorts of weird, crazy things. But yeah, so that's what happened. The staff that were running freenode, left and went and formed a new network called Liberia. And so a lot of the open source channels that used to be on Freenode have moved over to Liberia. So yeah, going back to PHP Appalachia. So we all met on Friday. Note IRC and the PHPC channel. And it was kind of a, I guess we were just kind of, you know, tossing out ideas one day, and someone said it would be great to do like a camping trip together. And that morphed into well, we could all get together in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park in North Carolina, and have kind of a get together. So that that Elizabeth Nevermore and I organised that first one, and we had to get together. And then there was a second one two years later, that I think Keith Casey and Elizabeth Nevermore put together. And we did that one, not far from the original one. It was in Gatlinburg, Tennessee. So it was a lot of fun. That year, we had a cabin that all of us stayed in just one huge cabin. We called it the beast. I think it slept like 36 people or something like that. It was Skaven. And then Brian Moon from deal news, his company rented the cabin right next door, which slept another huge amount of people. And so the two cabins together, we had quite a quite a neat crowd. I don't know 30 to 40 people or something. And it was a lot of fun. We had, we had some talks, but most of it was just hanging out and having fun. So it's exciting. Well, I don't know if we would do it again. But it's something that comes up every few years as Hey, remember that time it was pretty fun. Maybe we should try it again.

Wasseem Khayrattee 21:43

For the sake of old golden memories, you also organise PHP, the PHP community Conference, which had as an aim to be a conference for people who care about PHP. And what they make visit. That purpose Kobe's a lot of passion and emotion in the artist for me, I want to dig into your boss again, in what state of mind where you and what made you create that conference with that CO purpose.

Ben Ramsey 22:12

That conference was created because of mainly directly as a result of Chris shift let's Brooklyn beta conference. He started Brooklyn beta, I think their first year was in 2010. And, or maybe 2009. I don't remember exactly when the first year was. But after that, there was I had been wanting to do a conference for a long time, one that was just a smaller conference that was a little more of an intimate setting that wasn't at a hotel or a convention centre, and mainly focused on what people were building with PHP. And after Brooklyn beta. And I saw kind of how they ran their conference, it was exactly that it was an intimate setting. It was a lot of people all together with one single track of talks. And each talk was really focused on what someone was building with tech, and what problems they were solving. And it wasn't really about the tech itself, it was about the problems they were solving with tech, and how they were helping other people. So I thought, well, that would be great to really kind of see what people are doing with PHP, what kinds of projects they're working on, what kind of products they're building, and have them, you know, present those to people to, to kind of inspire them to also go build products that help people. So that was really the goal behind it. And I feel like we were really successful with that. We only did it that one year, though, shortly after that. That was in 2011 in April. And then like there were community conferences everywhere. But the main reason I haven't done it again, is just it's a lot of work to do a conference. And so all the other people who do conferences, my hat's off to you. It's a lot of work. If you can do it more than once. You are an amazing person who has much more enthusiasm and excitement. And yeah, to put something like that. And I guess the word I'm looking for is energy. Yes, its energy. You have to have a lot of energy to put on a conference and you have to be able to put up with it. A lot of disappointing things

things go wrong. You also have to be willing to maybe sacrifice some of your own money, which is not a fun thing to do. And as I know I have friends who've lost money on conferences and so yeah, I think that those things all kind of play into why I haven't done that again.

W Wasseem Khayrattee 25:00

Was it the very first PHP conference at that point in time? No, no. This was 2011. So the first PHP conference itself was back in 2000, in Germany, and I don't have their names in front of me, but I do know, I know the people who put that on. Actually, no, I think I'm wrong about that. There was one in Germany in 2000. But I think the very first was in Japan in 2000.

B Ben Ramsey 25:31

Earlier in the year, and I met one of the organisers of that conference at PHP world a few years ago. So that was very, very neat to get to meet her.

W Wasseem Khayrattee 25:45

What would be your best memories of PHP con?

B Ben Ramsey 25:53

My best memory is watching Chris Hart, just, you know, grumpy programmer, ride a mechanical bull.

W Wasseem Khayrattee 26:02

Oh.

B Ben Ramsey 26:05

I think there's a picture of him somewhere riding this mechanical goal. That's one of my favourite memories. We had an after a party at one of so it was in Nashville was was was where the conference was. And Nashville has these bars downtown with where it's all all the music is there's no cover charge to get into them. So all the bands are playing for free. They're paying playing for tips. So they have a lot of good country music, or other kinds. They have other styles of music to country as the one most people think of in Nashville, but there's, there's some rockabilly clubs too, which I actually enjoy those. But anyway, I'm getting sidetracked. So we went to one of the bars as an after party, and had rented out the upstairs of it. And they had a mechanical bowl. And a lot of people, we took turns going around to writing the mechanical bowl. I think Microsoft actually sponsored that party. Maybe Mark Brown from Microsoft was the one who sponsored that party. But it was a lot of fun. You're involved in leading and organising user groups as well. Can you update us on which user group you're currently leading and involve? I like how he said which one you're currently leading, like. Now, I've only led to user groups. One of the one I'm at right

now is Nashville, PHP, in Nashville, and the one previously was Atlanta, PHP, and Atlanta, Georgia, the one in Nashville right now. I mean, things are kind of slow right now. We had several good months this year with talks. But it's, you know, I think that you know, the pandemic has worn everyone else.

W Wasseem Khayrattee 27:50

True. So so it's, it's been harder to kind of like even, it's not that it's hard to find.

B Ben Ramsey 27:57

To find speakers or anything. I think that that's not such a hard thing to do. But it's hard to kind of just feel any energy behind organising something like that, at least for me.

W Wasseem Khayrattee 28:11

From your rich experience, and I want to ask you, do you have an idea? Which part of the world has the most, let's say, a doozy plastic or most highly involved? PHP committee?

B Ben Ramsey 28:33

That's a good question. I think there are two parts of the world that come to mind. One is Brazil, and the other is Japan. I think that I've had the opportunity to go to to visit Brazil, and speak at one of their conferences. And that was probably the largest conference crowd I've ever spoken at largest PHP conference crowd. And I have heard similar things from the Japan conference. I think that they have a large conference there. I have heard great things from others who have been able to go speak at that conference. And I hope one day I'll get to as well. But those two communities, I think, have I've seen a lot of activity from them within their own communities. And it's a shame really that, like, the Western arm, sorry, I guess Brazil is is part of the Western world, technically. But it's a shame that like North America and Europe and Africa and those communities aren't really as tied into, I guess, the Asian community or even the Brazilian community. It would be great to see a lot more cross pollination between those communities. Yeah, that's that's a good thing. You you've mentioned it.

W Wasseem Khayrattee 29:57

Let's step up to your PHP technicalities, you seem to be someone who is very meticulous about tooling when it comes to PHP, and you have a special focus to develop experience. I want to ask you about your beliefs and stance on developer experience.

B Ben Ramsey 30:16

I think developer experience is one of those things that's really come to the forefront in the recent, in the last five years, 10 years, it was not something we thought about often, in the past, although it's always been there. I think the experience that a developer has, when they're building software, is really important. And it's something that's important for us to take a look at. I think that it is, this is really my

opinion about it, because I haven't done enough research into it. But I think this is a trend that has come out of developer advocacy. Because developer advocates have to work with developers, that's who they're selling to, for the most part, and selling their products to developers, they're really selling tools and their SDKs. And they're trying to get developers to use them. So the easier their tools are for a developer to use, then the more likely developers are going to use their tools. So I think that that's really where this whole developer experience focus has, has kind of arisen from. But among those of us who build open source tools, it's extremely important that we take the same focus, because we're building tools for developers to use. And we want them to be easy for those developers to use. Otherwise, they're not going to use our tools, and our tool doesn't solve our problem. And the same thing goes for like, even our own teams, within the companies we work for, or even if we're a one person, team, one person shop, we need to focus on the tools we use, that make our doing our jobs easier. Because that helps us kind of get the work done, it helps us have more enthusiasm, more joy in the work we do, I think your tools can can affect really your mood, even when it comes down to just how you feel about development. If you hate development, maybe you should take a look at your tools. That may not be the only reason you hate development, maybe there's a whole bunch of other stuff. Maybe it is the community that you hate, because there are bad people in that community. But that's a different topic. It could be your tools, too. So that's something I've been feeling really strongly about lately. And I think one of the things that's brought it to my attention is, among other things, is it seems really prevalent in the JavaScript community to talk about developer experience, and that seems really prevalent in the Laravel community to talk about it. But I haven't seen a lot of discussion among other groups in the PHP world. So that's why I've kind of started talking about a lot more this year, especially with a recent talk I've been giving.

Wasseem Khayrattee 33:13

It's true that this is like the oxygen of developers. When it comes to the workplace, I get the feeling that this is not even the first or second thought for attack in a workplace. Is that your experience, too? And how can we, as developers, as a community of developers, get bosses founders to acknowledge that developer experience matters to us as a developer? Because that's the very first thing that needs to be set as a foundation so that we can do our craft in a better way? Well, I mean,

Ben Ramsey 33:58

this is all anecdotal. But I wonder if there are studies that could could show this, I know that there are studies that can show how developer happiness is impacted by their tools. So there are some studies already that show that. But there may, I think there's an opportunity here to look at productivity as well. Definitely. If you have better tooling, it can mean the difference between a developer making a new hire developer making their first commit and push to production on their first or second day versus two months later. Right. There are some places you join. Are I've seen this in the past? I don't know. And I'm sure it's still still prevalent. There are some places developer will join. And they, it takes them weeks before they are able to really make any kind of valuable contribution. And a lot of that is all about the tools. It's it's about how you deploy it's about how you develop. And so if the company doesn't have a plan around that, or any kind of framework in place for the developer to use when they start there, then they're on their own, for the most part. And at previous companies I've worked at, where there was a focus on developer tooling, our experience, that's what it boiled down to each developer was kind of responsible for their own experience. And for their own tooling around things, sometimes the developer create a tool, and then they share it with the team. But because they didn't have a culture of this is the tool we all use to build this thing and to deploy it. And whatever I'm built and untested. Because that didn't exist, it didn't become a part of the workflow. Whereas on the other hand, when you do have that in place, and a developer builds something that is helpful and useful, then it can become part of that workflow. And you can even code it

into the workflow, so that the other developers are running it without even thinking. And so it's good examples of that, especially at my current company are really just the build process. You know, all the things that happen when I push a branch, up to the repository, the remote repository, it goes through circle CI, and runs all sorts of things on it. And these are things I don't even have to think about running. It does all of it for me. But even the act of like running it locally, there are some things I have to think about. And that's built into our tooling. And you know, it, it wasn't, it's not all great. There are things that could be polished things that could be made better. But for the most part like we are continually improving that so that we have a better experience. And I think that I think it is at a good point right now where when new developers join the team, they're able to make contributions pretty quickly. And so I think that's important anywhere you go. It's an interesting thing you mentioned, because when we say developer experience in a workplace, I think the major role in this equation is the technical lead, or the manager, because they are the first line of defence for developers. So relating to my previous experience, I had the opportunity to lead a team at two different companies in the first company, it was very difficult, I could not fight for it. In a second one, I saw it was possible. So I was able to do that. But since you have more experience than me at this stage, you have been with so many companies, and you have been a director ahead. And Timlin. What is your feed on this, those leaders in development? Are they willing to push that or they simply just I think that there's an appetite for it now, nowadays, but that's given a limited kind of exposure to all sorts of people, I think there's always going to be people who push back on it, managers who just who don't understand the value. But I do think that there is a lot more openness to it, there's a lot more about it and spoken about it and best practice circles. And especially like at large companies like Amazon, and Facebook and wherever. And people tend to managers tend to look up to what's going on and those kinds of companies. So because they see that there's that happening. I think that's why a lot of people are more open to it nowadays. I also think it depends on your team makeup, and your team structure, you've got to have some people on the team who kind of are interested in building those things out. And some companies nowadays are putting together a special teams that kind of do that their DevOps team, or their platform team, who are able to kind of build that tooling for them. But if you're in a company that doesn't have that capability, then it's really on the developers. So in those cases, it's it's really a case of, I think the best thing for the developers should do on their own, if they're not being supported by their manager to build these things is to build it in small chunks. So if you have a small team and you've built, you've written a script that helps you deploy the site, well then put that script somewhere where everyone can have access to it and agree among yourselves that this is now your deployment process. That that's that's what you're going to use or if you use something that helps you run the tests in a more efficient way, you know, you're just gonna make little incremental changes along the way that help your job become easier and smoother. And if you can show how it's helping make your job easier and smoother, that's gonna be a lot of good ammunition to bring to your manager. I was gonna say, you mentioned though, that I was a director in the past, and I was even a VP of engineering, I was horrible at those jobs. So I wouldn't necessarily think that I have the best experience or advice on those jobs, I am much better as an individual contributor, I think.

W **Wasseem Khayrattee** 40:42

I would like to see you lead by example, in your developer experience, philosophy, because you have created projects and skeletons around it, namely, the PHP library starter kit, and the dev tools. Can you tell us about these tools that you have built? And why did you build it? And what's the plan? Sure, actually, the the why is quite simple. It's because I, when I needed it, I found myself making changes, as I learn more about thing, the way I want tools in my library to work or any library to work, I would add that to that library, and then I have like, I don't know, a bunch of other libraries. So I have to go add it to all of them. So the idea behind the dev tools, which is a composer plugin, that I have, the idea behind that was, well, I could create this one thing that all of my packages require, like,

B Ben Ramsey 41:45

under required Dev, and whenever I want to make a change to it, that is going to help me on all my projects, I'll just make the change to the plugin, and then all my projects get it. So that was the main reason why I did that. But then it, you know, from there, became, well, this is something that could be really helpful in a team, before developer tools they share across all of their projects, whether those projects are websites, or whether their other software packages they're building, it doesn't matter, like you tend to have the same processes across all of your projects. So this is a great way to share that. So the library starter kit, was really just an extension of that. It was me looking at that going well, you know, I tend to start, whenever I start a new library, I need to go look at one of my other libraries and pull these files over and, you know, set everything up. So this was a way for me not to have to do that anymore. And then I felt like it was a good way to teach others about package development. So I expanded on it and added a lot more features for things that I don't necessarily need. Like when you run it, it'll ask you which licence you want to use, I'm almost always going to use the same licence. So I added that functionality for other people, so that they could use it. But it's highly opinionated. So it is based on kind of my experience and the way I like my packages to be developed, but are to be put together. But I think, and I hope that others have found it useful. In fact, I do know one person at least has found it useful. Someone just last week submitted a an issue and said, hey there, it'd be cool if we could do this with it. And I said, Well, can you tell me what your use cases because you know, so I can understand it better. And what they want to do is they are they are building like I'm going to describe it really bad. But I think that they have a bunch of, or they've got like a schema that they use, that generates libraries for all sorts of different like connectors to their system. And they need to do this and replicate it all the time. For some reason. That's what I don't quite understand. But in order to do that, they wanted to just use the library starter kit to completely generate the library right off the bat, like with all the files and everything in it. And then their schema thing which generate all the code that goes in the library. So they are building all these packages, which I thought was really cool. So I made some changes to it to help support that functionality. So now they can fully automate what it is they're doing.

W Wasseem Khayrattee 44:47

Cool. We now step into bed wrappz as the new release manager for PHP.

B Ben Ramsey 44:59

So This year, you have been chosen to be in that role. First of all, how is your journey going so far? How are you liking it? Yeah, it's going really well, so far. I am working with Joe Watkins and Patrick Ehlert, who are also release managers on it. Joe is the senior release manager. He's been a release manager before. And just kind of, you know, he is really kind of there as more of a mentor kind of, to show us and answer questions as we need it. But Patrick and I have been managing the releases so far on our own pretty much. And we haven't really done any formal, like you do this week. And I'll do that week type thing yet, I kind of suspect that after the general availability release 8.1 dot O, that we'll probably get into more of a cadence like that, for the more regular release cycle. But right now, today, in fact, I don't know when you're going to be publishing this. But today, we announced release candidate number three. And so those announcements just went out earlier. And Patrick was the one that queued those up and sent them out. And on Tuesday, I was the one that created the build. So what we do, each time we each week, we have a release, the release is always on Thursday. But we will do the builds for the release on Tuesday. And this gives us time to catch anything ahead of time that might need to be fixed for the build. And once we do the builds on Tuesday, I think Christophe is the one who does the windows builds. So he'll do the windows

builds. Then Remy will do the fedora builds. And so they'll both report back that their builds worked fine. Or if they run into an issue. That's when we'll try to fix it before we do the announcements on Thursday. So that gives us a little bit of buffer time. But yeah, it's been going pretty smooth. So far, there have not been a lot of hiccups. I think that there was one case of having to figure out whether or not we were going to allow someone to contribute something after feature freeze. And we dealt with that. And kind of the the ultimate goal. The ultimate result of that was no this cannot be added because it is a new feature. I guess the the main question around it was, Is this a feature? Or is it fixing a bug? And we ultimately decided that it was a feature, so we wouldn't allow it. But yeah, that was the only kind of like unsmooth or rough spot? I guess because I can't talk today apparently, but. But it was the only rough spot we've encountered.

W Wasseem Khayrattee 48:11

prior to putting your heart in the rig, as Sarah puts it, what would be the main criteria for someone to be considered for this role? And is there any kind of interview process for this? Or is it just like

B Ben Ramsey 48:25

you had to see selection? There. It's not an interview process. It's not very behind the scenes. I think in the past, when they've asked for volunteers. If they'd had one person, volunteer, then there was no need to vote right? The past couple of times though, we've actually had to do votes for PHP eight Dotto. I had also throw my hat into the ring. And I was not voted in that was Gabriel Caruso, who was chosen for that. And then this year, I almost didn't put my name in. But then I changed my mind at the last minute and decided that you know, I really wanted to do it and it's something I've been wanting to do for a long time. So I I sucked it up and put my name in. And I'm glad I did. It's been a good experience. The main reason I changed my mind to throw my hat in the ring this time was because I saw that Eric Van Johnson had put his name in and I was like that guy's not going to be released manager. I am going to be released manager so that's why I put my name in there I love your Eric That's I don't know if you've seen that's like an ongoing like, jokey he's been doing on on PHP ugly is like hit him, you know, blasting me and like complaining about how I got released manager and he didn't. So that's why I have to bring that up. But yeah, as far as requirements for being released manager, whether there's an interview process, there's not an interview process, I don't know, what would happen if just like, someone put their name in, and no one knew who that person was, and, or whether they had any experience at all, like, I'm not sure what kind of situation that would bring up, I don't think that's ever really happened. Everyone who's kind of put their names and have had some experience with internals, they've been on the internals mailing list for a little while. Most people aren't going to put their name and if they like, unless it's something they really want to do, I don't think so. But in terms of like, the criteria, really, it you just need to know get, you don't have to be a sea Guru, I know my way around, see well enough to kind of mess with it. And to know if I need to make some changes here or there. But it's not really my job to make changes or to fix the bugs, it's my job to say, Hey, there's this bug here, it needs to get fixed for the release. And I can ask around and find someone who might be able to, to help fix it. Or, and then it's also my job to make the releases, which involves, you know, working with Git, and GitHub. So that that's the main requirement is someone you need to be familiar with get, and you need to be able to communicate, I think that those were the the two biggest requirements. Other than that, you can, you don't have to know a lot of see, it would be helpful if you can find your way around the PHP code base. like, I am not, you know, I think Patrick is much more knowledgeable of the code base than I am much more knowledgeable about C programming than I am. So, you know, he's there to help with that. And so as Joe, but I haven't had any problems with that myself, since since we got started.

W Wasseem Khayrattee 52:14

Is there any specific toolset or software's that you use on your step? For this process?

B Ben Ramsey 52:22

I use sea lion, which is a JetBrains IDE for PHP. And I actually posted on dev two, Dev dot two, how I set that up. And so if you go to dev dot two, slash Ramsay, there's a blog post there that kind of talks about setting up C line for PHP development. I use that mainly to, to do things, but most of the time I use the command line for the for all the git commands, I don't use a special tool for that. When it comes to release managers, would you say there is a lack of a juiciest, or do any of it? I don't think there's a lack of it. But like I said, the last two times we've had to vote. And so that shows that there is a healthy level of enthusiasm for the role. And I don't think we've seen that in the past. So it's good to see that now. And in the future. So what we did this time, because usually, it's always been to people, like someone who has the more senior who's has the experience, and someone who is brand new. This time Joe decided to take on two mentees or apprentices. And that way, we kind of build up the pool a little bit more. So in the future, once once this term is kind of up and I say term, it's like we were elected to term I guess, in a sense, we have agreed that we'll be around for three years to do the releases for 8.1. And then after three years, 8.1 will be end of life, and so will no longer need to do releases for it. So it's dependent on the end of life. Right, right. And so I think that, you know, that would be another requirement for a candidate they need to be they need to be aware of that. It is a commitment. And I say that, I guess it is important. It is an important commitment. And so you need to be willing to make that commitment to say you're going to be around for at least three years and dedicated to doing these releases. And if if you're going to miss a week or something, that's fine. Like in our case, I've been able to just be like Patrick, I'm not going to be there this this time. Can you do it? Patrick was on vacation for a couple of weeks. And during that time I did all the releases. So we've been able to work it out. And I think that that's the that's the key really like You need to be able to work out, you know, your availability with your partner or partners who are helping with the releases.

W Wasseem Khayrattee 55:10

How much of diamond effort are we looking at the week?

B Ben Ramsey 55:15

Well, the release cycles are every two weeks right now, I would say, it is really kind of up to the individual, I could put in a lot of work, if I just do the bare minimum for the releases, also, which involves, for me, I'll look through the bugs, and the ticket tracker, see what bugs have been logged for 8.1. And I'll also take a look at the branches and pull requests. And I want to make sure that tests are passing before I do a release. And so I kind of bucket all that together, it's you know, several hours, a couple hours a week, not not a lot of work. If I wanted to put in more effort I can, I can go in and do development on my own, do much more triaging of bugs, that kind of stuff. That's up to the individual. But if you were only putting in the smallest amount of work, it would be, you know, three hours a week, maybe two or three.

W Wasseem Khayrattee 56:18

Considering this is a bit of a lead role, how are you managing your time with your real life work and this

role, because it looks to me that it takes up, though it could take like two hours for you. But considering you your day to day, this is quite some weightage on your personal life as well.

B Ben Ramsey 56:41

Well, yeah, I do spend a lot of time on my computer. And so, so there's that there's other open source projects I work on. And there's my regular daily work that I have with my job. And then there's family time, and so all of my time. And then there's like just like the, what I call the veg out time where you just want to like, completely decompress and stare at a screen with moving pictures on it. You're my TV. So with all of that, it's like all of my time is taken up between all of those things. And I think that the the short answer to your question is that I really suck bad at managing all of that. I am not good at managing my time. I do manage to get the things done, though, that I need to get done. I, I prioritise certain things as best I can definitely prioritise my job over that I do. I do all of you know, my open source work in the evenings and weekends, mostly, but But you know, sometimes there, I just need a turn off. So I just don't do the open source work. And instead go, you know, chill out, spend time with my family, that kind of thing. So yeah, I'm really bad at managing my time. I'm trying to do better. But I don't have a great answer for that, because I'm so bad at it.

W Wasseem Khayrattee 58:21

One last point, before we move to the next one, what would be the challenges maybe you have already give us an idea of the challenges, but for you what will be the main challenge that you feel you will be facing ahead for these free years?

B Ben Ramsey 58:37

I guess the main tech challenge would be time. It's it's that balance of time. I think that I mean, if I could be a little personal, I guess is that I, I'm diagnosed with ADHD. And so like, the biggest problem I have is, is kind of finding that balance. And I mean that the thing is I jump around from one thing to the next so quickly. It's just like, whatever captures my attention is, it's just like always buying for the most important part of my mental capacity. It's like I'm always trying to, you know, juggle too many things. And as a result, I often like drop the balls on a lot of those things that I'm juggling. And so the biggest challenge is really trying to, to overcome that and to work within those limitations. And I think I managed to somehow be successful sometimes with that. I'm not quite sure how it works. But yeah, thanks. Thanks for sharing this, but I didn't know your situation, but I'm thankful that you've shared with us, from what I can say you're very successful, but like I've mentioned, you're doing it

W Wasseem Khayrattee 1:00:00

For me, your UI leader up there that I look to for inspiration, I even think how do you manage to do all these things? Even during the PSP test fest? I was amazed. Wow, you juggle among so many things in your life. It's incredible. Thank you for all you do better. I think from the whole community, I think the amount of hours you put every day for the community. Wow, I have no word to express how much gratitude we should have for you. Thank you very much that that means a lot to me. I do it. Because I think as

B Ben Ramsey 1:00:30

Ben Ramsey 1:00:39

as Rasmus Lerdorf once said in a talk he gave at Sunshine, PHP, maybe it was the year you were there. Like I do it for the Yes. The dopamine hit are, are the what did he say? I do it for the basis. Basically, it's the dopamine. But yeah, I do it because I like it. I do it because I enjoy it, I get I get a lot out of it myself. If it wasn't that way, I wouldn't do it. But I really enjoy all the people. I enjoy. I enjoy the code. But yeah, it's it's a lot of enjoyment for me.

Wasseem Khayrattee 1:01:18

One last question. Before we end this section, just going to briefly touch on your role at Skillshare. You're a staff engineer there, I just want to understand what are the responsibilities of a staff engineer.

Ben Ramsey 1:01:31

Staff engineer is something that is it's a new title to me, actually. Well, I keep saying that now. But it's new to me, at least within the last few years, I at my last job, I was a software architect. And that was kind of what the title that I had been. I've had that title since 2008, maybe across a couple different companies. And that had always been like the best title for an individual contributor at a very senior level. But it wasn't really like a very good description of the role. Since architect in other companies, aside from the actual architects who dropped designs for buildings and stuff, software architects tend to be more abstracted from actually the writing the code. They might be engineers, but they are more about design. And so as a description of my role, it was not very good. So when I learned about the I learned about staff, engineers, and principal engineers, and when I joined Skillshare, this was kind of also more about like, my personal career development was to learn more about this path. It's an individual contributor path, you are a technical leader, and the organisation, you might lead projects, but your responsibilities are not about managing people, or even leading, like a development team on an ongoing basis, you might lead a team on a project basis, but but not in terms of like managing them. And so you're a technical leader, you're also a mentor, kind of help set best practices and standards in the organisation, you have a lot of input on those kinds of things. And I think it's, I think it's still new within kind of the industry, mainly because a lot of people have grown up in the industry. And they're at the point where they've been, you know, you look for a senior level position with five, you know, five years, right? That's, you'll see that on resumes, but the thing is, like, I've been doing this for 20 years, other people have been doing it for 20 years to lots of people like where do you put us in that kind of role. Other people are have been around for 1015 20 years? You know, where do we fit? Are we just like senior senior senior software engineer now, like how do you keep going? So a lot of the, you know, Bay Area companies and all will have levels to that like So level one, level two or level three. I can't remember what my technical level is. But staff engineer fits on that levelling chart. And so when I, if I move to another company, it will be much easier to show where I fit in the level of an organisation. Because of that, due to my title. Also, it's much easier to articulate or understand what it is that my role is my role at this organisation is not an architect, although I might do architectural things A lead engineer, although I might do lead engineer things, it is a subject matter expert, for lack of a better term, it's, it's someone who has a lot of experience. I do a lot of coding every day. But I also spend time reviewing other people's code. And you know, helping kind of direct how we're how we how we code. You mentioned every point there regarding people with 20 years and 15 years experience, and this could be like, maybe inspiring other companies to trail that buff.

Wasseem Khayrattee 1:05:40

Alright, we move on to section two. Now, enough of tech, I want to know, when you are not using your

brain power as a geek, what is your creative side? How are you spending your time? Are you doing something creative? What is your secret?

B **Ben Ramsey** 1:05:58

Well, that's the thing. Like, I think my creative thing is writing code. So I spent that's why I guess the time that a lot of people might spend on other hobbies I spend on open source software, because that is my hobby. But since that's kind of boring, I do also enjoy well right now. So I binge watch a lot of TV shows, which, you know, and I read a lot. So for the TV stuff right now, I have been been binge watching. I just finished Star Wars, The Clone Wars, that whole series. And now I'm watching rebels. And cuz I've never watched them all the way through before. And I'm really enjoying those. I read a lot of books right now, I've been on a journey to read all Nebula award winning novels. And I think I'm up into like the year 2007. Now started at 1969, which is the book that that won that year was Frank Herbert's dune. So the Nebula Awards, if you're not aware, is the science fiction and fantasy industry awards. So they're the awards that are awarded are voted on by their peers. So other authors will vote on who wins that year. Whereas you might have heard of also the Hugo Awards, which are similar, but they're the fan, the chosen award, so the fans will vote on the books for that year. Yeah, so I've been trying to go through all the Nebula award winning novels. And the other thing that I I do in my spare time is, I will play d&d Or play role playing tabletop role playing games. Right now, on a, I guess, bi weekly basis. I've been meeting with Oscar mereta. And Chris Tankersley. Eli, why am Matthew Terrell, and we have our own group that meets and we've been going through different campaigns. It's a lot of fun.

W **Wasseem Khayrattee** 1:08:09

Yeah, I know Chris loves while giving. Okay, we move on to the last section, which is the rapid fire round. It's basically I asked a question and you can reply quickly or if you want to elaborate at some point. Feel free to PSP from scratch for PSP using a framework. I do both. coding or managing.

👤 1:08:33

Definitely coding. As I mentioned earlier, I don't like managing

W **Wasseem Khayrattee** 1:08:40

your PHP IDE of choice.

👤 1:08:43

For a long time, I would have said no IDE I use them. But I have started using PHP storm and I really enjoy it.

W **Wasseem Khayrattee** 1:08:55

When Windows or Mac, Mac What are you not very good at managing people and managing my time. If you are not into tech, what would you be doing?

1:09:14

I would like to think that I would be a writer. But I don't do a lot of writing nowadays. I wish I did. I wish I did more.

Wasseem Khayrattee 1:09:28

If you had to go back in time, what would you do differently? I

1:09:35

honestly don't know the answer to this. I think my usual answer is that I wouldn't change a thing. But I also think there could be things that I would I might change so I'm not sure what they would be though.

Wasseem Khayrattee 1:09:51

One person you admire in the PHP community.

1:09:55

There's actually a lot of people so it's kind of hard for me to narrow this down to one person I We'll mention two people, though, at the risk of not mentioning all the other people that I that I think are super important to me. And that I admire, but I admire Derrick Redskins and Sarah Goleman a lot.

Wasseem Khayrattee 1:10:19

One person, project or community that you feel is underrated.

1:10:24

I don't know about underrated, but maybe under talked about not not given as much attention right now is, and I would like it to get more attention is Captain Hook. Are you familiar with Captain Hook?

Wasseem Khayrattee 1:10:37

I've heard, I might not recall. If

1:10:41

it's Sebastian Feldman's project, I think I got his name, right. I hope, Sebastian if I didn't get your name, right, I'm sorry. But it is a PHP tool for managing git hooks. So you know, like your pre post, post commit

hook, pre push. And I have really enjoyed using it. And it's featured prominently in my dev tools library that I talked about earlier. And so yeah, I definitely encourage everyone to go check that out. It's definitely a super useful developer tool.

W Wasseem Khayrattee 1:11:17

One beautiful move at in your journey with the PHP language or the community.

1:11:28

I think there's, there's a lot of good moments. I think that I would say, a point that stands out, in my speaking career, is being able to go to Brazil and present to the PHP experience at the PHP experience conference there. They had an eye stage, and it was up in front of I don't know, I think I was told there were 3500 attendees or something in the audience. I could have that number wrong. I don't know, it was definitely a lot of people. And they also had a translator, who was translating it at the same time that I was speaking. So that was definitely an interesting experience. And so that's going to stand out on my mind. But yeah, there's a lot of other moments that I think are, are equally beautiful, and important.

W Wasseem Khayrattee 1:12:31

Ones ps3 project that you really appreciate.

1:12:35

Again, I'll say Captain Hook on that. It's a it's one that I'm super excited about right now.

W Wasseem Khayrattee 1:12:44

What fuck about PHP or the community that very few people knew.

1:12:50

I think the big fact that very few people know is that the core developer pool is small. And Joe Watkins wrote a blog post earlier this year, or maybe last year, talking about the the bus factor, and saying that he had calculated that the bus factor for any feature in PHP was like around two or three people. That's all it would take to lose the knowledge of that feature. And there are a lot of features that have been added to PHP that, you know, people just don't know how they work, except the person who added them. And that's, that's a big problem we have. And so I think that one of the most important things I could probably do for PHP is to try to raise awareness about that, and encourage others to pitch in and, you know, get involved in help as well. If you, especially if you know, C if you don't, we can learn C together. So I think that that's an important thing.

W Wasseem Khayrattee 1:14:12

The valley, this would be the last question, but I get the feeling. I have to ask you this question that just about the PHP community is evolving for all these years, and it is going to take a new turning point as well as the language changing facet. And all these many small niches cropping up and popping up. What is your feeling on how the committee is moving? Is it moving in the right direction? If not, what would be your message to the community at large?

1:14:44

I don't think I would presume to know what the right direction or wrong direction is. I think the language is moving in a good direction. I do think that It is maybe moving a little too fast in some ways. But I think that what I would like to see is more people kind of contributing to the core and some substantial ways. And I don't necessarily mean through code. I mean, I would like to see more companies hiring some of the core developers, and are hiring people who can be core developers who are who are, you know, instrumental in core development for certain things, and giving them time, like so to to work on those things. So rather than like donating money to the core, which there's no place to really donate money right now. They've hired someone and they're paying that person salary to work on core, I know that that some companies have done this in the past. I know that SmugMug is one company that did a pay someone to work on core, I know that Zend used to are still employs people to work on core JetBrains employees, I think as JetBrains employees, Nikita pop off, right? Yes, yes. So there are companies that are doing this, and but I think there needs to be more. And especially for some of the companies that for which PHP is a critical, you know, core component of their infrastructure. They need to be contributing that to the community. The community is a vibrant community there. I don't think there's any real danger of of problems there. Like the community comes in, it ebbs and flows, there's waves within the community, sometimes there's more enthusiasm than others, you'll go through laws, you'll go through periods of real excitement, the Laravel community has come in and has reenergized certain parts of the community. I really don't think there's any danger of us losing kind of that overall greater community. But there is a definite danger of us, like having stagnation in the core, and not so much anymore with as we have introduced. We've introduced some, some processes that can help reduce that stagnation, like the RFC process is new. And I remember like 10 years ago, 11 years ago, there was a real worry that PHP itself was had grown stagnant that there wasn't going to be any major improvements or changes to it. This was around 5.4. And that was completely wrong. Like, it got reentered Gize there were some community projects that really helped spur that on I think, composer has been has played a major role in that. The PHP, Figg played a major role in making composer possible. So like package development, has grown tremendously. There's a lot of really good development and frameworks right now. But when it comes right back, and there's a lot of good proposals for improvements to the PHP language, too. But it comes back to like, there are few people who know how these things work in the core, and we need to grow that community.

W   Wasseem Khayrattee   1:18:40

Well, we are now at the, at the end of this chat ban, for me personally have been very insightful and very interesting. It's like I could go on with you because it's there's so much thing that you know, and it's it fascinates me. Thank you very much for your time, Ben. I hope the audience have really enjoyed this conversation with you. Thank you.

B   Ben Ramsey   1:19:04

Thank you. I hope so too. It's been a pleasure.