**Globally Speaking**

**Podcast 65 Transcript**

**A Big Brand’s Small Start to a Successful Localization Program**

**Featuring Oleksandr Pysaryuk**

Renato I’m Renato Beninatto and today on Globally Speaking, Michael is interviewing a localization manager who’s a team of one. Listen to how he got his start and, most interestingly, his thoughts on keeping people engaged in the work whether they report to you or not. That’s actually the mission of the company. I hope you enjoy this one.

Oleksandr My name is Oleksandr Pysaryuk. I’m originally from Ukraine and I live and work in Toronto, Canada. The company I’ve been with for the past six years is Achievers. You can find us at acheivers.com. We make software for the world of HR. We call it employee engagement software.

It’s a platform, it’s a web app and iOS and Android apps used by companies, their employees, for rewards, recognition, achievements, celebrations…all the good and happy things that are happening in the business.

Michael That’s a really exciting, growing space right now in business, I think: the realization, like Jack Welch and other people, of really bringing HR to the forefront. Nothing gets done in companies without people. There are companies like Achievers who are doing these real things.

I know you started as a translator before you got into running a localization team?

Oleksandr I did start as a translator. I actually did that in school, so I have a degree in linguistics. Did a little bit of translation studies, then I spent four years teaching at the university level. I was teaching translation technology, translation theory, practical aspects of translation down to things like simultaneous interpreting.

I had some experience sitting in a booth, translating in written forms, and then I jumped into the business of localization by quitting academic work. I left university and I went to a company called Logrus where we were just localizing software for phones, for operating systems—technology basically.

Michael We have folks who may be coming from the academic background or they may have just finished their studies who listen to the podcast. How much of what you did before relates to what you do today?

Oleksandr It’s related directly, absolutely, so having studied languages, and not as much languages in terms of communicating in those languages, but…I usually say I don’t speak the languages; I speak *about* the languages.

Michael Their function.

Oleksandr We did in our school at the university things like theoretical grammar, philosophy of grammar, stylistics, lexicography, lexicology and all those things that are fundamentally useful and absolutely necessary for the kind of things I specialized in.

Michael What about moving into the business side of things? How did you get up to speed, how were you prepared for that, what did that transition look like?

Oleksandr It was pretty fast. I freelanced for a bit, and then at an interview that happened at Logrus years ago, somebody asked me, “Do you want to be part of localization of Windows by Microsoft?” I said absolutely, yes, and I started learning two things: translation technologies and reference books on Windows systems administration.

Reading sysadmin stuff on my commute to work and then translating that stuff at work.

Michael You went from working for a service provider to the buyer side, the person who would be purchasing those services. Was there a different set of skills that you developed for that work?

Oleksandr On the service provider side, it was definitely a good school. It was learning, as they would say, on steroids. On the service provider side, the job is much more diverse, I would say, than on the buyer side. On the buyer side, you are at the company who does one kind of business, who has one or several products that are industry-related.

On the service provider side, you are an account manager or the project manager for dozens of interesting accounts who do all kinds of things, from clinical trial translations, to software…you are in all verticals of business on the translation side of those verticals. It’s very interesting and you learn all kinds of tools, interact with all kinds of clients who have many ways to organize their team structure, their processes, and you learn a lot more than when you are on the buyer side.

Michael What did you take away from that experience? Because it sounds like you really have to be constantly learning, and you have to be willing to broaden your abilities in a pretty rapid way on the supplier side. When you went to the client side, what did you take away from your previous experience?

Oleksandr I just took away this diversity of knowledge. On the supplier side, I was really shadowing a lot of my coworkers. I was a localization project manager, so I’d go sit in the QA department with localization engineers. I even shadowed sales people and sat next to them just to see how they do their part of the job in the localization context.

Just structure and knowledge of all aspects of localization technologies and processes helped come into the buyer side and see where things were missing or where things could be improved faster than just seeing it for the first time.

Michael Our listeners tell us they love to hear stories of accomplishments and things that you’ve been able to achieve in your job. So, what’s something in Achievers that really stands out that you guys have pulled off?

Oleksandr At Achievers, I’ve been here for six years and I could say everything we’ve pulled off here is story-worthy and is an achievement.

I started localization from scratch. The company was doing translation of their software before I joined, but really nothing was organized on the level you would imagine on the buyer side. It was the early days of product, the early days of product localization.

I came into the context of the need to build the localization function from the ground up: hire vendors for translation, establish relationships with translators, adopt translation technology, develop translation processes for the products that we were localizing, do the content audit…all those things.

Michael How did you know you were making the right decisions each step along the way?

Oleksandr Before joining Achievers, I spent four years in a slightly bigger company called Blackberry. We had a slightly bigger than a one-person localization group; there were about 25 people. We were doing localization on a large scale, so I had some exposure to the context of how localization is done in big companies, how much money we were spending, how many resources it was all taking, how much content was going to translation into how many languages.

That was a good experience to apply to a smaller context; to take the best out of the bigger company and implement things in a smaller company. And actually, in a smaller company, most often you cannot go wrong with your decisions. Anything you do for the first time is going to be better than it was before.

Michael Something is better than nothing. That’s a big jump.

Oleksandr Absolutely, you don’t experiment blindly. You come in with some experience. You can ask somebody for help, of course, but usually things are only for the better.

Michael What’s the size of your team now and what’s the scale you’re supporting?

Oleksandr The size of the team at Achievers is one. It’s just me. I get help from developers if I need to set up some connection between the translation tools and the source control repositories, for example, with code and with language in the code, in language files. But mostly it’s just me.

Michael And how many languages and products are you supporting?

Oleksandr We are supporting 20 languages on the web app and slightly more languages, 23 I think, on mobile. That’s interesting, though: we go mobile first in terms of languages, not in terms of product. Our web application is much bigger; iOS and Android apps are smaller in size. I chose this path of introducing every new language we add on mobile apps first for several reasons.

One is mobile versions of our product have the same kind of feel and goal and terminology as desktop, so it’s easier to translate something small but do it right. In this way, we establish terminology early in languages. We train translators, too, on the nature and the feel of our product, so once you’ve localized an Android app, you know what to expect from a bigger product like a huge web application. So, we go mobile first and then we add that language onto desktop.

Michael Is it inevitable that the language is added on desktop or do you also use it as a way to gather some data on the market, to say “once our mobile app hits a certain threshold, then we’re going to go to desktop”?

Oleksandr It’s inevitable that the language will go from mobile to desktop. Data matters; however, the nature of our product is that it’s not a consumer product. The interface, yes, it’s a consumer product; users at large organizations use our mobile apps, not our desktop apps. But think of it like this: it’s a product that you cannot use before you buy it. You can go to the App Store or Google Play Store and download the Achievers app. It will be a shell, a frame with no content.

You need to be an employee of a bigger company whose HR department adopted our technology, deployed it and started using it. Like, think of it as you are part of Microsoft or McDonalds, or some big company. Your HR deployed this application, you as an employee started using it; only then you will see the content and see the language on it. So, there is no demand from the field and there is no data that tells me users in this or that region are interested in this particular language. They are not until they buy it, until their mother organization buys it, and then they use it.

Michael I had client at one point tell me, “Michael, there are only two things we’re interested in: seeing our cost per word go down, whether that’s through leverage or through other technology, and on-time delivery. Those are the only two data points I need to track.” What’s the holy grail of data for you? What are the things you’re paying attention to within your program?

Oleksandr Probably the greatest amount of attention I pay is towards quality. In my case, the quality is the user experience of people who use our products in the languages that we offer. I like to say dance like nobody’s watching, sing like nobody’s listening, and translate like there is no linguistic testing afterwards. Translate like there is no review.

We are building a lot of training and onboarding into early stages of localizing our product. Any translator to join the team for Achievers goes through a certification exam which is an open-book, 50-question exam. They use our product for a few days. They log into Achievers University which is our LMS with courses about our product. They learn about the features of the product. It’s a few weeks of onboarding, really, that translators take before they translate.

They have interviews with me, so I speak with them and train them. Every translator is compensated for the hours that they spend getting trained on our product.

After all of this, there is no excuse to say, “I do not understand this text,” or “I have not seen this context,” or “I’ve made a mistake.” Yes, human work comes with mistakes and you fix them after and it’s okay, but we build a lot into quality upfront. We overwhelm every participant of the localization process with context.

Michael How have translators who work on that content responded to this approach?

Oleksandr Most of them love it. Actually, a few translators left because they felt probably the amount of content was overwhelming. But whenever I speak with colleagues in the industry and I tell them about this kind of approach we’ve taken, it’s usually positive feedback.

Michael Those who left were the exception, I’m sure. I often liken it to a person doing a trapeze and you would do certain things on a trapeze knowing there’s a net beneath you, and there’s another way you approach trapeze when there’s no net. And I wonder sometimes the amount of LQA reviews we do affects the way they translate from the onset.

They know that it’s going to get caught eventually in these multiple processes and for the buyer of translation, that’s negative because they’re paying multiple times for the same words. Have you guys reduced the amount of reviews that you do? What’s been the impact of this investment in quality upfront?

Oleksandr The impact is silence, so, there are no complaints coming back from the users. To adopt our product, customers go through the implementation journey from a few weeks to a few months, and they get help from our own professional services with building their program. They do user acceptance testing on their own, they do user acceptance testing in the languages that their product is in, and I do not get any negative feedback or any reports about any serious mistakes in the software or anything like that. Nothing.

Michael That’s great.

Oleksandr So that’s the result. The result is good user experience with people understanding what they are looking at, if the software is solving your problem, the software is not blocking you from completing a task. You understand what you’re looking at, you understand what happens next.

Michael You’re in this environment of employee engagement; people being engaged in their jobs. And I think the statistics are overwhelming: it’s like 70% of people don’t feel like they’re engaged in their job. You work for a company who’s looking to try to change that.

For localization managers, people in our industry who have folks reporting into them, what’s some guidance you could give them in this area?

Oleksandr The major piece of guidance would be that saying “thank you” and recognizing someone for the good thing that they do, and hearing them and listening to them every day goes a long way. You say “thank you” in the moment. Managers appreciate their direct reports; they come to work feeling good and motivated to do more and the business of the company they are working for is booming.

I practice what my company preaches with the translation provider that I work with, by saying “thank you” or by appreciating the work that they do, by recognizing them or recognizing translators. You can practice this by having basic badge systems or swag. You can send your t-shirts with your logos to the translators.

Michael You have no idea how far a t-shirt goes.

Oleksandr Salary or money earned for the work that you do goes a long way but go and check with theories of motivation and behavioral psychology. This works. You’re motivated to a certain degree by the compensation you’re getting for the work that you do, but even more than that, you are motivated by knowing that you’re appreciated.

Mozilla, I heard, has communities of localizers who localize their product. Jeff Beatty, the head of localization at Mozilla, told me the t-shirt story. This works. This motivates. You’re proudly wearing the product on your shirt or on your wrist that you’ve localized.

I’m wearing a Polar GPS sports watch. It’s made by Polar in Finland. I met localization managers from this company at a conference. We geeked out about this product. I’m a heavy user of Polar. Through their translation agency, they hired me to freelance for them and I actually translated the new sleep-tracking features for Polar.

Michael How great is that?

Oleksandr Absolutely. I got paid for that translation, but it’s nothing compared to how proud I am to be the user and the translator for this company.

Michael You can’t undervalue those parts and I think hand-in-hand with that is giving people a voice, a place to listen, where you listen and you hear the feedback that’s coming from them as well, because that’s of great value too, when people are doing a job where they feel like they’ve been invested in, they’ve been told that their work is appreciated, and then to have someone listen to them when they see areas of improvement and all of that.

In the spirit of that, I want to say thank you for this time and I hope our listeners have enjoyed your thoughts there as much as I have.

**End of conversation**