

Relationships



A letter from

Maze

Let's shape change together.

The research community has weathered a lot—shifting headcount, rising expectations, and constant pressure to prove value. Yet the work researchers do has never mattered more. AI can speed up execution, but clarity and judgment are what set teams apart in a crowded market. Research becomes powerful when it influences decisions at every level.

Over the past year, three shifts have stood out:

Insight is becoming a leadership skill:

80% of stakeholders want their research to be “strategically relevant”.

Research creates value when it's integrated, not isolated:

The strongest teams build relationships, not just reports.

Systems of learning beat silos:

High-impact orgs enable research at all altitudes with rigor and repeatability.

At Maze, our goal is to reduce busywork so you can focus on the uniquely human parts of research —framing problems, connecting teams, and shaping decisions.

These skills will define the future of product and innovation.
We're proud to support the Learners community and sponsor Road to Research Week.



Jonathan Widawski

Co-founder & CEO, Maze



From Transaction to Partnership

There's a subtle but important difference between working with stakeholders and truly partnering with them.

Transactional relationships tend to focus on delivery: get the project done, check the box, move on. They can work—briefly—but without trust and transparency, they rarely improve how teams collaborate over time. Partnerships, on the other hand, hold both the short term and the long term at once. They aim for immediate outcomes while deliberately investing in a relationship that makes the next collaboration stronger.



One of the most powerful levers in building that kind of partnership is transparency—not just about findings, but about process. When researchers open up their work early and often, stakeholders stop feeling like an audience and start feeling like collaborators. Product managers become part of the research journey, and researchers gain earlier access to strategy, planning, and context. Over time, this creates a reinforcing loop: better context leads to better research, which leads to greater trust, which leads to even earlier involvement.

Transparency also changes capability. As stakeholders see how research happens, they build confidence to run simpler studies themselves. Researchers shift from executors to enablers, freeing up time for work that truly requires depth and expertise.

Of course, openness comes with risk. Sharing early work invites more feedback, more iteration, and sometimes more anxiety. But in cultures that value growth and learning, those risks are manageable. The real work is internal: learning to separate our identity from our output. When feedback is no longer personal, sharing early becomes easier—and partnerships grow stronger as a result.

Trust Is Built in the Small Moments

You can often tell when a relationship is shifting from transactional to something deeper—not through grand gestures, but through subtle signals.

Stakeholders start bringing questions, not just requests. Research shows up in their presentations. They invite researchers into rooms where decisions are being shaped, not just validated. They talk openly about how insights influenced their thinking. These are the quiet indicators that trust is forming.

Sometimes, trust begins by giving first. In a story shared at the Roundtable, one team supported a survey they weren't fully convinced was necessary, choosing to trust their stakeholder's instincts. What emerged wasn't redundant data, but context: the stakeholder was facing internal blame, and needed quantitative evidence to correct a false narrative. By helping anyway, the research team earned something far more valuable than agreement—they earned honesty. With fuller context, future research became sharper, more relevant, and more impactful.



Credibility plays a role here, but it's a delicate balance. Authority doesn't come from sounding smarter; it comes from doing the homework. Understanding product history, referencing the metrics stakeholders care about, and grounding insights in a broader body of evidence all signal alignment rather than superiority.

And then there are the smallest commitments. Following up. Closing loops. Sending the message that says, "I haven't forgotten." These moments are easy to overlook, but they compound. Consistent follow-through builds a reputation for reliability—and reliability is often the foundation of partnership.

Partnerships as the New Core Skill

A decade ago, many researchers were rewarded for independence. Do the study. Deliver the deck. Move on. We now know how little impact that model creates.

Today's environment doesn't allow for it. The pace is faster, DIY research tools are everywhere, and dropping a polished deck rarely changes decisions. In this reality, partnerships aren't a nice-to-have—they're core to the job. The researchers who make the most impact have embraced this shift, understanding that relationships are the primary mechanism through which research influences organizations.



Partnerships are also what endure. Teams change. Orgs reorganize. Leaders come and go. But when a researcher becomes indispensable to a partner—when they deeply understand priorities, pressures, and anxieties—they're often brought along through change. Focusing on a few strong relationships, rather than spreading yourself thin, creates resilience in unstable environments.

One simple ritual helps sustain this: regularly asking two questions about your partners. What are their priorities right now? And what's keeping them up at night? Often, the answers overlap. Staying attuned to both keeps research grounded in reality, builds trust over time, and ensures that impact survives long after the org chart shifts.

Because in modern UX research, partnerships aren't adjacent to the work. They are the work.



Our Sponsors

Thank you

Support from our sponsors let's us do what we do best: make awesome learning events for UX Researchers everywhere.

Title Sponsor



And Road to Research Week: Toronto Sponsors

  dialogue  outset.ai

 Riley  Terac  Listen

 atellica  marvin