

Article 19 – Neurodiversity Part 2

Speakers: Marty Molloy, Kristen Witucki, Nate Stauffer, Damien LaRock

Voiceover:

Expression is one of the most powerful tools we have. A voice, a pen, a keyboard. The real change, which must give to people throughout the world their human rights, must come about in the hearts of people. We must want our fellow human beings to have rights and freedoms, which give them dignity. Article 19 is the voice in the room.

Marty:

Hello, and welcome to Article 19. My name is Marty Molloy, president at Tamman and our host for today's podcast. This is part two of a podcast that we did and a conversation that we had around neurodiversity. If you haven't had a chance to listen to part one, I encourage you to go back. It's about an hour long, but it's because the conversation just flew. We had so many wonderful experts from the field of education really guiding us through the ins and outs of neurodiversity. If you are so bold and just wanna jump right in, or if you had a chance to listen to that first one and want more, our guests are back. We had to do a second recording because we just had so much more information that we wanted to cover with this group. One note, one of our guests, Daniella Arcuri, was not able to make this second recording, so we missed her but we know that she'll be back in another podcast that we do because she was so great. So enjoy neurodiversity, part two, as we finalize and go through as many more societal and industry kind of feels where it comes to neurodiversity, and a little less about education in this part two, a little bit more about industry and society. Take it away.

Kristen:

So, I really think that educators hold the keys to the kingdom. They're working with people in the moment every single day addressing their present concerns, their goals, their strengths and needs and dreams and everything. For them, they also must simultaneously think ahead to when these young people that they're working with are out in the world, whether that's next year or two as Liz is working with graduate students, or many, many years from now as like students that Nate and Damien are working with, and I think there's a tendency among people who maybe don't know as much about disability, who aren't as familiar with it to imagine people with disabilities or people who are neurodiverse as always in this present state of being childlike or not fully growing up, but they do grow up. They grow up, they have jobs, they marry, they have children, they don't have children, they don't marry, they have fun, they do every single thing that people without disabilities or people who are temporarily able do, and so because you as educators have the gift of noticing and witnessing the present and then imagining the future, we'll talk some about the future, about what it's like for adults. So, my first question in the arena of people who are neurodiverse in society in general is: How do you

handle colleagues who are resistant to embracing more recent ideas or ways of working, specifically in the classroom but also kind of in general?

00:03:16

Liz:

First, I'd like to acknowledge some of the positive changes that I already see educators are making in terms of embracing neurodiversity. I see that some of the younger teachers are reluctant to use phrases like nonverbal, which may seem very dismissive because they recognize there's many other ways to communicate. I also see that the obsession with eye contact that we used to have maybe a decade ago has gone because people realize that for some individual eye contact can really kind of induce anxiety and it's stressful for those students, so those are definitely positive changes that I've seen. Now, on the other hand, educators are notoriously slow at making changes, and I think we have to accept that. People are resistant to change because of the impact that it may make on them. Maybe they perceive it as more work involved or they don't look knowledgeable or sometimes they're worried that the students might not get services that they need, so I would definitely encourage the slow, gentle approach, maybe bringing a book that has a character that is neurodiverse that you can use during meeting time, or maybe instead of always putting one group aside, suggest that maybe we have mixed ability groups for a project, but slowly bring these things in to your colleagues rather than sort of bombarding them with everything all at once.

Marty:

Nate, please, because I love pulling out the parallels to work, and I think that is one that is exactly this. As a younger worker coming into this space and having colleagues who may be multiple decades your senior and really stuck in their ways, what do you find? And is it that they're stuck in their ways? Is that just an old trope that doesn't really apply?

Nate:

I think that Liz was right on the money when she said that ultimately these resistances tend to be rooted in a fear of lacking one of things. One is resources to make this change. Two is time to make this change, which I think is increasingly seems like the biggest one for teachers in particularly public districts in our country. And the third one is just energy, so we have the time, but do I have it within me to put in the work to make four accommodated versions of the same assignment when I have all these other things on my to-do list. With the resources question, I think it's a little harder to answer because either you have the resources available to support a group of people or you don't [inaudible 00:05:44] speaking within school districts, I imagine within companies as well, but I also would point to amazing educators who are doing great work in under-resourced schools across our country to support students with disabilities to say it doesn't always take the newest, hottest technology invention to make your space inclusive, and there are always human ways that you can just change the way you're interacting with other people that make it possible to create inclusive communities. And that leads to the other two. On our last episode conversation together, I know I spoke extensively about the importance of having strong administrators, which also goes toward like managers within

companies, and I think when it comes to limitations on time that's where that really comes into account. As an administrator or a manager at a company, you need to be realistic about what you're asking your employees to do in the time—the contracted hours that you have assigned them to work under you because ultimately what causes burnout and people who tend to leave the profession or who just chafe against this idea about creating inclusion, it's oftentimes that they feel that there's just too much being asked of them in the first place, so that is a systemic thing that managers can be kind of thinking about, but if you're not in a managerial position and you're working on a team, it really comes to that third piece of you have to find within yourself the energy and the commitment of what kind of employee do I wanna be here as a coworker of people who identify as neurodiverse individuals within a working space? So that's where managers really come in is thinking about limitations on time, but on the flipside when it comes to energy, if you're just an employee, not in a managerial position, you have to think about what type of employee you wanna be. You're a member of a community at your workplace, and not only the people at your workplace who maybe identify as neurodiverse actively but also recognizing that there may be people who have never had a disability diagnosed but who do have underlying disabilities or invisible disabilities. It's just important to be aware of the space that you take and the space that you give, and there's not really guidelines around that, which is why it's a very internal process, and I would say if you're listening to this podcast right now and engaging with the ideas, you're on the right track.

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Marty:

Pulling from something that you talked about in an old episode on language, Nate, is this idea that stayed with me and centered with me around is the fact that it's not about me, right? So if you're a manager in a company or if you're a teacher, it's who's your customer? Who is your client? Who are you serving? And when we center it on ourselves, a lot of times that's where I think especially us old heads like myself get caught and think, why should I? Oh, right, you're centering it on yourself, and so I know that's something that has helped me of being like, yeah, OK, what am I trying to get through here and not having it be about me necessarily? So Liz, I'm curious, as someone who's teaching teachers, do you ever explore that with your students, around who you're serving really needs to be maintained at the center of this conversation?

Liz:

Yes, absolutely right. We really need to have like a common goal or focus, and in a sense our clients are our students and their families, so we have to establish that understanding that our common goal is to improve outcomes for our students, and there may be many, many opinions on how best to do that, and so that's when those interpersonal [inaudible 00:09:06] become so important that we also listen to each other as well express our points of view because we need to find some common ground.

00:09:14

Kristen:

Are there individuals who are neurodiverse who inspire you, either students you've have or famous people or people you work with? How have those people inspired your work or just your thinking?

Liz:

I'm very fortunate in that I have worked with people that identify as neurodiverse, I have students that identify as neurodiverse, and so I think the big benefit for me is that I get to hear their perspective and then to understand their perspective, why they might feel marginalized or why they misunderstood, and also we can address some of the changes that they would like to see either in schools or the workplace.

Nate:

I fully second Liz's perspective on that. I think when it comes to—it's tricky when we talk about inspiration because we don't want to pity people for their identities as being neurodiverse, so I never want to feel inspired by a person who is neurodiverse, and at the same time there needs to be recognition that when they achieve incredible work within my classroom space, like they put a lot of work in to make that happen, whoever the student is. Anytime a student reaches a higher level achievement closer to their greatest potential, they need to be celebrated, and so I just find that those moments are extra special when I know the student has been working additionally hard, and I as an educator have also found myself pouring myself into supporting those students to make sure that they're able to access the content in the same way as their peers, so those moments of joy really are the things that keep me going as an educator with every student, and I would encourage people who have never had a moment like that within their own workplace to think about how they could find moments of joy like that for themselves because it makes it way easier to get out of bed in the morning.

Kristen:

Yeah, that's so true, and I think there's sort of this traditional idea of people with disabilities having overcome something, so I am not neurodiverse, I'm just blind, but I think that there have been these articles in local papers about overcoming blindness or whatever, it can sometimes be better to think of neurodiversity as just a small part of a complex human being and that when someone has achieved something it's not so much overcoming, unless it's overcoming societal barriers. I don't know, but not something within themselves. That's just sort of interesting to think about.

Nate:

Can I jump in with—

Kristen:

Yeah.

00:11:43

Nate:

—an example that just came to mind in hearing this? Because another thing that I wanna name is when working with young people, how important it is for them to also find inspiration within other people with disabilities, so there was a moment in my class two years ago. We were reading a book called *The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle*, which was written by a man named Avi, and before we started reading the book I always have the kids read the author biography on the back to learn a little bit about who wrote the book, and in Avi's author biography it mentioned that when he was in school had been diagnosed with dysgraphia and was told he could never become a writer, and I had a young man in my class who had also just been diagnosed with dysgraphia, and the look of joy on that little boy's face when he noticed that he was about to read a book written by someone who had the same disability that he had just been diagnosed with was something I will never forget, so think about how we're not only creating spaces that are inclusive but we're opening windows for people that have disabilities or who identify as neurodiverse to see themselves in others as well and see the achievements that other people have accomplished from their own [inaudible 00:12:46].

Kristen:

Avi is so cool, by the way. I love Avi. I've read a few of his books.

Liz:

I also think it's important that celebrities come out and announce their diagnoses because I think it brings more acceptance to having that diagnosis or being neurodivergent. Some examples that come to mind, obviously Elon Musk came out as having autism on Saturday Night Live. That was a big deal for a lot of people. Simone Biles, the gymnast, has announced that she has ADHD. Billie Eilish has told people that she has Tourette syndrome, and I think then people see that the diagnosis is just part of a person. I really think it helps when people see that neurodivergent people being accomplished in different fields, whether it's creative fields, athletics, or business, because that gives them different options as well.

Marty:

So, this kind of goes with that because Simone Biles or Elon Musk or whomever has reached a level of fame, fortune, comfortability, even though it's still powerful when they do announce this and open up. I'm really curious, thinking about it from the standpoint of a teacher mentor, how do you encourage your students to advocate for their own needs? And in some ways, we can even take the neurodiverse label off of this because this is all young people. Like what are some things that you have employed or that you work with teachers to employ so they can advocate for themselves?

Liz:

One of the things that I do encourage teachers to do is bring the students in to their IEP meetings early. So the IEP meeting is where we set up the program for the next year, and I used to bring my students in as young as 10 years old. They were not there for the entire meeting. They were there primarily to meet people from the middle school, which they would be attending, and they could ask questions about the middle school and address any concerns. Now, because they were 10 years old and going to the middle school, their biggest concern was

what is the food like at the cafeteria? Should I buy lunch or bring lunch? But that's OK because they're advocating for themselves, and then you get used to being in that environment as well. As time goes on, we really want to find out what their interests are, so we go looking at college or looking at professional work or a job. We can match their educational program to the interests and future prospects. I think the challenge for a lot of teachers is the emphasis on schools on academics because I think that has really restricted the options over the years. [inaudible 00:15:20] from state to state, so I lived in Pennsylvania for a while, and in Pennsylvania they have a lot more options for technical careers in mechanics and engineering, which we don't see in every state.

00:15:35

Nate:

Can I build off this as well?

Marty:

Yeah, please.

Nate:

So, speaking from the role of an educator. I had a professor pretty early in my teaching career who told me that 50% of the work of a teacher happens in the first week, and what he meant by that was that you have to start by creating really clear expectations and systems for all the kids of like this is what everybody has to be on the same page about, things like where do you put your papers when I give them to you, when you get a paper remember to write your name on top, that's the first thing we do, and it feels silly every year when we do it, but that repetition during that first week for all students, getting them all on that baseline creates a muscle memory that allows us to build all of our work off of for the rest of the year, and I think it's applicable in workplaces too. When you're onboarding new members to your company of your staff, you wanna be really clear with what every member of your company is held to as the baseline expectation so that that person then can take it and build in their own way whatever their role is and whatever identities they're carrying into the space. Additionally, I think a big thing that companies don't always think about is multiple modalities. So, when information is being presented, by partner works for a tech company, and at this company a lot of the time I'll listen in to their meetings, and everything's being presented verbally and it's just a lot of information being thrown at them, and my partner's able to process it, but he also takes notes on the side for himself, and I just wondered, if you know this information is gonna be shared, why wouldn't you also already have it in a written form for folks so that they could engage with it textually, they could engage with it verbally, they could engage with it visually if there are graphical representations of the information you're presenting, and the more opportunities you give to present that information in different ways, then people can access it in whatever way makes the most sense for them, and you don't even need to ask them where they identify within the spectrum of neurodiversity. They will be able to access that for themselves if you put in the forethought to put those resources out there for them.

00:17:31

Marty:

I am feeling very seen right now because I do a whole lot [inaudible 00:17:37] people in meetings, and I don't regularly share my agenda ahead of time, so thank you, Nate. But that's a great example of what I wanted out of this podcast, because I believe that education is leading industry in this area and multimodality thinking about ways in which we can better support the broad array of individuals, of a diversity of individuals thinking and acting is what we wanted, so I'm gonna turn now—I only wanna ask a couple more questions. Actually, I have a litany, but we're only gonna hit a few more, and I wanna thank all of you for really just this amazing conversation. We've already been touching on the workplace. We've been talking about society, and Nate, you've brought up workplace a couple of times. And so I wanna really dig in here, because this is the crux for all of us. These young folks, these young learners that you are engaging with, that you are helping to build and mold, they are going to become our workers, and whether they are learning to advocate for themselves at the age of 10, Liz, and taking those skills forward, or they themselves are the boss and they're thinking about the ways that Mr. Stauffer really helped me think and present ideas in different ways, I wanna see how we can commit to getting better as workplaces. So Liz, at the beginning of our first episode, you talked about how neurodiverse thinkers, one of the things that really makes them stand out is they have a markedly different way of thinking and approaching problems, versus sort of just neurotypical approaches of thinking. I mean, this was at the very beginning of our whole conversation here, and it has just stuck with me because as someone who does a lot of hiring, I'm thinking to myself, gosh, I want people who are going to approach problems in a different way, so classrooms in schools are really I think much more set up to support different and individualized learning, as we've talked about, based on different diagnoses and what have you. So can you make a case for me, Liz, why employers should do the same? What's the case for employers to create spaces, community, that are able to attract and retain neurodiverse thinkers?

Liz:

The tech industry has made a lot of advances in this area. The tech industry has embraced thinkers that are neurodivergent, so they see that people with—pay close attention to detail, they think in a very, very systematic way, which is good for programming and problem solving, and so they have really embraced and actively sought some of these thinkers out. What they've done to embrace those individuals is adjusted some of the culture within that company. So for example, in terms of social events, they were finding that the traditional happy hour where everybody met for drinks and chatted was really not very popular because having that level of social interaction was very difficult for some people, but maybe instead they had a video game night, and that really appealed to a lot of people, and they just played video games and hung out with each other, so we see those types of adjustments. The other companies I think of when I think of companies and how they adjust is Walgreens because Walgreens, yes, has very good reputation for hiring people with disabilities, and in their fulfillment center, not only do they have aisles numbered by—with the traditional numbers one, two, three, but for people that can't necessarily perceive or interpret those numbers, they also use symbols, like animals,

like the rhinoceros or a bear, so you're not looking for aisle number four, you're looking for the rhinoceros aisle, and that really is very good, and they've realized these employees always show up, they have good attendance, they follow directions, and they're very happy with having those neurodiverse employees in their company.

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Kristen:

That's just really cool to imagine. I didn't even know about that, that stores are actively using symbols to help people. I mean, not just their employees, but their customers or really anyone that's interacting with the stores. Do you think that virtual work from our postpandemic lives is making things easier or harder or in what ways is it doing both?

Liz:

I think it's doing both, depending on how you think. There's some people that really can sit alone and reflect and think through problems, prefer to be at home in a remote work environment because they have that time and they don't get interrupted every five minutes, whereas other people, they need that interaction, they need that constant stimulus from other people, bouncing off ideas and solving problems that way, so to be at home was extremely isolating and had a decrease in productivity.

Marty:

Nate, what have you found with your students in terms of things that are remote, on Zoom, on video? Do your students who might be more neurodivergent thinkers, do they prefer that? Or is it both? What are you finding in the parallel moving forward in their lives?

Nate:

The pandemic is a time that I think most of us don't wanna go back to, so this conversation is pitching in a lot of ways as a teacher. But it is true what Liz is saying. There were students who absolutely were able to engage with the content in a new ways. I think the pandemic for me as a young teacher too—I mean, I had only been teaching three or four years by the time it started—it really was a critical time for me [inaudible sounds like: to be thinking 00:22:57] accessibility in terms of how I was presenting my documents to kids because I couldn't be sure they were gonna log on to Zoom for class for the day, but I needed them when they opened a document to still know what they were being asked to do, so if they tried to at least look at their classwork they could do it even without my help, so things like adding little checklists, like self-checklists to understand, what are they supposed to have in order for the assignment to be complete? Making sure my rubric was right up front so they could see it as soon as they logged in to the document, and then it was in kid-friendly language that was easy for them to understand with key words bolded. These little simple tricks of the trade that only came out for me when I started to have to see things through that digital lens that I now keep in my classroom, so we still use Google Classroom now, which was something I had never used prior to the pandemic. I still put those rubrics on every one of my assignments, and so I think it's important to recognize that not every accommodation is going to be helpful for every student,

but every accommodation will be helpful for some student, and that makes it worth our time and our effort. I also think it's important to name [inaudible 00:24:01] why those things are there because I've had students who—something I try to implement within my classroom is if I'm gonna ask update discussion-based question, I have to give think time beforehand so students can try to process their ideas, particularly those who might not be apt to jump into the conversation if they haven't had time to think about what they wanna say first. But I've had students perform during that time feel like they know immediately what they wanna say, and they don't understand why they have to wait five minutes for all their classmates to think about what they wanna say, and it's important to frame for them, not to call out individual students and say we're waiting for this person, but to say to the community, hey, people need different amounts of time to think through their ideas before they jump into a conversation. If you feel like you know what you wanna say, that's awesome, write it all down so you're ready to go, but if you're not sure what you wanna say yet, that's cool too. And I think that could be used in meetings a lot. I think a lot of times in my experience working with managers they come in knowing exactly what they want to accomplish within that meeting, and they don't leave open space for those dialogs, but if we just build in that extra five minutes, it's really gonna make a world of difference, as Liz was saying, in inviting in the ideas of neurodiverse members of [inaudible 00:25:09].

00:25:09

Marty:

That's awesome. Yeah, and there's so many great things that you put there that are very true in terms of accessibility and Tamman specifically in that we're consistently talking about paying attention to your headings. We care deeply about making sure that we have a font that is dyslexic friendly. We make sure that we have headings. We bold key words. All of those little things that you just mentioned, it's necessary for some but useful for everyone, and that really, really continues, and I really appreciate that. So again, one or two more questions here for all of you. So, Damien, I wanna bring you into the conversation. We were just talking about Zoom and how in a post-pandemic world how that has affected, so are you finding that young people that you have are doing well with Zoom still? Are you still using things like Google Classroom and other online tools, or have you really moved back into an in-person space, and do you find that that's a little bit better for the students that you serve?

Damien:

Yeah, Marty, I find that at P.S. 148 teachers here have continued to use Google Classroom and Zoom for lots of things. We came out of the pandemic with a whole host of new skills that it would really be a shame to not continue to utilize. A lot of teachers just have really become much more technologically savvy. We were forced into it, but now that we have skills, we are continuing to use them. At my school one of the things that we're doing is we're hosting a test prep series for teachers and students, and what we do is we have a one-hour Zoom meeting where we meets with students online, but we invite their parents to join. One of the things that was really great about remote learning—I know a lot of people sort of have an assumption that remote learning didn't go very well for a whole host of reasons, and in large part many of those

things are true, but there were big positives that came out of remote learning, one of which from my perspective is parent engagement. When I was doing remote learning I saw that many parents were much more involved in understanding what their kids were doing academically, and so what we've tried to do is capitalize on that, and we're doing a test prep series where we invite the students and their parents to come and study together. That way, parents can also learn about some of the test prep strategies, and also we just felt like we needed to respond to a need to support parents more with some of the higher-level work that's happening in the elementary upper grades, so we do a one-hour session. We're doing 12 sessions across the school year. We cover either a topic in ELA or math, and we invite the parents and students to come study together. We review questions, and then we record the session and then post the videos on Google Classroom for any student or parent who can't make it because they have other commitments outside of school hours. So I feel like Google Classroom and Zoom have really helped to increase accessibility.

00:28:10

Marty:

So, Kristen, I think we have time for one more question.

Kristen:

I think we do. So, looking ahead or imagining your students as adults in the world or maybe the adults who are coming just ahead of the students you have now, what do you think some of the biggest hurdles are or are going to be in the workplace for people who identify as neurodiverse thinkers?

Nate:

I have two quick thoughts off the mat. One is in a 21st century industry we're relying increasingly on technology, which as Liz, Damien, and I have all addressed in our answers, has big pros when it comes to supporting neurodiverse folks, but it also comes with challenges in terms of presenting things in multiple modalities as spoke about, and also in terms of for folks who maybe have attentional disabilities, the internet is a wild place, and there's a lot of things and a lot of ways in which technology can end up creating more distractions and making it harder to focus on like one task at hand, so I think being mindful of the ways in which technology is useful and then also in what ways you still need sort of the human touch in order to accomplish the goals or missions of your workplace is an important thing to think about. The other big thing I think about right now is the way recruitment works, and my experience is only in education, so perhaps it's different in other industries, but something that strike me when I was preparing to become a teacher in getting my license was I had to get something called a sheltered English-immersion endorsement to teach in Massachusetts, which is essentially the Massachusetts set of policies for supporting English language learners, and in order to do that I had to take a five-hour standardized written exam entirely in English about how to support students who were English language learners. Now, I thought it was ironic because I was working on a staff at a school with many educators who had become educators because they themselves had at one time been English language learners, and when I thought about the

experience of taking a standardized test like that for myself as someone who identifies as neurotypical and as someone who's a native English speaker, I couldn't imagine how much more challenging preparing for that examination would be if I didn't identify that way, and I think thinking about not just what standards we want for the employees we're trying to hire and how we're licensing them but also why we think that's even relevant because I can tell you as someone who works with ELL students every day I don't approach working with them in the same way that test asked me to show that I'm able to do. So, if we think through very carefully the systems we have in place in our interview processes in terms of how we're recruiting people and how we're codifying the experiences they're bringing in, I think we'll open the door to a much wider array of thinking in the folks that we're inviting into our workplaces in the first place.

00:30:55

Marty:

Awesome. I couldn't agree more. It's why we and we encourage others to drop some of these quote-unquote AI recruitment tools that do the screening and things like that, cutting things out because it is creating a more homogenous group rather than looking at as wide array—there are many other things we can do as an entire workplace industry to make sure that we're getting to the candidates that we need. That was a great example, Nate. I appreciate that. Liz, Damien, did you wanna add anything in terms of the potential biggest hurdles that may exist for your students?

Liz:

I [inaudible sounds like: think 00:31:26] that going into workplace cultures that have been established over decades is difficult and being the different person, because you're always going to have to be advocating for yourself, explaining what your needs are or explaining why you have certain preferences, and right now I'm sitting on a four-legged chair, and I know some people would prefer to sit on like a round yoga ball, and you would have to explain why I am bouncing up and down during a meeting, and that would be difficult because it's not just once you're doing it; you're doing it over and over again, and I think that challenge of sustained advocacy is probably the biggest hurdle.

Marty:

So, I wanna follow up that real quick because I totally agree with you. What a wonderful comment, but we struggle with do you offer a list of potential accommodations? Do you just make sure the door is open? We actually do both of those things. Is there another way that folks could be thinking about making sure that we're creating as inclusive a space as possible? What would you say to that?

Liz:

I would commend you for all of the steps that you are taking, but I also think we have to recognize that no company is obligated to do that right now, so that's just a mindset of the culture overall. Maybe that's something companies in their industrial organizations can be

thinking of, like how can we make sure we capture all the talent that's out there. Right now, pretty much the onus is on the individual if they need accommodations to advocate for themselves, and the law really talks about reasonable accommodations, and the measurement for reasonable is cost, and so as long as it's not too expensive then I would hope that employers would be willing and able to provide those accommodations.

00:33:12

Marty:

For sure. That's absolutely great. And we've created cultures overall—big broad strokes here, but where people are—sort of been taught not to share that they have a disability, they have a need or they have accommodation, which is why I think it's important to talk about accommodations like I wear contact lenses or glasses, or I need a particular type of desk that's a standing desk for my back. There's all sorts of things that I think as we give examples of accommodations that are happening all over—it doesn't always have to be Dragon text-to-speech software or a particular screen reader that you need that might be a little bit more overt. Damien, how about you?

Damien:

Yeah, I would say to build off of what Nate and Liz said, the thing that came to my mind is the way that students all throughout their schooling careers—if a student has an IEP, they are really guaranteed a provision of accommodations, modifications, supports, services, but the way that our society works right now, like that pretty much just totally disappears when schooling ends and graduating students enter the work world, so I would imagine that that would be one of the biggest struggles. I can't imagine what it would be like to go through your whole schooling career receiving services and supports that you need and then have to enter a space where you now have to advocate for yourself in order to receive those things and not really have a guarantee that those will be provided because the laws don't exist in all of the same ways that they do in regards to schooling. I mean, certainly we have lots of protections under the ADA for people who need reasonable accommodations, but I don't think the level of supports that we provide students in a school setting, it's not equal to what's available for adults in the working world.

Marty:

And here's where I'd like to plus another episode of Article 19 because I encourage folks to listen to Erin Leuthold and Nimit Kaur talking about accommodations in higher ed because Nimit especially really walks through this process of being someone who got those supports in high school and primary school and getting to college and going, what happened? Where is everything? Why isn't everything just presented to me on a plate? And having to learn to advocate for herself, and then it's just one more leap into the workplace, and so Erin, who is the director of disability services at Rutgers Camden does a great job of talking exactly about what you talked about there, Damien, so thank you. So, this has been an amazing conversation; for those listeners who have been on the journey with us the entire time, I cannot wait for you to give us feedback on this episode. We have never had a panel this experienced, this large, this

brilliant before. I really appreciate everyone spending so much of your valuable time with us today. We're still only scratching the surface of this topic though, so I really hope that we can come back to it and continue to have conversations about what education is doing, what education is doing in the neurodiversity space, drilling down on different diagnoses. I mean, we really—a few times touched on autism spectrum disorder or dyslexia or what have you, but I'd really love to get into some of those more specific areas with all of you. So before you leave though, we have a tradition of asking sort of a question that sort of cleanses the palate. Sometimes we do three questions, but today we're gonna do just one, and it comes from our associate producer, who I appreciate so much, Harper Yatvin, who asks: If you had a billboard for one day and you could put any message you wanted on it in Times Square, what would you say on that billboard in Times Square?

00:36:55

Damien:

This is a bit of a silly answer, but I think a fun one. I really love doing food rankings, and on the notes app on my phone I rank a whole bunch of different things, mostly dessert foods, but one particular dessert that I really love is the Italian sfogliatelle, and I would love for more New Yorkers to support the great Italian bakeries of New York City, and I would put my sfogliatelle ranking on a billboard in New York so that people around the city could see what I think are the best [inaudible 00:37:35] to go and get a real authentic Italian sfogliatelle.

Marty:

That's amazing, Damien.

Nate:

Yeah, I can jump in. I've been in New York for a little under a year now at this point, and my answer—my partner would kill me if he knew I was gonna say this, but I would just put in really big words slow down, because Times Square is one of my least favorite places in the world, but it's also a place I pass through a lot as a frequent theater-goer, and I always am just like, why are people jaywalking when also the cars are trying to push through and bikes are flying, and I am never sure I'm gonna survive on my way through there to get to wherever I'm heading. Always a good reminder for all of us, just nothing in life is that important to be rushing through, unless it's maybe an ambulance. So any time they're in Times Square, I'm like, go, go, go. Yeah, slow down.

Marty:

Liz, final word is yours.

Liz:

I was thinking about this, and I guess I'm very influenced by our conversation that we've had today, so thinking about this I'm definitely influenced by the conversation that we've had today, and if I had a billboard in Times Square, I would put on it accept people for who they are.

00:38:51

Marty:

And I'm just gonna let that sit for a minute. That is a wonderful note to end on. But wait. There's more. I'm sorry. I don't mean to keep you even another minute longer unless it was for something really important, and I've gotta tell you, we have a book recommendation from my cohost Kristen Witucki and our lunch and learn monthly book talk host, who recommended the book *Haben* by Haben Girma. It was actually our very first book talk with the Tamman team, and if you haven't had a chance to listen or read *Haben* by Haben Girma, you gotta just take my word for it, or actually even better, take Kristen's word for it. Kristen?

Kristen:

It's time for a book break. Hi everyone, this is Kristen Witucki. And I'm here to discuss a book in the disability space that will make you think. The book for our first book break is actually the same book that was the subject of our first book talk at Tamman, *Haben: The Deafblind Woman Who Conquered Harvard Law*, by Haben Girma. What we all love about this book is an aspect that I think many writers with disabilities hope to have when they add a memoir or a book of fiction or poetry to the disability space, and that is that *Haben*, the subject of the book, does not come across as overly inspiring or so detached from human existence that you couldn't imagine her as an actual person. Certainly her accomplishments are inspiring and she's done so much with her time on earth, but at the same time when you finish the book you can imagine having a cup of coffee, chatting with her, asking her questions, talking about whatever it is that you both want to talk about that day. The quote that inspired us the most at Tamman is about a very formative time in everyone's life: middle school. Certainly some aspects of this passage are unique to the experiences of a deafblind student in a sighted, hearing school, a school that's not designed for students like Haben to succeed in, but other aspects of this experience are so universal that it's painful, and everybody at Tamman really seemed to feel it. "Apparently, assuming teachers will always give me the information I need leads to failure. If I want to succeed, I'll have to work to gain access to every visual detail and every spoken word, every single time. Putting my book in my backpack, I get ready to leave. Wait, is there homework? I didn't hear any homework, so there's no homework tonight, right? If I didn't hear it then it didn't happen. If I didn't see it then it didn't matter. Right? My back tenses. When I told Ms. Scott, my TVI, I would ask another student for the homework, I failed to consider how that feels. I don't have friends here. I don't feel wanted. I just feel tolerated. Asking someone to tell me the homework will just confirm their low expectations. As I approach his desk, I scan the room for a tall figure. Nothing. I stop by the history teacher's desk. Nothing. Every cell in my body tells me to run. I force myself to use my voice. 'Hello?' Nothing. My knees feel weak. I consider putting my backpack down since I don't know how long I'll have to wait. When I told Ms. Scott I would ask for the homework, I failed to consider the emotional drain of trying to find someone when you can't see or hear them. A tall figure strides over from the other side of the room. 'Are you here for the homework?' It's a sighted, hearing classroom in a sighted, hearing school in a sighted, hearing society. They designed this environment for people who can see and hear. In this environment, I'm disabled. They place the burden on me to step out of

my world and reach into theirs.” We hope that you will enjoy this book: *Haben: The Deafblind Woman Who Conquered Harvard Law*, by Haben Girma, available wherever books are sold.

00:42:39

Marty:

Thank you, Kristen. A little bit more from Article 19, coming to your ears very soon. Thanks so much everyone. Thank you so much for joining us today on this second episode where we focused on neurodiversity. From my host’s chair, and I know my cohost Kristen Witucki would agree with me, that may have been the longest two-part podcast that Tamman’s ever done, but man, did that conversation flow. There’s still so much more we didn’t get a chance to get to. But I really appreciate all of our guests coming on and sharing so much of their expertise and of themselves. We really do appreciate it. If you like what you heard today and you want to explore more about digital accessibility, technology, or our company culture, you can schedule a time to meet with us at [TammanInc.com](https://tammaninc.com). That’s T-A-M-M-A-N-I-N-C dot com. Don’t forget to sign up for our newsletter too so you never miss an event or an insight from us. Be sure to rate this podcast five stars on Spotify, Apple Podcast, or wherever you happen to be listening. It really helps our podcast grow and reach new audiences. And please, make sure if you do follow us, hit that bell icon so you never miss an episode. If social media’s more your style, you can follow us @TammanInc on LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram, or Facebook. You can share our podcast on your favorite platform. We really do appreciate it. Thank you so much for joining us today, and we look forward to continuing the conversation next time.

00:44:06