



Podcast Name: Article 19, Episode 2 - Radical Empathy

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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 Malloy. I'm the Chief of Staff and Catalyst at Tamman and I'm also the host for our conversation today. Today we're going to be talking about radical empathy as well as many other amazing digital accessibility things with Wally Zielinski. But before we get to Wally let me start by introducing my co-host, Amanda Roper, Program Manager of Tamman's Accessibility Initiatives. Hi, Amanda.

Amanda:

Hey, Marty.

Marty:

And we are joined again today by our head honcho, Michael Mangos, C.E.O., and co-founder of Tamman. Hey Mike.

Michael:

Hello Marty, Hello Amanda.

Marty:

Before I begin, I'd like to set the stage for our listeners. That this conversation and this podcast is born from the decision at Tamman to state clearly and plainly that access to information is a human right. The developers and the designers at Tamman work hard to make sure that no matter what use constraint a user may have, be it due to a temporary, situational, or permanent condition or disability, that they are able to access information designed and built by Tamman. This podcast is a call for others to join in a bigger conversation with us. We want to build the inclusive web. To do that we need all of us working together, learning together. So, thanks for listening. I'm really excited to get this conversation started. Once again, Amanda, Mike, let me bring our friend Wally into the conversation as well. Wally Zielinski, welcome to Article 19.

Wally:

Thank you, Marty. Happy to be here.

Marty:

We are so happy to have you. So, we always like to start off with a fairly easy question. I'm not sure how easy this is, but for you Wally, what is the first thing you do or look at, in terms of digital accessibility, when you go to a website that you hadn't been to before?

Wally:

I think the first thing I always do is I just try to Tab. I think the Tab key can tell you a lot about how accessible a website actually is and how much care was taken to make it accessible. Or how much knowledge the engineer had when they were building it. Because as soon as you hit the Tab key, if you start to notice that there's no visual indicator for the focus, that tells you something, that might give you a baseline for what to expect for the rest of your experience there. If you keep tabbing and it goes off into some hidden menu somewhere and you can't see it anymore at all, or you can tell it's going through some MobileNav that was not removed from the DOM for what reason, that gives you a clue. So, I think the Tab key gives you a lot of key information. It'll also – if you notice huge chunks of content that just gets skipped over because someone put tab index negative one or something on a button. That's generally where I go first. Then I'll poke around the code a little bit from there. But the Tab key gives you a lot of info.

[00:03:01]

Marty:

It's the power of Tab, it's sort of remember the 80s soda when you're thinking about accessibility in a website. Mike, Wally may have stolen your answer, but did you want to add anything to – what do you do when you go to a website you hadn't been to before to look for digital accessibility on the site?

Michael:

Yeah, I agree about the Tab. You know, I find though myself, being a sighted user, I find that actually when I just start looking at it, challenges or problems or gaps start to just pop out of the screen. Like any other QA process when you get good at it and you've been doing it enough years, you start to get this blink kind of experience. Like a Malcolm Gladwell *Blink* style thing where instantly you're like, oh, I can tell, you know, there's problems here. Then I start to explore it a little bit. There's lots of things I explore, but usually my visual experience at the site start to immediately pop content, orientation, order, legibility, like all these things start popping out right away. So, that's usually my first blush with it. Without even trying, it happens automatically.

Marty:

How about you Amanda? When you're popping on a site for the first time?

Amanda:

I don't have those Jedi mind tricks that Mike is talking about yet. That hasn't evolved for me quite yet. But something that really stuck with me, recently someone said, if a certain aspect of a site is annoying, most likely it's inaccessible. So, I found that that's a good starting point to dig into when I'm looking for accessibility issues on a site.

Marty:

So, Wally, we've talked before and you're a friend of Tamman, and we're a part of different Meetups and things like that, and so I know you to be just a really wonderful and brilliant developer. But I'd like to start off by giving you a second to orient listeners to who you are. Can you tell us a little bit about you? What do you do professionally obviously? But what do you do also unprofessionally or for fun?

Wally:

I've been in web development for I guess nine years or something like that now. Started in Fernanda Engineering, got into accessibility later. I'm a nerd in that I am super obsessed with board games, video games, Dungeon and Dragons, but I'm also a weird spiritualist kind of person. I'm into yoga and tarot and right now I'm reading a book about the cabal. I kind of run the gamut.

Marty:

Yes, yes. That's so great.

Michael:

That's so awesome, Wally. I didn't know that about you and that's so much fun.

Wally:

Yeah, that's a secret that I keep. I save it for things like podcasts where I –

Michael:

And then we're all going to publish it to the world.

Marty:

What's your sign?

Wally:

Oh, I'm a Taurus Sun Aquarius Moon and a Sagittarius Rising. If you want to know my big three.

Marty:

I think you took it way past my ability to understand. So, I'll have to follow up on those down the road, down the line.

Wally:

Is this the wrong podcast? Is this not the astrology podcast?

Michael:

We're going to take it a whole other direction than what had planned, no.

Marty:

So, you've been developing for nine years. How did you find yourself getting into web development and development in general code?

[00:05:48]

Wally:

It's kind of a dumb story. So, I grew up in the age of Myspace, so I was very into customizing my – Everyone had to have a custom Myspace, right. You had to have your background on fleet, you had to have your music player playing, you know whatever emo song was top of mind. So, I was like – and also had LiveJournal and all these other internet social media sites. So, I grew up kind of messing around with those things. I didn't ever think that that was going to be something that I did professionally. It was just something that I found enjoyment out of. I would also – but I illegally pirated Photoshop 7, because I was obsessed with Photoshop. So, I would spend a lot of time in Photoshop. I would spend a lot of time in Photoshop. I was on anime forums making avatar art and signatures for people and selling it for virtual currencies. I enjoyed art and I took all art classes in high school. I kind of thought that that's where I was going to end up, is doing more of a graphic design kind of route. So, when I was looking at colleges – I grew up on Long Island. I knew that I wanted to get out of my house and away from my family. Far enough away that I didn't have to see them every weekend. I had just come off of a viewing of *The Real World: Philadelphia*, and so I assumed Philadelphia was the gayest, coolest place you could possibly go.

Marty:

That's so great.

Wally:

So, I started looking at schools here and I came down for an open house at the Art Institutes, which are no longer around, they're now a – I think it's a Gap and an Old Navy or something like that – are the old [inaudible 00:07:12] school buildings. UNIQLO is one too. So, I go there, and they have the sort of student work out for all the different majors. I'm wondering around and looking at the stuff. They have fashion and graphic design and all that. I'm looking at the graphic design booth and it's really uninspired, magazine cover, that's like some sunflower and some cruddy text. It was not speaking to me; we'll just say it that way. So, I kept wondering around and I found the web design interactive media. I didn't really put much thought into art after that. I noticed that the placement rates after graduation were higher, and the base salary was higher than graphic design. I was like, this seems cooler. I messed with Myspace; I could do this. I didn't do a lick of study beforehand. I just went to this trade school, got the basic understanding of JavaScript functional programming. We did some ActionScript back then. Basic HTMLCS. They didn't even have jQuery in the curriculum. It was before that became ubiquitous. So, I kind of fell into it in some ways. I stuck with it. It was a three-year bachelor program. I feel it's a point of pride that I have about graduating from AI, even though it's gone now, was that so many people would

drop out because it was a little bit too like – you didn't take summers off. It was just get in, get out, do your thing. Yes. I made it through that, and I got my first gig. I was in my little professional world, and it felt good. It sort of just evolved from there. I don't know why it stuck. I was one of the lucky people that ended up in a major that made sense to me and that I could get behind. I was a math and science kid, and I enjoyed those classes. I felt like web design was this nice combination of some of my art background and some of the skills I was good at and it just sort of stuck, so that's how I ended up here. It sounds super random. I probably could have gotten the same education for a lot cheaper on Lynda.com, but here we are.

Marty:

Yes, technology is that weird space where you can still do a lot of self-teaching, but it really helps when you have the professional behind you kind of guiding you in a particular way. Mike.

00:09:11

Michael:

I've worked with a lot of agencies and a lot of professionals in the sort of marketing and art space for decades now, and I find that there's a very common pattern. That the people that tend to more technical, even though they start in art, they almost always bleed over into either IT or software development because they find a pathway there and they find their home and they friends. It doesn't mean they're not artistic, but you just find the people that sort of appreciate sort of the production quality tend to lean more towards the technological. So, I've heard your story – not your story, but I've heard that same kind of story from a lot of people that end up being really successful developers.

Wally:

That's cool. I thought I had this very unique story, but clearly, I'm just –

Michael:

Wally, you are one of a kind.

Marty:

So, I'm curious as someone who really is a strong digital accessibility inclusive web person and professional. Did you fall into accessibility in the same way? Or do you have some other calling to that?

Wally:

Similarly, yes. I wish I could say that I had this cool epiphany moment where I was like, I want to do things for the right reasons, and I care about all these people all of a sudden. I sort of happened in reverse where I had the opportunity to work in accessibility and then it grew my level of empathy towards that kind of thing. A couple of years ago I was working at a mid-sized agency in Philadelphia, and we had a bunch of clients that were like – places like Comcast, these kinds of big names that have accessibility requirements for everything that you do for them. So,

we're contracts working for those people and we're building stuff for them and no one on the team really understands what accessibility is. We just know it's the stuff for screen readers and no one's testing it. Comcast isn't testing it. They're just kind of like, it's in the contract so we assume that you're doing it and we were certainly trying. We knew how to google and that was about it. So, at the time I was climbing this corporate ladder kind of thing. Doing the thing capitalism tells you to do and get the best salary you can, and get the best title you can, try to really build out your portfolio in that way. So, I was at a stage where my manager had just left, and I was vying for her spot in some ways. So, I was like, OK, well, there's clearly this gap. My manager was like, yes, we need to get better at this, and just kind of walked away. So, I was like, OK, I will set up the study group. I will do the thing. I will take initiative and do the homework. I found all of the stuff about IEAP, the certification programs that are out there. I found the DQ course that preps you for that. I kind of created a study plan for myself and the other frontend developers on the team. We sort of grew from there. So, then we added designers and business analysts and stuff would join the team as well. We ended up creating the first accessibility initiative within this company. So, that was where it started. It was sort of as a means of evolving my career. It was sort of a cool niche thing I could get into. Because at that point I was still kind of a jack of all trades type. I was decent at JavaScript and pretty fast with layouts and I didn't have any really distinguishing thing really invest myself in. So, it was sort of like, OK, this makes sense for me and my career and I'm just going to do this. Then the more I learned about different disabilities that are out there, the different ways that people are affected, the egregious lack of awareness of these issues in the industry, the more it kind of like – to go back to the zodiac stuff – aligned with my Aquarius Moon stuff. I care about people. I want to make the world a better place. I think everyone has this to an extent. Everyone has a little bit of that hope that you can impact the world in some way that is bigger or a lot more long lasting than yourself. So, that was a thing that I could get behind and I ran with it. So, I was able to get certified from the IAP, that was so cool. I was so proud of that. We got a couple other people on the team certified along the way. That just became – then I started going to all the Meetups and doing all the things. That's where I met you, that's where I met a lot of people that I now talk to pretty regularly.

00:13:03

Marty:

You mentioned something in there and it's one of the reasons I was so excited to talk to you, because you brought up the word empathy and it led to the phrase radical empathy. I really want to know more about this. Because obviously I'm very aware of what empathy is. But I don't really have a sense of radical empathy. So, what is that and how does it apply to accessibility?

Wally:

So, empathy, we all know what empathy is. Putting yourself in someone else's shoes. Understanding what their needs are and where they're coming from, what their past is, what their histories are, what their skills are, their weaknesses. Kind of understanding them to the point where you can understand their feelings and

why they're feeling that way. Empathy is that side of it. It's really easy to do for people that you care about. Maybe a little bit harder to do for people like on an out group or people that you don't necessarily know very well. I'm sure that there are better explanations of radical empathy. I'm sure you could google it and find something better. But to me radical empathy is applying the same concept of empathy, but to the nth degree to every person out on the street. People who you don't know. It's really easy when someone cuts you off on the highway to get angry at that person and to blame them for your shortcomings of your problems now. Expressing radical empathy in that moment would be, what might this person be going through? Why could they maybe have missed my signal? Maybe they didn't see me. What else is going on in their life? Do they have a kid in the back seat? Kind of applying all of the different things that you go through on every day of your life. You have distractions and issues, and you make mistakes. It's just about taking that and applying it to everyone without exception. I guess that's really the crux of the radical part. It's everyone without exception. Because I think a lot of times people can get sort of caught up or – we get caught up in the moment and we think like, oh, well that guy just cut me off, or this guy is – whatever. That guy's a criminal. All this stuff. But if you can take that same thing of empathy and apply that to even those people, then your skillset for empathizing with anybody, like people that you actually do care about even, becomes exponentially higher. The way that I think that that applies to accessibility is, I don't think that anyone could build an accessible digital experience without empathy. If you are just approaching accessibility from the standpoint of compliance or a legal thing, or conforming to the WCAG, you're probably not going to ever make anything that's accessible. You might make something that is technically by the book, by the letter, accessible. But you'll never make something like an enjoyable experience. We all talk about user experience. We have all of these fantastic little personas that we try to optimize our experience for, and how many of those includes someone with a disability, includes someone of a different race, includes someone – You know what I mean, there's so many different layers of that that don't often get included. So, it's just about taking all those things that we think are good about ourselves and applying that to everybody. If that makes sense.

00:15:59

Michael:

It does. Wally, I've got some follow up questions for you actually because you've got my brain thinking about a bunch of things. We've kind of started to double down on the language of awareness instead of empathy, because empathy comes with – it's a little loaded at times, it can feel a little overwhelming, so we like the term awareness. But I'm kind of curious, when you hear the word awareness, at least at first blush when you think about it, do you think there's an intersection between awareness and empathy? Or do you think they're really truly distinct concepts that don't belong in the same playfield?

Wally:

I have an interesting reaction to that, which is I feel like awareness is sort of step zero of empathy. I can be aware of the crying woman next to me at the bus stop.

But if I don't care enough to ask her what she needs or how I can help her, there's no empathy there. I can be aware that she exists, and I can go about my life with or without her. Awareness is literally step zero. It's like if you're not aware – that's the bare minimum standard we should be expecting of people. Whereas empathy is sort of taking that next step. It's like, OK, I am aware that you have a problem and I empathize enough with your position that I want to do something to change that or to make your life better.

Michael:

Interesting. Do you think that there's a progression that people might go through? When I think about empathy, as a contrast maybe a word like sympathy. Where sympathy is maybe not being in their shoes, but you can at least – you're aware there's a problem. If you got with that awareness versus empathy, is sympathy you think a middle, a mid-point there when it comes to this? Do you think that has a place? Or do you think the goal is always just to get straight to empathy?

00:17:26

Wally:

You know, there is absolutely a path and I'm not smart enough or witty enough to put it together into words at this very moment. That makes me think of some of the stuff around white fragility that was talked a lot about during the summer of 2020, where there's a pathway between being an outright racist. So, you could be on the extreme end of racism, but there's a spectrum between that and being an advocate or an ally. I think there's probably a similar spectrum when it comes to awareness and empathy, where there's probably some steps in between. Between that and like, yes, I can sympathize with that but you're the one with the disability, you have to figure it out. There absolutely is, and I'm not eloquent enough to outline it perfectly in this moment. But yes, I do think that there's probably a progression there.

00:18:15

Marty:

That was pretty good I would say. That was all right. Amanda, you wanted to jump in.

Amanda:

You kind of answered my question. I was going to just try and have you elaborate on, is radical empathy something that could be taught and did somebody inspire you to take on this mindset of radical empathy?

Wally:

I don't remember where I heard radical empathy for the first time. It was probably a podcast or something. Can radical empathy be taught? I think I want to say, yes. I don't think that any one of us can claim to have been – or ever be radically empathetic towards everyone in the universe since the day they were born. I don't think that's a trait that you're born with. I think that it is easier for some people

than others, especially if you've gone through something. If you've experienced inequality. If you've experience aggression or disparity. The only answer to that is, yes, you have to be able to learn it because the only other option then is, you either can or you can't, and that feels totally wrong.

Michael:

It feels like a fixed mindset instead of –

Wally:

Yes.

Michael:

Potentially, like an agile mind, where you can bend into the future, bend into new ideas.

Marty:

Absolutely.

Wally:

The thing with me is I don't ever want to be the same person every day. I want to be a dynamic thinker. I try to enforce plasticity in my thinking. So, maybe there's a value of plasticity that needs to be there. That you have to value being able to be a dynamic person, to grow and to change in order for you to start the path of learning radical empathy and all these other things.

Michael:

So, you threw out some very challenging scenarios. Like the person who was driving like a maniac and cuts you off. They clearly have endangered you and possibly upset you. But then you turn, your plastic mind into trying to think about them and their situation and what might be happening to them. That kind of radical empathy. But do you think there are any practical limits or limits that you've even experienced in your own life to radical empathy where you're like, that's where I'm going to stop? I'm really curious.

Wally:

Because here's the thing, if you really were to apply radical empathy every day, you would be walking around Center City, Philadelphia, talking to every single homeless person, asking them what they need, going into the store, buying it, giving them food and clothes and whatever, and you wouldn't have anything left for yourself. So, I think the line has to be, you have to have your own boundaries about what you are capable of giving. There's the whole idea of spoon theory right, of you only have so many spoons when you're going through the day. When you give away a spoon to – some people, just getting dressed in the morning is giving away a spoon. Some people it might be something bigger than that. Whatever your number of spoons are that you have, you only have so many of them and if you spend them all, all the time, you'll have nothing left for you. So, I guess my answer to that would be, there has to be limits and you have to set them for yourself. No one can set those limits for you. But it's sort of making sure that you're putting the

life vest on yourself before you help the next 100 people that you think need the help.

[00:21:09]

Michael:

So, in digital accessibility, because we're all in digital on this call here, where do you think the best application of radical empathy is as a starting point? Take me for example, I consider myself to be an empathetic person. But if I were trying to exercise what you've described as your radical empathy in an exercise, we'd be either starting a new web project or a new application. What's the mindset that I should be putting myself in, in the context of radical empathy as it applies to work? Or do you think that it's a little separate and radical empathy is actually sort of a theory and the practical application is normal empathy with the starting point of radical to kind of get you juiced up? Where does it fit?

Wally:

That's a great question. I think to me radical empathy is a way of approaching life less so than a way of approaching work. As long as you are living your life through that lens of radical empathy, you're probably going to exude it in your work too. I feel like there's got to be something there that you could maybe apply a certain set of questions to what – everything that you're doing. Like, if I'm going to build a new website, is this website going to –

Michael:

It sounds like what you're saying is, radical empathy is a philosophy that if you hold authentically in your personal life or in your life overall, you can see expressions of that in your work. And that rather than you bringing a tool to the workplace, or a tool to the project, you actually just allow that authenticity to come through in the natural course of the work.

Wally:

Absolutely. So, if you were living your life through the lens of radical empathy and you were actively engaged in that mindset, you're going to apply all of the same concepts to everything that you do. That's going to be something that comes through no matter what you are doing in that moment. It's not a tool or a checkbox on some form that you're filling out or some list of things you need to do that day. It's already part of you, it's part of what you're doing every single day all the time.

Michael:

Yes, you know, it reminds me of a philosopher and writer that I really like, Daniel Quinn. He wrote, we make a lot of programs in our society to deal with problems, but if we all had the right vision, which is more of a starting point, than a thing to execute it on, we wouldn't need programs because that stuff would kind of solve itself. We would all be acting authentically to our truest selves, with our highest ideals. So, I kind of hear you saying a little bit of that. Does that resonate? Does that sound like how you're feeling?

Wally:

Yes, I think so. When you say programs, you mean like social programs or like –

Michael:

Yes. He was talking about a totally different context. It wasn't about digital accessibility or anything like that. He was talking about, do we need a social program or entitlements? We have that because we have a society that inherently creates inequality. But if we had a vision for equality, and we all held it dear as a core value, and we expressed it, we wouldn't need a program for entitlements, because we'd all be taking care of each other. Does that make sense?

[00:24:01]

Wally:

Absolutely. Our society transitioned from a society in which there were more opportunities for people. People used to live with their families. Your grandmother, your grandfather, everyone lived in the same house, and all took care of each other. The reason we have to have retirement homes today is because we stopped doing that and we stopped living that way and caring for our elders in that way. So, now we need social programs and stuff to meet the needs of a society that sort of started to – maybe not drift away from – I don't want to make it sound like I'm saying, oh, we've gone so far from –

Michael:

No. You know Wally, what I hear you saying, and it's speaking to me, I'm having all – this flood of thoughts right now. What I hear you saying is – and it resonates with me – that we have evolved as a – and I'll just say America, because I don't want to pull the whole world into it. But when I think about my experience as an American, watching this evolution of – or maybe being at the end of a long history of radical individuality, that radical empathy becomes sort of this other side of the pendulum swing response to radical individualism.

Wally:

Absolutely.

Amanda:

I love what you guys are saying. However, as society has changed and we become a little bit more separate from each other, we're not all living together. The lack of awareness becomes more and more evident as we've become more siloed in our society. So, is there a better way to raise awareness? Do we need to teach our kids in school? Wally and Michael, can you solve these world issues right now, is what I'm asking?

Wally:

I thought we were talking about digital accessibility.

Marty:

Yes, exactly.

Michael:

Well, that's an interesting point, right. When you talk about bringing radical empathy to a project or to work, it may start sooner than that. But maybe because we don't have a shared vision as a society, we end up needing programs. But those programs to your point Amanda, interestingly we could start them in children's education, in primary education, around giving children experiences. Because once they've had those experiences, they start to have empathy without having to be taught what empathy is. They start to build it naturally. So, maybe there is still room for programs because we are not a culture of 100 percent radically empathetic individuals. We're, yes, maybe we do start bringing it in early. I know at Tamman, in the office, we've tried to start to create experiences for people so that they can build that empathy. Not just saying, take this class on empathy or do this online training around what I means for digital accessibility awareness. There is a place for that. But we've tried to create additional experiences for people that allow them to open up their minds and their hearts a little differently, so that the training becomes sort of less prescriptive and more obvious and then people pursue it on their own. Wally, what do you think?

[00:26:44]

Wally:

Yes, it's a hundred percent real. We have built this very hyper individualized society that inherently – it's very easy to Amanda's point – for your awareness to drift away from other people's needs and just focus solely on you. Because you have your own problems, your own house, your own issues, your own health to focus on. So, there is absolutely room for more educational – I think I tend to be the type of person that says education is the crux of everything. If we can get education right, we could fix a lot of problems without having them become problems in the first place. So, very onboard for more empathy experiences for kids because I think that would be so great.

Marty:

I have one more question before we get to our final segment. Because as we're talking here, I have a little bit of a danger zone. So, one of the tools we use with digital accessibility and UX design and everything else, are personas. I wonder, within the limits of radical empathy as we build personas for people where we really want to get into this particular use case, that we may make assumptions that are not grounded in reality. I'm just curious, Wally, what you might think about people hearing this, getting excited, being like, yes, I am a radical empathizer, and I am going to create this persona. And they just miss the mark so completely. Is that something that then we would need to worry about?

Wally:

Yes. You see it all the time. Even someone who's not like, oh, yeah, I'm going to go do radical empathy, but even someone – when I see code from an engineer who's like, oh, yeah, I saw I have to make this accessible, so I just copied and pasted this thing. It's really easy to miss the mark on this stuff if you aren't actively engaging

in – with people with disabilities to understand really what their needs are. You could use a screen reader, but you're not going to use it the same way that a blind person uses it. There's no way. They're using it every day for everything, they are going to be way faster than you are. I think even good strategist should be basing their personas in actual data, which is helpful. But there's two sides of that too, where there's privacy concerns about collecting data about people with disabilities. So, I don't want people to take away from this conversation – I almost think personas need to be turned a little bit upside down, in the sense that instead of trying to prescribe out site to these five or six personas that we've identified as really important people to the site. Why are we not just find the sort of common ground, right? What are the things that absolutely everyone needs to have and surface that first? Personas themselves are almost a little bit weird. But I'm sure that I will get dragged by UXers who are like, I need this in order to do my job, thank you very much.

Michael:

Or you know, personas I think are a way to try to build empathy and then to establish a direction and parameters for that empathy in the process of development, right. So, it's not a perfect surrogate for everybody on the team in all levels, from writing to designing to developing to QA, to be able to have full empathy, but it certainly – I think you would hear, or at least this is what I would anticipate to hear from people in user experience design, that those personas really help ground them and remind them to be empathetic. So, maybe see it as an artifact of empathy rather than the end onto itself. Does that make sense?

[00:30:10]

Wally:

I think so. Yes. I wonder if maybe there's a middle ground of when you're creating your personas make sure each one reflects a different ability level. Because I think that is some thing that comes up a lot, is how many times are all of your personas able bodied people. You're already limiting – You think that you have this diverse set of people that you're catering your site to, but you're not. So, maybe it's just about having the empathy to include all the intersections, not just the four or five that you've identified as things you want to cater to. But all the intersections of race and gender and identity and disability and all the things in every single use case, in every single persona.

Marty:

Wally, you're going to have to come back. I have a couple more questions for you, but I'm going to move us on to the next segment. We have so much more to talk about.

Wally:

I know, we haven't even gotten into your moon and your rising sign yet.

Marty:

That's right, so please. I'm asking you for a guarantee now that at some point you're going to come back onto the podcast.

Wally:

I guess I have to say, yes.

Marty:

Yes, I'm not going to let you – All right, great. We have three questions that we ask all of our guests. I want you to think through some of these and we're anxious to hear what you're going to say. What is one personal accommodation that you make for yourself?

Wally:

Can you explain accommodation? What do you mean by accommodation?

Marty:

Often times individuals with various levels of ability come into a work or a setting and they need a particular accommodation, something that can help them be productive. You can choose to take that in your personal life, so glasses, eyeglasses, for example, could be a form of personal accommodation. But it could be something a little bit more like our screen reader or yoga ball to sit on, it can be a lot of different things. It could be, you need to walk your dog in the middle of the day, if you a dog.

Wally:

Definitely one that – I'm known a little bit in some circles as an annoying mouse aficionado. I need to have a particular mouse. I went through – there was a time where I went through – I'd beta tested five different mice variants because I was getting very annoying tennis elbow. I could not – it was brutal. I don't even know how to describe that pain, but it was weird. So, I tried vertical mice, I tried – and I feel like there was five different types of mice that I tried. I think they were all variants of a vertical mouse or a stationary mouse, and I ended up with this one. It's a trackball mouse, so it's sort of like you don't move it in the same way, you don't drag it around, you just move the trackball. I found that that has made a huge difference for me. Now I can't have anything but this mouse. This mouse comes with me everywhere. I don't use any other mice. Get out of here with your trackpad. I don't want it. I could think of a million. I use dark mode everything, because I can't stand looking at a white screen all the time. It just totally kills me. The other one I just thought of and then I'll stop, is Chrome used to – I think this is a thing in most browser, you used to be able to hit the Backspace button to go back a page in your history and they got rid of that. I guess because a lot of people would hit it accidentally when they were trying to fill out a form and go back and then it was frustrating. I certainly still do that. But I installed the extension to bring that functionality back, because there's no way that I am hitting Ctrl, left arrow, or I'm dragging my mouse cursor all the way to the Back button to back – I'm hitting the Backspace button, there's no other –

[00:33:24]

Marty:

If you had a trackpad, it's very easy just to kind – never mind.

Wally:

Absolutely not.

Marty:

What is something about your work that keeps you up at night?

Wally:

Well, as a Taurus, nothing keeps me up at night. No. Things that stress me out. There's two sides of the same coin that I go back to a lot and they both give me anxiety, so I don't know why I even bother thinking about it. But one avenue that I think about all the time is, what happens if we're still having the same conversations about accessibility that we're having now in 10 years. It's like, I don't want to explain alt texts anymore to someone. That gives me anxiety and it pushes me to do as much education as I can and to be really, really clear with people why this stuff is important. To try to get us to a point where we're not having the same conversations constantly. That's one side that keeps me up at night. Then the other side is, what if the opposite happens? What if in five or six years everyone's got accessibility figured out. We're all doing it all the time. It's responsive design, we're all doing it right, we're all doing it well. It's like, now what do I do? That's more of a selfish worry of, this is the niche that I decided to carve out for myself. What if I do my job so well that there's no more job left to do? But I have a feeling that – we're going to end up somewhere in the middle and there will still be plenty of room on both sides. But yeah, definitely those two things.

Marty:

Those are great answers. Our last question for you is, what is one recommendation for a game, or a book, or a movie, TV show, what ever you might have. What's your recommendation for us?

Wally:

OK, this is going to get real nerdy. There is a Twitch stream, it is a live stream every Thursday night. They go from – I forget what time it is. They record in Pacific time. But it's started 10 p.m. Eastern, they go till two a.m. Eastern. It's a four-to-five-hour live stream of a bunch of professional voice actors playing Dungeons & Dragons. It's called *Critical Role*. It is very, very good. I don't know that I'm – again, this could be a whole other podcast to just explain what *Critical role* is. It's an absurd amount of content to consume. There's two separate campaigns that have aired. The second one is still going. They're both over a hundred episodes long and they're four to five hours each. So, it's not something for the faint of heart.

Marty:

You have to make a commitment, yes.

Wally:

You really do. My boyfriend just got caught up on campaign two. He started it from episode one and he went through it like a podcast. I think he treated it more like a podcast. He's the kind of person that listens to stuff at 1.7 speed. So, he was able to plow through it. But yes, it's a lot. It will be coming more and more relevant because they just had one of the most successful Kickstarters. They broke a record. They were trying to make a movie out of some of the stuff in campaign one. They ended up raising 14 million dollars to do – now they're doing a whole TV series. Launching on Amazon later this year or next year.

[00:36:22]

Amanda:
Wow.

Wally:
Yeah, so it's huge. People are going to start talking about it more when the animated series comes out, but now you can be on the inside, now you know about it.

Marty:
I feel like we got on the inside. That is really cool. Not only did we get on the inside, but you piqued the interest of everybody here too.

Wally: Dude, it's like the Olympics of D&D. It's insane. They're so committed to their characters. They're so – like they hardly ever break, and they're voice actors, so they get into the voices too. It feels so immersive. The DM, his name is Matt Mercer, is incredibly talented. You feel like every person that they encounter on this adventure is a unique, fully fleshed-out persona, person, with a totally unique backstory and everything. He's incredible. So, highly recommend. It's a ton of content, so bear that in mind. But it's great. You could honestly pick it up live if you wanted to just follow along and not go back and do everything. But you're gonna want to go back and do everything.

Marty:
Wally, I can't thank you enough. I love talking with you. This was so great. You've already promised to come back, so I'm going to hold you to that. But I really appreciate your openness and your sharing today. You've given us a lot to think about. Let's do this again and keep the conversation going.

Wally:
Let's do it. This was great. Thank you so much for having me.

Michael:
Thank you, Wally.

Amanda:
Thank you, Wally.