

Podcast Name: Article 19, Episode 1 – Introduction to Article 19

[00:00:00]

Marty:

Hello and welcome to Article 19. My name is Marty Molloy. I am the Chief of Staff and Catalyst at Tamman. I'm also the host for our conversation. Today will be an all Tamman cast with my co-host Amanda Roper, Program Manager of Tamman's accessibility initiatives. Hi, Amanda.

Amanda:

Hey. Hey.

Marty:

We are joined today by our head honcho, Michael Mangos, CEO and cofounder of Tamman. Hey, Mike.

Mike:

Hello, Mr. Molloy.

Marty:

Before we begin, I would like to set the stage for our listeners. 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 designers at Tamman work hard to make sure that no matter what use constraint a user may have, be it do to a temporary, situational, or permanent condition or disability, that they will be able to access the 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, in fact, we do build the inclusive web every day, but to do that, we need all of us working together, learning together to do that. Thanks for listening. Let's get this conversation started. With that, I really want to bring the two of you in. Amanda and Mike, it has been a long work day as we're recording, so how are you both doing?

Mike:

Getting hungry. We're approaching the dinner hour, as I know Amanda's cats are, too.

Amanda:

Yes, Cheese is right here beside me. She's just ready for a good old big bowl of wet kibble.

Mike:

I don't think I knew your cat's name was Cheese. That's adorable.

Marty:

Cheese is very loud. She's a little shy though. I don't see her on camera too often, but she is definitely a voice in the background.

Amanda:

Yes, she's attached at our hips, but she's kind of camera shy.

Marty:

Let's go ahead and kick this off. Amanda, I need an easy question to start off. What do you have for us today?

Amanda:

Oh yeah. I'm excited to hear the answers on this one. We're working from home all the time. We spend however many hours at our home offices now. What's one thing you especially love about your home office? Could be anything, big or small.

Mike:

I know in my home office, I spend a lot of time setting it up. Actually, prior to the pandemic, not realizing I was going to be in it all the time for a year and I have two windows facing different directions. I get a ton of sunlight and then to sort of continue the beautiful light that I've created in the room by its positioning and the window treatments, I actually invested in some Philips Hue lights. That's not an endorsement. But I bought these Hue lights and I change the color temperature and intensity of the light throughout the day so that I continue both compliment the outdoor light during the day and then transition it to a more warm tone to create a mood in the evening as the sun sets. I just love this light experience that I've created in my space.

[00:03:25]

Marty:

That may be the Mangosian answer to a question I've ever heard. That's amazing. I didn't know that about you. You've never shared that. That's crazy. Mine is much more simple. I've had, for a long time, this petrified wood ball. It is become my

personal fidget thing and I never had it in a professional office, but I always had it at home and whenever I was doing stuff at home it's become my constant companion and it allows me to just have something to play with whenever I'm on the phone or whenever I'm talking. The problem is it's petrified wood and so sometimes I miss or it rolls off my desk or I throw it really harder than I thought and it makes a very loud crashing and banging.

Mike:

Isn't petrified wood basically just a rock?

Marty:

Yeah, it's like this really heavy polished rock. It's awesome. It's become my – like Cheese is yours, it is my close companion to my work day. What about you, Amanda? What do you have in your office there that you love?

Amanda:

You know, Marty, I've always thought that was a rubber band ball until you explained that it's not. That's pretty cool. It doesn't make as much sense to have a rock in your office, but you know, that's great. I'm happy you have that. My favorite thing in my office, I suppose, is this weird desk setup that I have. My partner, Brian [ph] and I, we actually share this eight-foot-long desk and we made it ourselves from an old door that we just turned on its side, drilled a few holes in it, and again, we didn't know how permanent this was going to be. Moving out here to Philadelphia we didn't have anything and this was one our first bigger house projects together. Although it's not the prettiest, it's my favorite thing in the office. I'm glad we all have our favorite office things, large and smaller and technical and old. Very exciting. We spend so much time in this office working at a company where accessibility is at the forefront of our minds and at the forefront of our practice day in and day out. Mike, why should anyone care about accessibility?

Mike:

You know, I've heard a lot of arguments for this around how much the disabled community spends. How much persons with disability spend, how much they contribute to the workforce, how much they make up of the population. I think the statistics are great. I don't want to begrudge anybody those things. Those were never the compelling arguments for me. I can't speak for why everyone else should care. I can tell you why I care. I believe everybody is worth something. Everybody is worth a lot. Each person needs to be treated with the same dignity, the same respect and be included in the same conversations. For me, it doesn't need more than that. I don't need a monetary reason. I don't think it requires a statistical reason. It's just, it's the right thing to do. If we're going to treat people of different ages with equal respect and we're going to treat people of different races and

genders with equal respect, we should treat people with the same respect and dignity and equality regardless of their capabilities or their proclivities or sort of which way they lean. Having family members who kind of fall on different spots on the neurodiversity spectrum, it's just become a really interesting place for me to think about them in new ways since I started my journey learning about accessibility. So, for me, I kind of leave the statistics aside. Sometimes I call on them when I need to, but if we're having a frank conversation about it, people are all valuable. End of story.

[00:06:51]

Marty:

Just to piggyback on that a little bit, Mike, I remember when you first talked to me about this thing called digital accessibility and looking it up and feeling an immediate connection to it myself. It wasn't something that was on my radar in any way, right? With any sort of privilege, the web was the web. I would Google. I wouldn't even think about it as a tool or have any awareness towards what someone else might be going through as they access information. It was such a gift that you gave that to me because now, and we'll get to this a little bit later, but it is reshaped how I view many things, not just on the web. Because I am going to be there. I'm selfish. I know I am going to have vision issues and cognitive issues. It's going to affect all of us at some point or another so even from that like purely self-interested space, I'm like, oh man, we better get this right.

Mike:

Yeah, look, those are some of the classical responses and I think they're all really good, too. There's sort of two things I want to pull out of what you just said. One is, when I first encountered the concept that disabilities are not all permanent and that all of us, every one of us at some point, encounters a situational disability or a temporary disability, right? If we're all lucky enough to live to ripe old ages many of us, if not every single one of us, at some point, if you live long enough, you're gonna have some additional needs for access. I think it's really important to just recognize that it's the WHO's definition of a disability has changed over the years. In the 80s, it was a medical diagnosis and semi-permanent situation and now it's if you have trouble accessing a thing, you don't need a medical diagnosis to then also be considered disabled or need accessibility assistance to get to information. So, there's this paradigm shift that has occurred in many circles that hasn't permeated through all cultures and through all people, but like there's a huge shift and so I guess if you want me to get more theoretical about it or more academic about it, it's that the world is changing and if we all want to be part of that new world, don't resist the shift that's going on. That's sort of the one thing I want to point out. The second thing I want to tease out that you brought up was, you know, I talk why

anybody should care about accessibility, and that was really why should anyone care about people who need access, but there's also a different aspect to it which you brought up, which is digital accessibility. Specifically, digital accessibility being an expression of creating equal access, and so you know, where we've taken Tamman is yes, we want to build the inclusive web. Yes, we're working on that every day and we want to find willing partners that want to join in that conversation and in that work, but specifically we've chosen as a business to double down and focus on the digital accessibility aspect of essentially an inclusive world. So, I think there's a lot of reasons why people should care about digital accessibility as a subset of just overall access to information. We could have a whole other podcast about that. Maybe I'll save my answer for that one for another day. We could go to the next question.

[00:09:48]

Amanda:

As we're talking about including people, bringing people in, Mike, how did you get brought in to this world? How did your personal accessibility journey begin?

Mike:

I would love to say that I had some sort of epiphany or eureka moment that happened outside of work and that I knew a person or something happened to a family member and then I got involved. It isn't quite as glamorous as that. I had a client who came to me and said, hey, you know, part of our company is starting to explore digital accessibility in some of our other product lines because we don't normally deal with it there and do you know anything about that? I was like, well, I am a technologist. I've been an IT guy. I've done software programming, but I haven't really encountered digital accessibility, maybe heard the terms but never really had to engage with it and it piqued my curiosity. I started looking into it. This is really a thing. One, it's not new. What rock have I been living under all this time? This is about five, six years ago. The more I started to dig and I started to uncover more information and more people, this really resonated with me on an emotional level and on a values level. My morals and my ethics kicked in. I want to be a part of this movement. I had no reason to. Again, like Marty mentioned, through his privilege sometimes you don't know that you're not part of a thing and suddenly when I pulled that privilege away and I started to see other peoples' situations in a totally different light or from a different perspective, I kind of got hooked. I then couldn't consume enough of like what does it mean? I went through this journey of like first I had this mindset shift that occurred, so then I built up some skills, but once I got a certain level of the skills it made me more aware and it allowed me to expand my mindset even further. I was able to sort of broaden my mindset more, which then showed me more of what I didn't know. Then, I went and built more

skills around that and I've been on this progressive ladder climb for years now and it's never ending. It's a joy and it has really shaped more than just the direction of Tamman. It has shaped me.

Amanda:

How long ago did this initial mindset change happen for you? Like what were you at Tamman? Had you had founded Tamman at that point and, in general, what were like the first steps for Tamman turning toward accessibility?

[00:12:01]

Mike:

Jeff [ph], my business partner, and I started Tamman about 14 years ago, so we definitely had been running Tamman for many years. This was about five, six, seven years ago. I forget exactly the year that I started exploring it. It didn't happen all at once, but I remember that that first year was sort of this explosive growth period for me as an individual and, of course, in a small business often times the businesses become expressions of their owners and so the more I got into this and the more it became this like passion project of mine, the more it integrated itself with everything we do at Tamman. It didn't happen immediately and certainly we were not building 100 percent accessible websites that first year. We were doing what we thought was pretty well and then every year since then I realize there's a lot more we could be doing, so we keep raising our own bar. But yeah, it's only been like a five- or six-year journey for me. It has not been something that I've been doing my whole career and I'm in my mid-40s now, so you know, embarrassingly, can't believe it took me until I was almost 40 years old to discover this.

Marty:

But yet you're finding that other businesses are still discovering this. I mean, we're, I should say, finding that all the time, right?

Mike:

Yeah, sure.

Marty:

People are coming to this and the initial steps that you would give to any business to say, would you put them on that same mindset skillset ladder journey or would you –

Mike:

Oh, I see.

Marty:

Introduce them to it in a different way?

Mike:

It wasn't even until this past year that I even put together the vocabulary around the mindset skillset ladder and so I think it's really interesting that as long as I've been doing this, I still continue to think up or encounter new ideas or new ways to talk about it, but a week doesn't go by where I don't talk to a new business or some colleague out there in industry where maybe they've heard about digital accessibility, but they really don't know the first thing about it. That's not their fault. I don't really blame every body for that, right? But yeah, when I talk to anybody, I really have doubled down on this mindset skillset ladder concept, because it really does require a mindset to effectively employ a new skillset.

Marty:

Sure.

Mike:

I've watched a number of people out there in the industry, or maybe not in the industry – I guess people that aren't in the industry. They're outside of the industry. They're looking for our kinds of services, talking to them, where they want to jump right in to building skills. They want to essentially treat it like a checklist, like a thing they have to do. Oh, I'm sending this off to the printer. What are my specs? It's not really about that, right? Sure, you can get some of it that way and that may become a serviceable model for a little while, but there's also a point at which so much of making a good accessible design requires an awareness of the people you're trying to communicate with and if you don't first build the mindset, it's really hard to know how to implement the skillset. You know, I've also seen a number of people as they're starting this journey where adding all these new skills, if they don't start with a mindset shift first, the skills become this big burden. It becomes really hard. It's like all the work just becomes additive to what they're doing and they start to drown in it and if they just first started with a mindset shift. Maybe they don't change where they're starting from, but they change the direction where they're pointing and they start walking down that path, they realize it's actually no more steps to walk. It's the same length journey. You're just taking a different path. I think that's where the mindset coming before skillset and then ping ponging there, really has such a dramatic impact on peoples' adoption of new work styles.

[00:15:22]

Marty:

So, Mike, I'm going to kick off this last question in this segment to, sort of, all of us because I mentioned it earlier in the conversation that once you introduced it to me and once you sort of gave me, as your colleague, this mindset shift, I started reinterpreting the world around me with this accessibility mind shift. I'm going to shoot sort of the question over to you first and then Amanda. How are you reinterpreting the world around you because of digital accessibility and accessibility in the ADA, in general?

Mike:

It's probably not too different from the shift that I made when we started building web applications and websites that touch the public. I wasn't really in QA. I was in IT building data centers and configuring servers and doing tech support and when we started working on these front-end applications and these front-end websites, I became very attuned to looking for language and brand and fluidity and alignment and a lot of little things that probably could be diagnosed as OCD or anal retentive that are not diagnosed in me, but that I sure have just found a beautiful fertile ground to flourish. Once I started adopting these new principals around digital accessibility, I now see everything through that lens. Everything becomes a pattern recognition for me of I now see inaccessible patterns in every website that I visit, in every application that I use, and then it's gone beyond that. I have a beautiful luxury car that I drive that I spoiled myself with a few years ago and I get in it and I'm like, I love this car, but you know what? That radio interface is not particularly accessible. Then, I just can't help but start to extend it beyond digital accessibility and start looking at everything through a more inclusive lens, ya know? Even things in my house, like I'm having trouble opening this window. What happens if I ever injure my shoulder? How do people open windows if they have an injured shoulder? There isn't a thing that I can't interpret without understanding without how could I make this or how would one make this a more inclusive experience? It's kind of become a curse, but also a wonderful, delightful curse.

Marty:

Wonderful delightful blessing, yeah. Amanda, what about you?

Amanda:

So, I can totally relate to just like seeing it everywhere in every single website that I experience. Now I'm looking through that new lens of is this accessible? Is this not accessible? Oh, this website's really annoying. It's probably not accessible. Oh, man. I found myself putting on that hat of that person who is now commenting and putting in the chat, emailing them, giving them email feedback of hey, did you know that someone who is using a screen reader cannot make a purchase on your website? Ha ha. Like, do you need some help with that? I found myself like putting

on that hat of just like trying to be an advocate for these people who don't have access, but in turn it's not only helping people that have disabilities, whether they're temporary or permanent, but it's also like it's helping small businesses, as well. For me personally, I've worked with a lot of artists in the past and I have a lot of friends who are artists and it's not something that they consider when they are going to promote their work online. However, there's no ill intention there. They never set out to build something that couldn't be enjoyed by everyone so going back to Mike's mindset and skillset ladder, what I'm finding is a lot of people already have the mindset. It's just giving them that first basic set of tools and allowing them to build their skillset from there.

[00:19:01]

Marty:

I'm just going to echo both of you. I'm not going to belabor the thing, but once you give someone the vocabulary to think about something or the awareness to start to see something, you do have that pattern of recognition, Mike, and you see it everywhere. I know that that's been the case for me where I'm constantly seeing and experiencing things and wondering, well, how would someone who has a broken arm? How would someone who has this issue going on right now? How would they deal with this particular situation? That leads me to something that's very exciting, which is the fact that there is this Tamman accessibility initiative. There is this building of awareness. This idea that we can help other companies be able to make their digital properties, their web applications more accessible. I really want to know from the two of you because you're so involved in it every day. What are you most excited about when you think about our new initiative the Tamman accessibility initiative?

Mike:

I'm really excited about the education or the professional development of the people we connect with. I've always been drawn to education and, Marty, we've talked about this many times outside of the podcast space, that if I wasn't doing this I probably would be teaching somewhere.

Marty:

100 percent. You'd be a professor.

Mike:

I love to watch sort of the expansion of minds. Whenever we get to touch client's, figuratively of course, when we get to interact with them and I get to watch their professional development grow, their mindset grow, their skillset grow. That, to me, is the thing that gets me most excited and is the most rewarding, at least as

far as the day-to-day work goes.

Marty:

And Amanda, you are the heart and engine behind things happening with this. I know it's going to be really hard for you to pick one thing, but if you had to, what's the one thing that you're most excited about right now?

Amanda:

I had to think about this question for a while because it's a step back from being in the thick of it every day, but I actually have a pretty similar answer to Mike and that's just creating these learning opportunities for people in the business world and converting people to become digital accessibility advocates, empowering them with the tools they need. They might not stay at that company for the rest of their life, but hopefully they're able to be inspired and be empowered and then continue to spread that in the next places that they go. We always say we can't build the accessible web on our own and we always need advocates and partners with us. I think that's why I'm the most excited about educational aspect because we are helping to build the inclusive web.

[00:21:33]

Mike:

The visual I have in my head is the ripple in the pond. We're not the only ones creating ripples, but the more ripples you make, you end up having waves. You know? You end up reaching the far shores. I think that's where education, for me, is always the most interesting place to be. I love making stuff. I love building things. I love it when there's that satisfaction of you start an effort and then we finish that effort, but there is something that is potentially more durable kind of reward that is we taught somebody something, and they went out in the world and they taught others. They're making an impact and we helped effect that. That's the part that's so exciting.

Marty:

That's the thing for me. It's this podcast. I am so excited to bring on so many other perspectives and to hear from other people making ripples. That this audio format, I just think is really, really exciting in that education space. Let's jump to our final segment. Three questions that we are going to ask folks at the end of our conversations. So, Amanda, why don't you hit the first one there?

Amanda:

What is one personal accommodation that you make for yourself?

Mike:

For me, I'm not easily distracted, in general. I find that I can focus very well, but the one thing that can distract me beyond anything else is sounds, little sounds. I go to great lengths to make a quiet workspace for myself where I don't want to hear the whooshing of the air conditioning system. If there's the tiniest squeak, I have to oil it. I accommodate myself by creating a very silent workspace. When we were in the office, and we were doing the fit out and I was designing the space, I paid a lot of extra money and thankfully my partner was on board with this, to get soundproof glass and other things on the office windows. Like the front wall of each office is glass and it was floor to ceiling and we wanted it to be soundproof because I wanted to go into my office, close the door, and hear nothing. That is my personal accommodation.

Marty:

Hilarious because mine is the exact opposite in that I must have noises around me. I need that to focus. When we were in the office, I remember talking to you about this, Mike, and it was just like this how are we so compatible in so many ways and yet we are so completely different in this one really important thing? I have music on all the time. I have other little sounds and things that I make. What I've found is even when the music or other things aren't on, I make these little noises in my own mouth. I'll just be clicking along or doing some other tapping thing. I just have to have noise in my space.

[00:24:01]

Mike:

That's so funny.

Marty:

Amanda, so what about you? What's your personal accommodation?

Amanda:

I actually was thinking about the assistive tech that I use every day and I didn't really consider it assistive tech until I found that language here at Tamman, but I wear glasses. I have a really terrible, terrible prescription and that is my personal accommodation layered in with a lot of the flex app, which kind of like dims my screen so it doesn't hurt my eyes too much. It helps me stay focused all day.

Mike:

You would appreciate the lighting situation in my office.

Amanda:

It sounds like a dream. It sounds so cool. I have no windows in here and it drives me crazy sometimes.

Marty:

I'm curious because I work with both of you pretty closely. What's something that keeps you both up at night? Something about work that keeps you up at night?

Amanda:

What keeps me awake at night, I suppose, is when there just seems to be like an endless amount of stuff to get done. I feel like that's happened to me at every job whenever there's just like that long to-do list and I'm not sure if it's going to get done on time. That's when I stay up and worry a little bit.

Mike:

I thought you were going to say that what would keep you up would be the thought that you might wake up in the morning to an email from me or a Slack message from me that's asking for some enormous thing with tons of complexity and it's due by the end of the day.

Marty:

Nah. She's got that. No.

Mike:

That's great. The thing that keeps me up, and this is not related to digital accessibility at all, but it is related to being a small business owner and there's something about being a small business owner that is really different than I think working in a bigger company with more supports and or more protocols and regulations, is that I really do feel like every member of the company is family or at least as close as you can get to having family members that aren't in your family. Not that I sit around worrying about everybody, but what does keep me up, when I do have trouble falling asleep which is very rare, but it's always around something thinking about, am I supporting the staff well enough? Am I creating an environment where people want to work and where they feel like they can bring their best selves to the office every day? That is the thing I think that I probably spend more time thinking about at the end of the work day than anything else.

Marty:

I think for me, Mike, certainly I think you and Jeff, your partner at Tamman, have created a space that is so inclusive in and of itself, which dovetails nicely into the work that we do, but that it's really created a wonderful space for the people. Being the Chief of Staff, I feel particular responsibility for making sure that folks have everything that they need to be successful. That's the thing that really keeps me

up. I know that we can handle most business things, but it's going to be that personal situation that crosses my desk. Those are the ones that stay with you, stay with me, anyway, much more than the business problems because those are opportunities that have solutions. I have a team of people that I know I get to work with on that, but it's when I know that somebody's going through something that might take them away from their work and it's serious and all that and wanting to make sure we're supporting them in the way that we do is really, really important. The final question here is, that we'll ask of everyone, is what is one recommendation for a game, book, movie, or TV show right now? I'm going to kick that one off. There's so many. There's so many great recommendations that could be out there, but for me, I have just finished a book series by the author Simon Scarrow who traces these two Roman legionaries, actually centurions, all the way through a whole series of their travails. It is the most escapism, wonderful, historical fiction reading. I just can't thank Mr. Scarrow enough for writing it because he has given me this gift where every night I'm reading about Macro and Cato and just, I'm in ancient Rome and I'm so happy. That is my recommendation for all of you. It's the Eagle series, Under the Eagle series, is what it's called and it's really, really great. If you're into Rome, if you're into history, and it's so easy and so delightful. It's like candy. What about you, Michael? What's your recommendation today?

[00:28:11]

Mike:

It's my newest game. It was part of a Christmas present from my six-year-old son and it's called Tokyo Clash and basically up to four players act as Kaiju on the gameboard and try to battle to see who's the king of the Kaiju. It is fantastic. It's got Godzilla, Mothra. Do I need to go any further?

Marty:

No.

Mike:

It's got King Ghidorah. All I hope is that enough people buy more copies of it so that the makers build an expansion because I want more Kaiju.

Marty:

That sounds so much fun and I can't wait to play it with you at some point. How about you, Amanda?

Amanda:

Brian and I have a, you guys know that we've been immersed in the Expanse series

and books for ever, but now we're coming up on the end of the Expanse book series and I just, it's still a solid recommendation from me. We're on book number eight out of nine. The ninth book comes out. It's the fifth season of the TV series just ended as well, and a lot of people are looking for that, kind of like escape from the reality of COVID life and I love sci fi and I think it's the perfect escape for me right now.

Marty:

Well, guys, thank you so much. I appreciate both of you so much every day, but definitely for sharing your thoughts today, Mike. I really, really appreciate it. This is great. I am, as I said, very excited about this podcast. I really want to keep doing it again and again and again, so let's keep the conversation going. Shall we?

Mike:

Here here. Thank you, Marty, for hosting. Thank you, Amanda, for helping lead a lot of this conversation.