

## Article 19, Episode 12 – Individuality and Accessibility (Part I)

Female:

Expression is one of the most powerful tools we have. A voice. A pen. A keyboard.

Female:

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 gives them dignity.

Female:

Article 19 is the voice in the room.

Marty:

Hi, Article 19 listeners. My name is Marty Malloy, Chief of Staff and Catalyst and one of the hosts of our podcast. The episode you're about to hear is a little bit different than our previous episodes, in that it's going to be our first double episode with the same guests. Just like your favorite sitcom from back in the day, when they flashed that "To be continued" on the screen. Well, we're gonna do the same thing here. The reason for this is because our conversation with our three guests, Miso Quak [ph] who is a Disabilities Policy Expert driven by a passion for social justice, Nate Stoffer [ph], a middle school educator and advocate with a focus on gender and sexual minorities, and Jason Brilliant [ph], a Senior Software Engineer with a focus in React and Java, they were all just too good to stop at one episode. Bringing together Harvard educated, wickedly smart 20-somethings to discuss the intersection of education, accessibility, technology, and identity, it's frankly amazing we were able to keep it to two episodes. Before we begin, one quick fake fact about Miso, Nate, and Jason. When they're not focused on their day jobs, they're working on a Broadway musical salute to the classic game shows called, "Double Dare That Whammy". It's a working title. Anyway, thanks for joining us. Let's get this first part of the conversation started. I'd like to formally bring in our guests. Nate, Jason, Miso, welcome, friends. I am really curious. How are you all feeling today? Nate and Jason, why don't you kick us off?

Nate:

I think we're feeling good. We had a lovely Fourth of July weekend and we're enjoying a nice summer where we can be outside after a long time stuck indoors.

Miso:

This is Miso, I'm doing well. Good, busy work day. I'm happy to be here.

Marty:

We like to start off with kind of an easy question. Roll into our podcast on Article 19. What is your favorite summertime activity? Nate, why don't you go first?

Nate:

Sure. I think nothing's better than a good old summer barbecue. Enjoy me some burgers and dogs and slaw and chips and all the fixin's.

Marty:

Jason, how about you?

Jason:

I am a vegan, more or less, so my answer is going to be pretty different than Nate's, but over the course of quarantine and the pandemic, I became really interested in plants and I got over 30 plants in the past year. I think this summer is a really exciting time for a lot of my plants, because they have been growing very quickly, and I have been having a really good relationship with them and watching them grow into bigger plants. For me, that's the highlight.

Marty:

I think you and Amanda could start a horticulture podcast after this one, if you'd like to. Miso, what about you? Do you have a favorite summertime activity?

[00:03:03]

Miso:

I really enjoy just sitting by the pool with friends and family or being by the ocean and listening to the ocean and enjoying the summer vibe and weather.

Marty:

That sounds perfect. Michael, Amanda, we can't not have your ideas here.

Michael:

Sure. Get me out on the water. Sailing. Put me in a sailboat or a powerboat. If it's a boat, I'm on it.

Amanda:

My favorite summertime activity is going camping and hiking and just taking it easy. No plans and just walking out in nature.

Marty:

Fire, s'mores, it doesn't get any better than that. Plants with Jason, there's a whole thing there. For me, I'm going to be much like Mr. Mangos [ph] on this one, except not on a boat. I love to be in the water, and I love to just have the waves crashing on me. Specifically, ocean or bay water, not a pool. I am much more into the

nature side of things. Love that. We brought you guys and gals here, Miso, Nate, and Jason, to really get into a broader conversation around social identities and inclusivity. The cross-section between cultural touchpoints, etcetera. But before that, I really want to just give the audience a chance to get to know all three of you a little bit better. I'd like to start with you, Miso. Can you tell listeners a little bit about yourself?

Miso:

I identify as a 1.5 generation Korean-American blind woman, and I can just quickly unpack that. I was born in South Korea, and my family came to the United States when I was 13, so I was young enough to really be able to be integrated to American ways of life, but I was also old enough to really understand what it was like to be living in Korea and I have strong pride in my Korean identity and background. For people like me who come to this country with their family in their youth, the terminology is 1.5 generation immigrants. So, that part of my identity. And I identify as a blind person, because I've been blind since birth. For me, disability is something that I cannot separate from my life. I, frankly, cannot imagine my life without being a disabled person and being a blind person at this point, so that's just important part of who I am. I am [inaudible 00:05:20] woman, so hence, I say I am a woman. [inaudible 00:05:24] that's just briefly about who I am, and I work in the field of disability policy. Specifically, I am part of a national project that aims to promote and advance person-centered practices and supports for people with various disabilities and older adults who use long-term services and supports. That's kind of my main line of work. my background before doing this work is in education policy. I've always played music as I was growing up, so I've taught music before, as well. That's a brief snapshot of who I am.

[00:06:02]

Marty:

I'll key it up to you, Nate. Follow that.

Nate:

Sure thing. I was going to say, Miso is a true renaissance woman. That is a hard act to follow. My pathway to classroom teaching started in my undergraduate years. I went to the University of Pennsylvania, student taught in west Philadelphia, and quickly became aware of my own privileges as an able-bodied, white, cisgender American male, Ivy League educated teacher teaching in schools that were super underfunded and where truly none of my students reflected my own identity groups. That led me to want to kind of burst out of my bubble after college, so I was fortunate to win a fall break grant to go to Malaysia and teach for a year. And while that continued to enlighten me to the many ways in which my identities privileged me, it also, curiously enough, taught me a little bit again about what it feels like to face oppression, as well, because I also identify as a gay man. And

Malaysia is a country where homosexuality is illegal and not accepted, so I had to go back into the closet, what Kenji Yoshino calls "Covering". I highly recommend his book if you haven't read it. And that process of sort of going back into the headspace of not being able to be open about one of my identities helped me realize how important it really is to have inclusion in all settings. So, coming back, I dedicated myself to a career working in making schools more inclusive along the lines of, particularly, social identities. I went to the Harvard Grad School of Education with Miso, actually, where we did some DEI work together, and I try to continue that work at my current school, as well.

Marty:

Jason, bringing up the technology side of things, I'd love to hear a little bit more about your background and if you could orient listeners to who you are.

Jason:

For sure. So, I'm Jason. I am a software engineer working in the Boston area, which is where I met Nate. Nate and I are dating. And yeah, I've been an engineer for a travel company for the past five or six years, ever since I graduated. I really like traveling in my free time, so that was something that I wanted to work on. I think when I started working as an Engineer, I was more of a full stack role, I would say. Right now, I work more oriented towards the front end, so things that the user sees on the page, some of that being accessibility. I obviously studied software engineering in college. The other thing that I studied was literature, so something I'm really passionate about is keeping up on my reading. I like to read a lot of books and I run book clubs at work. Specifically, I try to read books that are exclusively by marginalized communities, just to get better perspectives on the world from people that you don't often hear from. So, yeah, when at work, I think I'm pretty active in forming a lot of the ERGs that are at work, Employee Resource Groups, and planning events for that, so trying to keep that alive at work.

[00:08:45]

Marty:

That is fantastic. We're going to dig in a little bit more there later in the conversation, I know, but I want to kind of get things started with technology inclusion. Obviously, here at Article 19, and at Tamman, we are very interested in inclusion in all of its forms, but certainly that starts a little bit with technology. So, I'll shoot this question to you, Miso. As a blind woman, are there any tips, tricks, tools, things that you do when you first go to a website to ensure that the information there is going to be accessible by you and it won't be a complete waste of time? What's your process as you're approaching a website for the first time?

Miso:

So, for those who don't know how earth a blind person accesses the internet and just computer in general, I use a software that reads out the screen, so those are generally called screen readers. There are a couple different brands that within the screen reader, and I do not use a mouse. All of the computer usage that I deal with is all done on keyboards. Having said that, when I go on a website, there are a couple red flags, I will say, to answer your question, Marty. If there are just so many graphics or links or buttons without any labels, that's kind of a no-no. For example, it will just literally say, "Button, button, graphic, graphic." Or it will just read a string of numbers and letters that really don't make any sense. If a site is full of those kind of things, I generally don't feel inclined to use that site. I think it's becoming less and less, but still; I sometimes encounter websites where it seems pretty impossible to navigate using a keyboard only. It's pretty apparent that- the website is up, and people are using it, because I know that people are- people have told me that they use it, but there is really nothing that I can click to enter in order to activate something. That is not really good sign for me, to be spending time in that website. Yeah, so those are kind of, I'll say, dealbreakers. Does that answer your question?

Marty:

Oh, absolutely. Yeah, that was fantastic. Jason, as the developer on the panel here, I know that you're not primarily focused on accessibility in your day job, but what are some of the things that you look for as you're building inclusion into the sites that you work on?

[00:11:13]

Jason:

I think that Miso touched on some of it, and I'll end up repeating it, but some of the things, just on the initial impression of a page, would be things like the font size. Is that something that is readable for everybody, depending on their vision skills? Things like color contrast of the background color against the font color, same kind of thing. Is that distinguishable enough for everybody to see? There's kinds of colors you're using, right? If you're using any red, green with a reason to use it, that could affect people that are colorblind. And then if you want to go a little bit more under the hood, then you're thinking about, how is the code structured on the page? In terms of the html, is it written in a way that makes sense? Are there heading tags where there should be heading tags? Do you have- list items, like bullet points that are properly tagged as such? And then things like Miso mentioned. So, having labels on things that need to have labels so that people know what they are. Can you access and tab through the site with a keyboard? If you turn on a screen reader, like Chromebox or something, which is a Chrome extension, and it goes through the page, will it tell you what all of the things are in a way that is good enough to use the site? If you use something like Wave, which is kind of like another Chrome extension that'll scrape the page and let you know

what's wrong with it. And those could be the things that I mentioned, like color contrast, or you have really bad html markup. Stuff like that. When I'm working on things, those are generally the things that I look for, and the things that I think about. But a lot of them are already taken care of for you in some of the newer frameworks that are built, which is nice. So, if you're using something like React or Angular or if you're using a linter that looks at the code that you're writing, it'll tell you, "Hey, you have an image here, and it doesn't have a label for the image, so somebody that can't see it won't know what it is. You need to fix this." That's kind of what I do on my day-to-day.

Michael:

I mean, there's a lot we do at Tamman. We build for the [audio cuts out] and we build accessible applications and kiosks and all kinds of accessible experiences. And so, you're speaking my language already, Jason. I've said this in past podcasts. I'm just going to double down on this for a second that headings and heading structure, to me, are kind of the number one thing. Now, Miso may disagree with me from an importance perspective, and that's totally fine. I can take my lumps if I got it wrong, but I would say that having both employed and worked with designers, developers, QA testers, without good semantic structure for any experience, starting at the design phase with a content development phase, kind of the rest of it becomes almost impossible to succeed at later. Not that it's the lynch pin that makes everything else work, but that it's the thing that will scuttle the success of accessibility, because it kind of indicates a lack of planning and thinking that is really necessary to succeed at this business. I just want to kind of throw that out there and see if anybody has a reaction to that.

Miso:

This is Miso speaking. I agree with you. I think it's really important that, from the beginning, that accessibility is thought about. I think a lot of problems that we're running into, just speaking for many disabled folks, is that, it's always reactive, meaning, "Oh, wait. Yeah. We should really thought about that" but people kind of just wait until somebody tells them, "Hey, I can't use this for X, Y, Z reasons." But if we build things, whether that is a website or any product, or even something like making transportation, roads, all sorts of things, I think it's really important to think about accessibility and inclusion from the very beginning, and that will honestly save a lot of time and probably money, as well.

Marty:

Amanda, let me bring you in for a minute.

[00:14:50]

Amanda:

Thanks, Marty. And Miso, those are great questions and great answers. I am curious. From an educator's standpoint, is there something that you're looking for that's not necessarily on the back end within the code, but is there something content-wise that you're looking for as an educator? So, this would be for Nate or Miso to answer.

Nate:

Miso, I'm going to jump in here real quick. So, I look for a number of things. I think- I'm excited that we're having this conversation on the heels of a remote learning year, right? Because I've thought about educational technology more this past year than I have in the entirety of my career prior to that. Granted, I'm still a very young educator, but things that kind of came up early in the year- first of all, I think there's an assumption that a lot of adults make that, "Oh, kids are growing up with technology, so they inherently know how to use it." And that's not necessarily true. I think we all know that that's not true, because we've all had a moment of picking up a new piece of technology and having to teach it to ourselves. So, as a teacher, the first thing I have to think is, "Well, how easy is it going to be for me to scaffold this platform for my kids?" Right? Because I don't want to eat up a whole lot of class time to go through all the different parts of a website with the students. It needs to be pretty intuitive for them, so I can introduce the page or the app to them, and then sort of set them free to work independently. Second thing is, are all students able to navigate the platform relatively independently? Right? We have student support teachers who work with students with disabilities to make sure they can access things. But buying large, we want to make sure that if we're buying a new platform to use at our school, it's something that everyone is going to be able to make use of, not just a select few students. And then the third thing- well, it's two pieces, but they kind of go hand in hand. The first one would be just maximal customization for me, as an educator, to make sure I can put in as much of whatever the content is that I'm working on with my students into the platform as possible, and secondly, tied to that is, responsive feedback. There's one of me, and 30 kids in front of me. I only get 30 seconds with each kid as I pop around the room to help them with certain problems. I need to know that the platform that I'm using has systems built in to ensure that my students are going to still be receiving feedback from the platform when I'm not right in front of them doing it with them. Those are things I tend to look for in tech inclusion, but I'd love to hear if Miso has any other ideas, as well.

Miso:

Yeah, I think Nate has some really excellent points, especially from a teacher's perspective having taught through this pandemic year. What I'll touch on is, I think, from more business perspective. And of somebody who has navigated the educational system as a student with a disability. My entire educational experience, right? One- if to [inaudible 00:17:37] briefly, if you're listening to this and if you work in an educational setting, whether that is K-12, higher education, or

something else, and if you're in a position to make decisions about purchasing certain piece of technology or software, please just make sure, before you purchase that piece of technology, that it meets the accessibility standards, it is user-friendly. I think a lot of institutions make a mistake of purchasing whatever they think is good. Whatever that good means for them, and then realizing that, again, it goes back to the importance of being proactive, right? And yeah, so a lot of institutions make a mistake of purchasing something for everyone to access, and then realize in real life that not everyone can access the technology. And I think that creates a lot of problem that could have been prevented.

[00:18:30]

Michael:

So, great answers, by the way, so far. I'm really- you got me sort of turning over some things in my head. I think- I have a response to something you said, just to affirm it, that your students need to also be able to figure out this technology. It's not just obvious to them because they grew up with it in air quotes, which you can't see me putting on the podcast. But this idea that- we talk about digital accessibility as being sort of a part of user experience design, or some people think of it as an add-on, but honestly, if you start with good user experience design, it is inclusive of digital accessibility, as well. And when I think about the very young, it's kind of not too different from being the very old. Or someone who might be classified with a cognitive disability, not that young children are disabled, they just haven't learned stuff yet. They haven't had enough life experience yet. Not different from forgetting life experience. And I think just the idea of creating good, usable solutions that anybody can use and figure out is really sort of the goal, and sort of- I kind of would love to see a lot of people in my business, or in the technology business, stop putting accessibility as a check-box thing, and rather saying, "Good UX is just more important than anything else." And you can't be exclusive of people that don't look and sound just like you as a middle-aged, wealthy web developer. Do you know what I mean? Nate, I know you want to say something.

Nate:

Yeah, I just wanted to snowball off that, and make sure that we also bring in class, like socioeconomic status as part of this conversation, right? Because particularly for forms of technology that might be used by folks who are seeking jobs for the first time who are unemployed or who may have a lot of children that they're taking care of at home and don't have a lot of time to spend on the internet, right? Or don't have a super up-to-date iPhone to access the website from. I think we need to be thinking about how to make sure that the content is reaching the margins, right? Build for the margins and then kind of work your way in from there. And thinking about that not only from the lens of ability, but also from the lens of class, and how technology and class interplay with each other.

[00:20:39]

Michael:

Yeah. I have a couple of follow-up questions, if I may, related to this, because I think- our goal tonight is to talk about identity and individuality and pronouns at some point, but I think I sort of been on digital accessibility, there's a few things that, with the three of you as an interesting guest group, I'd love to get your take on a couple things. One is, I've heard the argument that building for accessibility, there's a lot of money in that, or there could be money. There's a lot of spending going on. And Miso, I've heard you talk about you would prefer to use websites or you're more likely to stick with an experience that is accessible to you, rather than muddling through an experience from a manufacturer or a distributor, or a company that you can't really get to their product easily. But I'm kind of curious. Are any of the three of you more likely to spend your money with companies that acknowledge your identity? It could be by building an accessible website. It could be by marketing the support for pride movements. It could be around creating gender identity normalization through their language in their site. Are you more likely to spend your money there? Or are you likely to buy the things you were going to buy anyway, you're just happier when they acknowledge your identity?

Nate:

I would defer to Miso on this question as a white man, personally, but I will also throw in real quick that I haven't had a Chick-fil-A milkshake in three years, for whatever that's worth.

Miso:

Absolutely. So, two quick example. One negative example is that there was a lawsuit in which a blind man sued Domino's Pizza because their online ordering wasn't accessible and it went to the Supreme Court, because Domino was ADA, which is Americans with Disabilities Act, does not apply to digital spaces. And, thankfully, a Supreme Court denied hearing that case, so that- the ruling that said that Domino needs to fix the website and compensate the plaintiff, that rule stood. But if somebody offers me a Domino pizza, I'm not going to be rude and deny that, but I am never ordering from Domino's with my own money at own will ever again until their website gets fixed and their company apologizes or something. A more positive example is, I was really, really excited when Senator Elizabeth Warren was running for President and she came out with buttons that had braille on it. And I don't buy anything political or anything like that. I don't have buying habits like that, but I was like, "Well, this is really special. No other public figure has acknowledged my existence to this degree." So, I immediately ordered her buttons and, honestly, I think I'll cherish that experience for a long time.

Marty:

That's a great example, Miso. Absolutely.

Michael:

Nate and Jason, before you jump in, I would like to ask Miso. Do you read braille?

Miso:

Yeah, absolutely. And if you give me 30 minutes to an hour, I'll tell you why braille is important, but for the sake of time, I will not do that. But yes, I do read braille, and I literally would not be here, having done what I've done so far without braille.

[00:23:46]

Michael:

That's interesting, because I read some statistics about the- for me, at least- the surprisingly small number of people that identify as blind that also read braille, and I just think that that's an interesting thing. Because I've encountered a lot of folks, as I'm teaching them about digital accessibility, you think, "Well, if we just put braille on that thing", whatever it is. Maybe it's signage or a credit card or whatever, that's somehow going to solve the blind concern, right? Like, "How do we serve the people that identify as blind well?" And I'm like, "I don't think that's actually going to solve your problem, because most blind people don't read braille, so you've got to come up with other solutions". Right? So, I just was curious about that. But then I want to get back to Nate.

Nate:

Yeah, so for myself, I guess, as a member of the queer community, I think that- I think that it depends, depending on how the company is- or brand or whatever, is engaging with the queer community. So, I don't usually get stuff from Chipotle, not because I have anything against Chipotle, but just because I don't usually eat Chipotle. But a transgender drag queen that I like was partnering with Chipotle where they made a special bowl that you could buy where the money would be going to an organization that supports the transgender community, and so I bought a bowl because of that. And I think that was because it looked like the money was going somewhere useful and it was not just like a performative action. And pride month recently ended, and I was walking home the other day, and I passed a store that had a bunch of rainbows outside and had a bunch of rainbow merchandise inside. And I went inside to look at it, just out of curiosity, and it was like, you could get this shoe that has rainbow shoelaces for 110 dollars. And I don't really know why anyone would do that. Or, at least, I, personally, wouldn't do that. I don't think that that money is really going anywhere useful. And it's kind of just, in my opinion, using a given community for the purposes of getting money out of them. So, more of a performative marketing and less of actually doing anything positive. Rainbow-washing is what Amanda wrote, and I totally agree with that, yeah.

Marty:

That's excellent. Absolutely. Before I leave education and technology and inclusion in the space that we are in, I want to bring Nate back in for a minute. Nate, I've heard you speak about ESSA, E-S-S-A, the Every Student Succeeds Act, before. And I'd really like for you to talk for a second about equal opportunity inclusion look- how does that look in your classroom? And what does that mean to you from an educational standpoint?

[00:26:06]

Nate:

Thanks for asking that. I think the public writ large has some understanding of the fact that schools have to cater our content to make sure it is accessible by all of our students, right? We are legally held in the public school system to make sure that all students can access all content at all times in some way. So, what that often looks like is individualized education plans or 504 plans as well with our student square. We work with the student and their family and our student support teacher team to co-create a set of accommodations that we think are going to best support each individual student, and we do that on an annual basis. So, that's always evolving, and each year, the next educator who will teach that student or educators who will teach that student will read that plan, agree to it, and will be evaluated throughout the year on how well we are maintaining those accommodations that we've set in place for those students. I think what's not thought about as much, and where I find there to be a lot more juice in this conversation is, outside the content delivery piece of instruction, because that's such a small part of what school really is, more into the relationship building piece of it. So, there are certain ways that most public schools in this country operate. Particularly, along the lines of discipline that have been upheld for centuries now, and that often take a sort of punitive approach that have led to school cultures being increasingly toxic for certain communities and we see it in the rates of suspension across our country. If you've ever read the new Jim Crow by Michelle Alexander, or any number of really great series of essays or books that talk about the school to prison pipeline, you have some understanding of how particularly black and brown students face higher rates of discipline in our country than their white peers. And a lot of that has to do, actually, with inclusion, right? About just the cultural sensitivity and responsiveness of classrooms. The teaching workforce, being large, demographically, does not reflect the students that we teach. And the programs in which most teachers are trained are grounded in norms and values that originated in white supremacy culture. So, the series of values that have historically defined organizational leadership across the United States, because our country was founded by white European men. So, I have worked with my school to start to shift that dialogue in the direction of restorative justice, which means working directly with students, being constantly in conversation with them about what they want their education experience to look like and ways that I can better support them. So, of course I, as

the adult in the room, have to set certain standards for all the kids, and I ultimately am legally held to a certain set of expectations, both content-wise and also in terms of just my presence in the classroom, but I also want to make sure that I'm communicating with the kids, because I try to think of the kids in my classroom almost as my clients, right? I mean, education doesn't work in the way most other capitalist industries do in the sense of client negotiations, but at the end of the day, the kids are the consumers of what I'm offering. I offer a service every day, and the kids receive that service. And so, the kids ultimately need to have some level of autonomy in choosing what they're learning, what they're reading, and how I'm addressing them. If there's a way that I am conducting myself in the classroom that doesn't work for certain kids, it is my responsibility, as the educator, to find out what that is and how I can do it better. So, that's how I try to approach ESSA in my own personal pedagogy, but I think that's something that still needs to be scaled out to the education conversation at large.

[00:29:42]

Marty:

So, Miso, continuing in this education path for a minute. One thing that I heard Nate talk about, and I actually have heard throughout this conversation we've been having so far is, this idea of individuality and sort of an ability to customize, Nate was mentioning in one of the platform conversations, things like that, is from a scalability standpoint and building relationships on an individual basis, or building something individually for someone. That is resource heavy. That is really time consuming. Is that something, as we move as a society into a space of more individuality, is that something that we can really do on a broader scale, thinking about every single student as an individual and not in the sort of industrial complex that we have of, "You're going to be a factory worker, so we want you to be this cog in this wheel and learn these skills and just move on". We're really kind of in this interesting space. Miso, as an education policy person, as an educational equity advocate, what are your thoughts with- is this even feasible to go as relationship and individual based as Nate has just articulately pointed out?

Miso:

First of all, I'll acknowledge this is a hard question, so yeah. I just want to first acknowledge that this is a hard question, and I also want to point out that we cannot ignore the financial cost, as well as the time involved in making everything really accessible and inclusive. That said, I think what's really important is this kind of attitude and mindset that every student who walks into a classroom can learn. I think that's really important. I honestly think what's often hinders me, based on my personal experience, what hindered me more in school is teachers saying that, "Well, I don't know if you, as a blind person, can really get a lot out of my biology class, because what are you going to do when we are learning about microscope, for example." Right? But the point is not that I have to stare into the microscope

and be able to see what's under it, but that I have to understand what microscope does, what it looks like, which can be represented using something- whatever that you have on hand. So, for example, I was really lucky to have this biology teacher in high school who would use Playdoh to make something really quickly and then show it to me so that I can understand what she was drawing on the board. I don't think the solutions have to be always this high tech, high-cost things. But more of this attitude and your willingness to be creative and think outside of the box.

Marty:

Awesome. Mike, I want to bring you into the conversation for a second, because as Miso was talking, it reminded me of something that I've heard you talk a lot about, and I think you were starting to go there with the cost question you had asked previously. Can you talk a little bit more about that?

[00:32:34]

Michael:

The first question I asked earlier was around, "Would you spend your money there?" Helping make the revenue argument, or the profit argument for businesses of why they should pursue accessibility or inclusion. I think it's a really tough one, because this kind of affects schools, it affects sort of all spending, right? Where does money get diverted? One of the things that I think was an interesting outcome from this user experience movement, where Apple really helped usher in a different concept for design. Once Apple's iPhone platform took off, a lot of companies wanted to emulate them and said, "Well, we want to build products that engage with customers or that engage with users." But then, everybody quickly was like, "Well, I don't need to get everybody on board. I just need to get a small number of loyal users or loyal constituents or loyal students on board with what I want to do." And yet, the whole concept was really exclusionary at its premise, right? That, "We want to make a piece of software that reaches this five percent of the population, and sort of forget everybody else." And I think so much momentum got built up in that vein. Like, "I'm not building for everybody. I'm building for the five percent of people that want to buy my thing." That we're seeing sort of a complete paradigm reversal here around, we want to design and build things for everybody, but that's not always practical or possible, given time and money. And so, where should companies send their money? And I think a lot of businesses, at least as I've found talking to business owners or leaders of divisions of big companies, it's not always an easy choice between serving everyone but doing a lot less for all people, or doing a lot for a small number of people. It's just not all going to happen. And I don't know that translates exactly into education. A couple of them, I'm using guests here, who can probably talk more about how those decisions get made or what sort of impacts you've seen from those decisions, but I know that in business, it's a hard argument to win. And I feel like where I try to guide people when they're willing to listen to me blather on about it is, going for accessibility, or going for

inclusion and for universal design isn't really about the money it's going to bring. It's a moral argument. We have to want to do it, because it's the right thing to do. Not because it's going to be more profitable, right? And until we, as a society, or at least a critical mass of people with influence decide that it's worth doing, it's probably not going to take off. It needs people that care. And kind of like nothing more. That's where resources will get diverted. Sort of profits be damned. It's maybe not the most capitalistic thing to say, but it is exactly what we need for government. It's exactly what we need for education. It's exactly what we need for commerce. I'll kind of stop there and see if anybody wants to glom on or refute me.

Amanda:

I don't have anything to refute you, I'm just seeing this really interesting crossover between the educational experience that Nate and Miso have had, and the tech world experience that Jason, you, Marty and I all have where the crossover being the people who are creating the product are not always the end user. And at Tamman, we always try to create empathy by sharing user personas and stories when we're teaching and educating. And so, I'm wondering, as educators, on your end, are there any techniques or tools that you use when you're educating stakeholders or trying to get people, air quotes, on board?

[00:35:57]

Miso:

This is Miso. I think, honestly, as not super clear cut, like clear solution as it may sound, I think the most kind of practical way to convince others on accessibility and inclusion has been just keep showing up and doing what I can. I think that's more of a persistence that has been really helpful. And, obviously, it doesn't always work, and in those cases, I have to kind of fold my case and move on to better fights. But I think, as somebody who's been doing advocacy work for a long time, mostly because of necessity, persistence and my willingness to keep going and then bringing in to people to my world has been honestly pretty [inaudible 00:36:47].

Nate:

Yeah, I would totally second Miso, and I would just add in that communication is key and that it should be the first step. I think a lot of times, at least in other industries, the thought is, you work on something, and then once you've worked on it for a sufficient period of time, you turn to someone else and you share what you've been working on. And in education, it's completely the other way around. Where, I would much rather my student finds me incredibly annoying, because I'm constantly over their shoulder being like, "Hey, is this working?" Then I would just assume it's working for them until I get the test scores back, right? So, front loading that work of being in communication and catching myself whenever I notice I'm making an assumption that something I'm doing is working, if I see a kid's head down or see them start to drift off, finding a new way to hook them back in.

So, it's just constant awareness. It definitely is resource intensive and energy intensive, as working in a social field. But, for me, that's why I chose this profession, so it's all worth it.

Marty:

Or, the profession chose you, Nate. Because you have both of those things in abundance, for sure. So, that's great. Yeah, Mike?

Michael:

Jason, I want to make sure we bring you back into the conversation. I'm really curious, not to bely any current or past employers, but in your experience as a developer, have you found that companies are committed to some of these things? Either inclusion and/or digital accessibility for its moral reasons? Or for compliance reasons? Or for profit reasons? Do you have any kind of perspective on that or experience there?

[00:38:14]

Jason:

Yeah. I'll take those separately, I guess. In terms of the digital accessibility piece, I think that a lot of companies, whether they're small startups or large companies, the big ones, I think that they- maybe less so now, but definitely a couple of years ago, were particularly reactive, like Miso has mentioned, in terms of doing accessibility work and some of them still might be reactive today. And even if they're not reactive where somebody brings them an issue and says, "This doesn't work." Accessibility might still be something that's brought in later on after something's already been developed and then after you develop it, you might add accessibility into it, which is never really great in my opinion, because, typically, in those cases, you might work on something and maybe ship it out or something and then move on to something else, and then you might go back and realize, "Oh, this doesn't have all the accessibility it needs, but now I'm probably going to be spending twice as long or three times as long on it, because it's been a while since I worked on this" or "I have to kind of shoehorn it into something that doesn't already have it, but if I had started at the beginning with accessibility while I was actually coding this, then it wouldn't take me even half as long, because I wouldn't have to try to figure out how to work it in. It would have already just been there from the beginning."

[00:39:29]

Michael:

Have you seen commitment from employers in the past building in inclusive design and/or digital accessibility for moral reasons, compliance reasons, or profit reasons?

Jason:

Yeah, I've only worked at one company, and I guess in terms of inclusivity, I think that that's something that we have started doing in the past couple of years for more moral reasons, I would say. We started creating Employee Resource Groups and other sort of educational events and opportunities for people at the company to learn about different identities and different backgrounds. And that was not something that we did because it was required of us, and it's not something that we did because it makes it look good, because it's not something we really outwardly publicized to the world. So, I think it was just really something that we wanted to do internally. Some of the more recent ones were definitely spurred by the just recent direction that society is heading in in general. In my opinion, I think, in general, a lot of companies are doing things for more moral reasons, just because that's kind of where the world is heading.

Marty:

I am curious, Jason, though, and Nate, then I want to get you in, were those employee groups, was that from the ground up, or was that from the top down?

[00:40:39]

Jason:

I actually started mine. So, that was- at least in my case, the ground up. Me and a couple of my friends at the company, this was probably in 2017, we went to an event together that was called like, "Out in Tech" it's a third-party company that hosts events in different areas around the country for people who are out in the field of tech. And afterwards, we got back, and I made a group chat on Slack, or it might have been pre-Slack. It might have been something earlier than that, but I made a group chat with them, and I was like, "Hey, I had a great time yesterday. It was cool seeing you all." And then we turned that from a private group chat into a public group chat, and we came up with a name for it, and then that kind of became a more formalized actual Employee Resource Group that got funding. And that was probably one of the earlier ones that we had, at least at my company. But I think definitely from the ground up.

Marty:

That's great. I think that's going to be the thing that makes it a lot more long-lasting, outlast you, even though you started it, and more. Nate, you wanted to jump in here.

Nate:

Yeah, I just wanted to jump in real quick to put in a second plug for the book Covering by Kenji Yoshino. I dropped it in the middle of a sentence earlier on, but the book gets at the heart of Mike's question. Dr. Yoshino, his work is in researching the financial impacts of exclusionary practices in Fortune 500

companies, and so, he has worked on figuring out how to quantify the net losses that companies face by not creating corporate cultures in which people feel that they can bring their full selves into their work. Because there's a real and very large impact if you actually dig in and can create a strong data set from all that. So, I think, Mike, this would be good beach reading for you. It's not light, but it is helpful and certainly informative.

Michael:

Thanks. I don't need light. I just want good.

Female:

If you like what you heard today, and want to explore more about digital accessibility, inclusivity, or to schedule a time to talk with us, you can find the whole Tamman team at [tammaninc.com](http://tammaninc.com). That's T-A-M-M-A-N-I-N-C dot com. Or, follow us on social media @tammaninc on LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram, or Facebook. We'll talk to you again next time.