

URL: <https://ecorner.stanford.edu/videos/innovating-accessibly-entire-talk/>

Jenny Lay-Flurrie is chief accessibility officer at Microsoft. Her team is at the forefront of creating positive experiences that apply technology to make a difference in the world and in the lives of individuals, from how Microsoft hires and supports people with disabilities in employment to innovative technology that aims to revolutionize what's possible for people with disabilities. In this conversation with Stanford adjunct lecturer Ravi Belani, Lay-Flurrie discusses the importance of strategically approaching accessibility and purposefully including people with disabilities in employment and innovation.



## Transcript

Announcer Who you are 00:00:03,897 defines how you build.. (electronic synth music) - Welcome YouTube 00:00:09,180 and the Stanford communities, to the "Stanford Entrepreneurial Thought Leaders" 2022 season.. It is so great to have you back.. I am Ravi Belani, a lecturer in the Management Science and Engineering Department at Stanford, and a Director at Alchemist and Accelerator for Enterprise Startups.. And I'd like to welcome you to the new year of the "Entrepreneurial Thought Leaders" series presented by STVP, the Stanford Technology Ventures Program, which is now the Stanford Engineering Entrepreneurship Center, or SEEC, and BASES, the Business Association of Stanford Entrepreneurial Students.. Before I introduce our speaker today, first off, let me say that today's ETL is the brainchild of MS&E lecturer, Bruce Cahan.. Bruce has long been advocating for the department to shed more light on the intersection of disability and entrepreneurship.. And so while I'm here facilitating this fireside chat, don't confuse the megaphone for the muscle.. This has really been the work, the result of Bruce's hard work that he's been championing for a while.. And I would say, that Bruce and myself could not be more pleased to kick off the 2022, 2023, ETL Series than to have Jenny Lay-Flurrie as our kickoff keynote fireside chat..

Jenny Lay-Flurrie is Microsoft's Chief Accessibility Officer, and as Microsoft's Chief Accessibility Officer, Jenny is leading the company's efforts to drive great products, services, and websites, that empower people and organizations to achieve more.. One in seven people, one in seven people in the world, over a billion people have a disability.. And for 70% of those people, the disability is not apparent.. That means, even in our Stanford class, if our Stanford class mirrors the world's statistics, there's over 75 students in this class that have a disability, and you may not even know about it.. Jenny's team is at the forefront of creating positive experiences that apply technology to make a difference in the world, and the lives of individuals.. From how Microsoft hires, and supports people with disabilities and employment, to innovative technology that aims to revolutionize what's possible for people with disabilities.. Jenny hails from Birmingham, England, famed for Ozzy Osbourne.. She has a sister who is congenitally deaf, and a child on the autism spectrum.. Jenny had hearing loss as a result of childhood measles, that worsened with multiple ear infections, and is now clinically deaf.. In fact, on the deafness spectrum, Jenny is classified as profound and severely deaf, meaning that she can't hear what we're saying, although her articulateness may fool you..

And we might talk about this, how she has the ability to cloak her deafness.. She studied Classical Music at the University of Sheffield, and also received an MBA from the University of Bradford.. Jenny's worked at Microsoft for 17 years, rising up from being a Support Manager, all the way to a Chief Executive role now, at Microsoft, as Microsoft's Chief Accessibility Officer.. And so, with all that said, please welcome Jenny to ETL.. Jenny, welcome.. - Hi there, it's lovely to be with you.. 00:03:24,000 - Well, Jenny, you know, 00:03:26,340 we define entrepreneurship at Stanford, as pursuing opportunity without regard for resources controlled, or said another way, it's about transcending beyond your limits.. And so, I would be remiss if I didn't kick off by asking about how you navigated your journey into leadership.. Because I think, especially, I think many people may have felt self limited, when they would look at the prospect of becoming a chief executive role in a tech company, especially given that your formal training was in music, you are profoundly deaf, and many people would've self limited themselves, but you didn't.. And so, I was wondering if we could kick off, if you could talk about your journey and navigating toward leadership in the tech industry, and especially what were the key lessons that you learned in creating your path in leadership, despite these things that others might have seen, might have perceived as disadvantages? - So, my journey to what I do today, 00:04:30,153 not the normal route, but every route is valid..

I went to mainstream school, I went on to study classical music, I then realized coming out of college and university in the UK that I needed to a wage.. I applied to a bunch of jobs, I got one working at the Daily Mirror on the IT help desk.. Having, really, candidly, not used a computer, there wasn't a lot of computing in my music degree.. In fact, I had an electronic typewriter to write my dissertation, which was all of 5,000 words.. You know, it was more about performance music than writing stuff.. But I did have a part nerd in me, I mean, that nerd started very early in life.. And I did love my ZX81, and I loved coding as a kid, and all that kind of stuff.. All that came into fruition when I started at the Daily Mirror, which was really about problem solving, fixing journalist issues with whatever tech they were using, back in the dark ages, in the sort of, my gosh, late nineties.. Went on from there to work in bigger groups, go through the IT boom and bust era, which was super fun, startups all over the place.. You were a millionaire one day, and then you were bankrupt the next..

And then, eventually landed at Microsoft, initially to work on Hotmail.. Very quickly, got into a whole bunch of other staff, whether it was online advertising, support, and my peers were supporting Windows and Office, and you know, great things.. And the launch of Xbox, and seeing, you know, three CEOs in my tenure here.. But really all the time what I was learning was, one, the discipline of IT, and this industry of computing, which is incredible, the sort of limitless potential that there is with computing.. Two, I was learning how to get stuff done in that environment, and how to go from helping people with problems to strategically identifying them, and being ahead of that.. How to manage people, how to work with people, how to collaborate with people and partners.. And yes, eventually falling into the discipline of accessibility, and being the CAO that I am today, which I've been in this role for seven years.. Do I see limits on what I can do? No.. I was brought up with two teachers as parents, and you know, my parents both said to me, "The only person that can stop you is you." And they were right.. Yes, I'm deaf, I wouldn't describe myself exactly as you put it in that intro, but I'm- - Oh, please correct me..

00:07:29,701 Please- - I had declining deafness from a young age.. 00:07:35,010 I don't hear speech today, but my voice is fantastic.. I'm super modest about it.. I use a sign language interpreter, I use captioning, and bluntly, I think actually my deafness, while it's not been easy at times, and I think having disability in this society, in a society that candidly, doesn't empower you, (chuckles) but it's ultimately become a very big strength and expertise for me, and has, you know, I've leaned into that over the years.. And I do think that disability can be that expertise and strength, you know, we very proactively here, hire people with disabilities because of that.. You know, we're the folks that can help to create great things and tools that are gonna empower people everywhere, whether it's our own employees or customers around the world.. 'Cause as you said, you know, disability is everywhere and if you're not in my core gang today, you will be at some point in your life.. So, I'm pretty damn sure of it.. So yes, it is about opening doors to possibility, and that's really the core of what we do here.. - Thank you..

00:08:49,950 And please correct me on the introduction if there's anything that was.... It wasn't intended to be misspoken.. But I would love to double click on this relationship that you've developed, with disabilities or with anything that may have confronted you in life.. Because, you know, I think it's highly relatable, this idea that we all have inadequacies when we're going into new forums, especially people that are trying to do something differently.. And I'm curious about, if that relationship has shifted or changed, because there's different narratives about how to approach perceived inadequacies.. And I understand that you had, in your career early on, developed compensatory superpowers where you could cloak your deafness and hide your deafness if you wanted to.. You had exceptional lip syncing skills that you had honed as a little girl, but then, eventually you decided that you wanted to stop cloaking it, or stop pretending not to be deaf, and in fact you've now leaned into it more.. And I think that's something that parallels many issues that our students have with feeling inadequate going into certain situations.. So, can I invite you to speak more about your relationship to your deafness? How did you originally approach it? When did you decide to stop cloaking it? When was that moment, and how did that shift things for you as a leader? - Okay.. 00:10:21,843 Well, let me maybe take a step back..

I'm deaf.. I'm very proudly deaf.. I do not feel that my deafness or my other disabilities, I have a leg that works sometimes, and not others, due to a blood condition.. I have a mental health condition that I live with.. I don't see any of those as inadequacies.. I don't see any of those as negatives.. They are part of my human.. And I was empowered to think that way as a kid.. I grew up with my sister who had mild moderate loss, hearing loss.. And I had my dad who kind of had some loss, he would ironically always hear dinner but never hear chores or dishes..

And I have an uncle who was deaf and used hearing aids, my sister used hearing aids, I had hearing aids.. It was never, ever, ever, in my lifetime, by my family, described as anything that was disadvantageous to us.. And I think that was a very important culture that I was part of.. So, I never saw my deafness as a negative, I never saw it as an inadequacy, and I would encourage anyone, whether you're dealing with a disability or anything else, you are worthy, you are human, you are awesome.. You may have a disability, which is again, just part of that human, and genetically, or whether you acquire it, most disability comes later in life.. These things come your way and they're not always easy to handle or to figure out, and the journey can be a little bit (moans) arduous as you go through, but you learn from it.. And so, I think that the grounding that I was taught as a very young child, I think was very important to me.. - Yeah.. 00:12:27,303 - And it's still something that I remember today.. 00:12:29,423 I will say that, I also don't believe I have superpowers..

I actually believe that I have learned to use.... I use certain skills and I lean on them a lot.. So, I do lipread, but again, lipreading can only get you 30 to 40%, it doesn't get you the full context of a room.. I have hearing aids, I don't use them as much now 'cause my hearing has gone down, but I do use them to try and keep my speech going and to hear my children.. And you know, I found that the combination of captioning, some degree of speech therapy training, and that's a personal choice.. I could be just fine signing, and never using my voice, and I empower anyone who sign is first language, you're beautiful and magical.. Do not feel that you need to follow my path in any way, shape, or form, and candidly, I wanna follow your path 'cause it's easier for me to sign than it is to voice, now, 'cause I don't hear what I'm saying.. And I learned how to watch body language, consume the context of a room, to be curious, to make sure that all voices have an opportunity to speak, whether they are oral or not oral.. I think if there's any, you know, ability that I've learned through my disabilities, is actually to be more inclusive of that.. So no, I think it's important to frame disability, it is part of the human experience..

And I also feel very, very lucky, blessed, and very privileged, to be working in a company that thinks that way, too.. And I'm fully supported.. I don't have to think about, "Do I have an interpreter for my next meeting?" It's covered by the company.. If there's captioning and I'm going to.... That's already done by the.... Everything I go to, is captioned.. You know, there's certain things that I don't have to spend a lot, and that's a very privileged position.. And maybe going back to what I said, society today doesn't just include those things.. You have to ask for them.. And then people say, "Well, I don't know, what is that?" And then they ask you, "Well how do I go about doing it? Oh, we can't do that in the time." Your society can be hard..

So I think it's, you know, I have to always remember that, when I leave the building, and I go to a restaurant, I am far more deaf than when I'm at home, or when I'm at work, because society doesn't provide what it should to be fully inclusive.. - And so, let's dovetail then, 00:15:30,030 into your role as CAO, and how Microsoft might be helping redefine accessibility.. Can you speak to the innovations that you're most excited about, or the most significant ones that you're seeing as part of your role at Microsoft? And if there are any broader implications for those innovations, for the rest of society? - Well, innovation is everywhere.. 00:15:52,733 So I mean, I get really excited by the toys and goodness that's coming out today.. And you know, the privilege of being in this position, I said this to a new member who joined my team last week, is you get to sit in the hub.. So, we have what's called a hub and spoke model.. so I have me and my team of amazing individuals, all of them geniuses and experts in their own right.. Many of them have far bigger profiles on social and other forums, than I do.. They work with every other part of the company, whether that is gaming, Windows, Cloud and AI, whatever it may be.. And they get to work with them on making sure that we don't just meet the basics, but we open paradigms..

'Cause our holistic set of goals are to drive and make an impact on the disability divide.. We want to impact that social inequity that exists in employment, in education, to help power people with disabilities.. In fact, that's why most of my team just happen to be, because they're the expert, people with disabilities who have lived experience or knowledge of, they are the experts.. So, I get to play across the company and go from division to division, and see what they're up to, and help disperse some of that.. And I will say, there's some really great things and trends that I'm seeing, as we go forward.. I think hardware is an incredible area for us.. I think we've got an amazing leader in our Chief Product Officer who's Panos Panay, who leads over Surface and Windows.. We've got the adaptive controller that led a lot, which was the first controller for gaming, the Xbox adaptive controller, which was designed with a whole gang of amazing individuals with disabilities.. Mostly vets in the beginning, giving their expertise to really scope a controller.. Well, that was a few years ago, but that led a legacy of amazing things coming out of that group..

Whether it's putting accessibility vehemently up there, in fact, if you're on Windows 11, it's right in the bottom corner, it's right there, it pops up, and you can have captions embedded into the operating system, online and offline, instantly on.. That is just ground changing for the hard of hearing.. But you've also got adaptive hardware coming through, with the mouse and the hub, which we announced a little bit earlier in the year.. And, just think about your mouse, and being able to, you know, with limited mobility, whether it's arthritis, cerebral palsy, or you wanna flick your mouse from quickly being lefthanded to right-handed, because your partner is lefty and you're a righty, that we've now got a mouse coming out that just simply with 3D printed, and we are putting those CAD files online so that people can 3D print that on, adapt it, you can just flick off that engine and put the tail on that you want, that works for you.. And I think that whole space is all about making sure that we design seamlessly operating systems, and hardware, to flow together, meet the needs of people, no matter where they are and what they're at.. And so, the mouse is fun, it's beautiful, it's cool, it's affordable, which matters, but also it adapts to you, can change it.. So if your hand works well in the morning and you don't need the adaptive tail, don't put it on.. But if during the course of the day you get muscle fatigue, chuck it on.. And that's how technology should group, so I get really excited about that.. I also get really excited about AI, I think AI is the untapped potential that's gonna lead the future in so many ways..

There's so much there that I can talk about ad nauseum, (chuckles) but I would say that I'm excited about the collaborations happening here.. I think we all know that artificial intelligence is based on data, it's based on a lot of data, billions of data points, that then give you the ability to have machine learning and intelligence coming out of it.. It's gotta be ethically done, it's got to be thoughtful, it's got to be inclusive.. It's also got to include data that's come from people with disabilities in that mass, 'cause if it doesn't, you don't have an end result that's gonna actually empower the full diversity of human.. So this week, we just announced a great collaboration, which we've been working on for some time with four other tech companies, small ones, Apple, Google, Amazon, Meta, small ones.. To work with the University of Illinois, with the right security privacy, gather that data working on impacted voice, so, speech recognition, so that we can accelerate and advance quickly, the technology that's available to people who need that.. The fact that you've got five huge companies working together, to accelerate a technology area, to really lean into AI potential, yeah, that gets me up in the morning.. (Ravi chuckles) - I'm gonna ask one more, 00:21:50,253 or two more questions, and then I'm gonna open it up for student questions.. And Jen, if you look at the Q&A tab, if there's any questions that really pop out at you when we go to that you have prerogative, and we can jump into those.. But you know, one of the things I wanna ask about is, you've been accredited with creating real change within Microsoft's culture..

You know, it's hard as an entrepreneur to create change, period, but creating change within an organization, which is a large corporate like Microsoft is even that much harder.. Do you have any advice on how to be an entrepreneur from within an organization? Are there un-intuitive insights you've learned on how to affect change from within? - Yeah, I mean, I've learned a lot, 00:22:35,490 and I think, but to be clear, I'm still learning.. So, you know, you've learned a lot but woo! That one, I'm sure there's a couple of books written on that, maybe there's a college course on it.. - People are still trying to figure it out.. 00:22:50,791 - Uh huh.. 00:22:53,070 You know, I will say that some of what I've learned, if I go back about 10 years ago, and I was chair of the disability employee group then, so that was really how I slid into this gig from Hotmail.. How do you go from Hotmail to? It was by.... I went to meet people who are deaf like me, and then I went to meet people who are blind, and then I find there's a mobility group, and an autism group, and ADD and mental health, and then I was like, "Oh, we should all work together!" So, I built the ERG with the help of many people.. And that's kind of rule number one, it's number one, person.. No one person can change a culture, it's got to be a gang of incredible, impassioned individuals..

And so, I know leadership is important, and we put a lot of onus on it, but I'll tell you, I don't do anything without that gang.. And that's probably one of my most proudest moments, is being a part of that ERG, and having a part in forming it, here at the company.. But 10 years ago, I was sat there meeting with the then President of Cloud and AI, who is now the CEO, Satya Nadella.. And it was my first meeting with him, and I'd asked him to be sponsor and I was horribly nervous, and I'd made this amazing 45 minute presentation deck and I'd labored for hours on it.. And I sat down, and he looked at me and he said, "No, let's not look at that.. Can you just tell me what's going on?" And I said, "No, no, no, I've spent days on these slides, you have no idea." But it ended up being one of the best meetings of my life, and the advice he gave me at the end is, "Jenny, you've got to go and get after hearts and minds.. Hearts and minds." And I was wallowing in this afterwards, and I wasn't in this role, you know, I was still pushing rocks uphill.. But I took it to heart, because I think there is a responsibility opportunity when it comes to accessibility, but I think there is with any kind of leadership.. Particularly at the time, this was under resourced, it didn't have a lot of prioritization in the company at the time.. And, you know, I felt like we were pushing constantly, but I started building collateral, I started working with people to turn this into something that would pull people in, in an empowering way, that would help them to learn, that would educate, that would also gather their expertise and insight that would start the flywheel..

That then accelerated in 2014, when Satya became CEO, in 2015, when I was fortunate enough to move into this role, along with a host of other amazing people.. When we pivoted this from just a technical discipline into thinking about accessibility as a cultural enterprise, as an ecosystem, as a maturity model, as something that you have to inch forward and be strategic and prioritizing clear and simple, in what you go after, and how you go after it.. And every year, I sit back, and I run my annual assessment and I go, "Well, they're doing really well, but woo, we gotta go focus on procurement.. We gotta go figure out how to empower our sellers or how to, you know, talk about disability in country X." And we come with a slim set of profiles and goals like you do with any other business.. And then you get after that, and you manage and you measure, and you move methodically forward.. I think if there's one difference with my space, it's never forgetting the ground you walk on.. We're trying to, we are trying to empower people around the world.. We're trying to change social demographic, social inequity that's existed for decades, if not centuries.. And it's human, and it's real, and it's not always fun, but it's really important, and there's people at the heart of it.. And so, yeah, we run it like a business, but at the core it's all about hearts and minds and it's all about humans..

- That's great.. 00:27:33,420 I'm gonna turn it now to the student questions.. And Jenny, if there's a question, if you click on the Q&A, that jumps out at you, you have prerogative, otherwise I'm gonna be - Crikey, there's a lot of them! 00:27:40,883 Okay.. - There are, but you can rank them 00:27:44,340 by most up votes.. So I'm gonna go in meritocratic order because we won't have time to get through all of them.. So I'll ask the first one, and if you see any that leaps out at you, you have prerogative to decide which questions we answer.. But the first question is, "How do Product Managers at Microsoft develop products or solutions through the lens of inclusion and adaptability? Is there any methodology, guideline, et cetera? Anything official from a company guideline perspective?" - Yeah, I mean, 00:28:19,560 the goodness where the accessibility is, while in some ways I would say that it's a constant learning environment, and we're constantly busting open, and challenging paradigms.. On the other end, there's an enormous amount of wealth, of expertise, wisdom, policies, processes, that are really

important as foundations to lean on.. So yes, Microsoft does have a Microsoft accessibility standard, which is an amalgamation of regulations around the world, that help inform that foundation.. That's not the goal with what we do, but it is the bare minimum..

And so, engineers are given that, whether it's, you know, a developer or someone who's writing websites, or code in any form, hardware, as well.. I would also say, that secondly, every employee at Microsoft has to take mandatory training on accessibility, so I've had 170 plus thousand employees that have taken training.. That's really important.. That helps me again, with that foundational basics of getting people to the point where they understand the importance of designing within fore.. But also they understand etiquette, they understand language, and how important it is to include people.. And some of the easy ways that you can exclude, you know, and how to navigate and avoid that.. Cause again, everyone comes to an environment with different varying levels of understanding of nature, nurture, with disability, with any part of the lived experience.. I think the other part, you know, learning how to design and go beyond that, is, you know, leaning into the principles of designing for human.. And, you know, there's lots of words you can band around here, inclusive design, it's probably the best well known, but there is a lot of rigor here that goes into designing and busting open those doors.. It's not just, "Oh, let's see if this works." It actually is a whole process..

So that mouse, which started as a hackathon project, we have a lot of hacks here, we just finished that a couple of weeks ago, and we had some amazing hack projects come up.. The adaptive controller came from the hack, the actual Windows captioning came from a hack.. It starts at small beginnings, but then it gets picked up by a team, they work with people all across the spectrum of disability to gather insights, to understand what would be best about that feature, what would not be good.. To gather that holistic understanding that informs that design process right at the beginning, all the way through, and keeps us grounded to, you know, whether it's the right thing to do or the wrong thing to do.. And so, that rigor and process is actually very important, as well, for us as you kind of go beyond, and start building technologies.. Otherwise you risk producing technologies that are not useful to anyone.. And sadly in this industry, there are a lot of them that haven't gone through that level of rigor.. So yes there are, there's a lot of materials, there's your short answer to your question.. - (chuckles) No, it's great.. 00:31:43,890 The next two questions are most up-voted, I'm gonna choose, oh, I'll ask this one..

"How do solutions for seen and unseen disabilities differ? How can companies or individuals ensure that they are addressing unseen disabilities, in addition to seen ones?" - Well, I should again, 00:32:08,280 just pause a minute on the spectrum of disabilities.. So you know, there's lots of different ways to categorize.. It's important to be thoughtful that there is a range in every part of the spectrum.. So, when talking about deafness, you have people that have mild loss, like my dad, you have people with mild moderate loss, like my sister.. There's moving beyond that, there's people who are born where first language is sign language, and so there's a massive spectrum within every parameter.. And a lot of that can be visual, and non-visual.. Deafness is one which really can be both.. But you've also got blindness, you've got mobility, you've got voice and speech, you've also got mental health and neurodiversity, which is the umbrella term for dyslexia, dyspraxia, autism, AAD, and much, much more.. In every part of this it can be apparent or non apparent.. In fact, over 70% of disability is non apparent, and I will say that those guidelines that I mentioned earlier, cover both..

But do they cover everything? No.. And you know, we have to remember that we are learning a lot about some areas of disability right now, like mental health, which skyrocketed through the pandemic, our understanding grew.. Neurodiversity, similar during the pandemic.. A lot of those conditions came much more to the fore, I think they were probably still there before the pandemic, but they came to the fore in terms of, "I need assistance." Or support, far more.. So the same principles apply, whether it's apparent or not apparent, it's making sure that you, at least imbed, the foundational items.. But then you include, if you're doing usability testing, if you are doing design forums, that you include the full diversity of human in those forums, to inform your process.. And you don't just take one voice, that means multiple voices, 'cause again, the spectrum is broad.. So thinking inclusively, particularly around disability, means that you pull in that expertise across the spectrum, to inform your process.. - The next question is, 00:34:34,320 "How do you incentivize organizations to invest more heavily in accessibility?" - I tell them to.. 00:34:42,630 (Ravi laughs) - Okay, let me play devil's advocate, 00:34:46,357 because I think some people would say, "Jenny, this is great, and I wish I could, but I have limited resources as an organization, and disabilities are a minority, ultimately, of my customers..

And so I need to prioritize my resources for the mainstream." I'm playing devil's advocate.. How would you respond to a CEO that responds with that, or an organization that acts with that motivation? - Well first, I'd have to control my eyebrows 00:35:16,370 'cause they give away my thoughts.. But, it's not a minority.. One, and the CDC actually has it, at 26% of the population in the States has a disability.. I don't think we can call that a minority.. And if you're not purposefully including people with disabilities, you are actively, intentionally, excluding.. And those are your customers, your peers, your employees, again, whether you know it or not.. And I think that's one of the key things, I have a lot of comments I've had in the years is, "Well, we don't have anyone in our company that has a disability." And again, I have to watch my eyebrows and my giggles, 'cause I'm like, "That you know of?" (Ravi chuckles) And that's because you haven't created a psychologically safe environment for somebody to come in, and tell them who they are, inclusive of their human, inclusive of their disability.. When I hired this team several years ago, first hired with a blank slate, which is a gift that you very rarely get in a career.. I knew coming in, that I had 50% disability..

A year later, I knew it was over 90%.. Why is that? Because the 40% in the meantime, felt safe enough to tell me or their

manager, that they had a disability, and how their manager could help best support their environment.. That disability could have been a mental health condition, could have been autism, could have been dyslexia, whatever it may be.. Didn't disclose it, previously.. Now, that's what's happening in most environments.. But I'll tell you now, they're your customers.. And I'll give you one quick example of that.. I went to a restaurant recently, on the many travels.. It was an environment, it was very open, 'cause you know, we are still in a pandemic, and it was outdoors.. But I asked if they wanted to verbally give me the menu..

And I said, "Well, do you mind if I have a written copy?" And they turned to the person with me, and said, "Would you mind telling her what I say? And you know, writing it down for me 'cause I can't be bothered with that." And my colleague very kindly said, "As she said she's deaf, and she just needs a little bit of.... She needs a written copy." And she said, "Well, this maybe isn't the restaurant for you." And we walked out, what we also did was cancel the event that we had the day following, at that same restaurant.. They lost my business, they lost a bigger business, as a result.. We spend money, a lot of it.. And so, any person who says to me that, "Why should I?" I'm like, "If you're not already, you're excluding people.. You're losing money, you're incurring risk, and you're creating societal damage.. Move on." - Can I ask one question on that? 00:38:35,250 On language, and what we as a society should do regarding language, and how we dialogue about disabilities, because I think it speaks to this idea of creating more comfort for people to come forth with disabilities.. There does seem to be a tension in society about how we should approach communications.. On the one hand, there's a desire for a lot more sensitivity, and we're hearing that, you know, in a variety of ways where different subgroups want more sensitivity called to them, as well as even in the mainstream.. You know, there are artists like Beyonce and Lizzo that misappropriated words that were obviously very insulting, and then they retracted lyrics..

Then there's another current which is talking about, really about the need is more humanizing the whole experience.. That the whole point is not to draw upon people's differences, but to really.... The common human thread across all of humanity.. Can you speak to, how we as a society should be approaching language and disabilities? - So first is to quote, 00:39:43,050 I'm not an expert on disability language.. There are some amazing folks out there that I would very quickly point you to.. Emily Ladau wrote an amazing book on disability.. Judy Heumann of course, has written an amazing book on the history of disability.. Alice Wong has just published recently, an amazing book that I was pouring all over on my way back from New York just a week ago.. So there are some incredible advocates out there that I would say are the right people to learn from.. And if you haven't read Emily's book, seriously grab a cup of tea and a biscuit, and read it..

It is the resource, it's where I point people.. But you know, there's a couple of things here.. One is, you know, with any language in any community, language evolves and changes over time.. You know, the phrase, my gosh, 'handicapped' used to be what was the term for actually, what were in this month, which is National Disability Employment Awareness Month or NDEAM.. That used to have the word handicap in there, but terrible word, not relevant today.. And there were several words that were used in Beyonce and Lizzo's frames, that also, terrible words, and should not be used.. And I was really thrilled to see, while they shouldn't have been included in the first place, the advocacy community jump on that, educate on that, and a very quick response in return.. Because ultimately, we've all gotta learn, language does change.. Today, the pendulum is a little swingy, and so, first remember that disability is personal, everyone has the ability to frame what is personal to them about disability.. In fact, if people wanna talk about my disability, I ask, let me do that, 'cause it's mine..

Let me talk about my deafness and my journey with it.. 'Cause it's very personal to talk about somebody else's medical condition.. So know that the best first thing to do is to ask, "How do you like, are you deaf? Are you?" And for me, I'm like, "I'm deaf, I'm definitely not impaired unless I've had two glasses of wine.. I'm deaf." But know that it's person first, some like, so people with disabilities, person with hearing loss.. And then there's identity first, autistic, deaf, blind.. Identity first is kind of where I land, but you'll see me use people with disabilities and disabled, interchangeably, as well.. But if someone says, "Hey Jen, I prefer this." That's what I'm gonna go with.. So ask, be curious.. Remember it's personal.. And there are days where it's like, "I really respect the question, just stick with deaf, and no I'm not gonna go into my personal journey of how I got here." If you see a person with a wheelchair, it's honestly rude to touch their wheelchair..

It is rude to ask them how they became, and use a wheelchair.. And it's terrible in all disability to say to someone, "I'm so sorry for your deafness." "I'm not sorry.. I like it! You guys live in your horrible, loud world, I prefer mine." Now, there are days where I wanna hear my kid.. There are days when as a musician, I wanna hear my music.. But I'm proud of who I am, including my deafness.. Do not apologize, it bugs me.. And I will tell you through the pandemic, that was the number one thing when I had to self-identify, to ask for help with masks.. It would be, "Oh, I'm so sorry." I'd say, "Well, you may be, I'm not." - Mm.. 00:43:33,690 - So ask, you know, 00:43:34,800 have the conversation.. Ultimately, it's a conversation..

- Jenny, we have more questions 00:43:40,830 than we will have time for, and we have two final minutes.. And so, I'd like to exercise my prerogative by just giving you the final two minutes to share any final words that you want to, with the future entrepreneurs that we have that are listening to you.. So, there's over 500 students at Stanford plus the whole YouTube and podcast community.. Are there any words that you wanna share with our future entrepreneurs? And if there's a specific message to our future entrepreneurs who have disabilities, that you wanna relay, I wanna give the final two minutes to you.. - That's dangerous.. 00:44:12,270 (Ravi chuckles) You know, I thank you for the opportunity for being here.. And if you're sitting there with a disability, whether you've shared it or not, game on.. I want you to know that companies like mine are actively looking for your talent.. Get your degree, (chuckles) get your master's, get educated.. Lean on every single support framework you can..

Do not be scared to self-identify, and if you self-identify and you're looking for jobs in a company, and they don't know how to handle it, teach them, but also make a note, 'cause you wanna work in a culture and in a company that supports you, and you're not having to worry about accommodations and basics every day.. So, I just, I get excited about what I'm seeing today, which is, much stronger self-identification than I had when I was a kid.. I didn't self-identify to the true extent of my deafness, as a kid, 'cause being a deaf musician wasn't really, it wasn't really.... Well, it was a bit frowned on back then.. That wasn't okay.. So, don't follow what I did, learn from it.. And I would just say, I look forward to the future and I look forward to seeing you here and all of the other companies that I know are actively looking for that talent.. So, look forward to seeing what you create, people.. (electronic synth music) (music fades)..