

3Play Webinars | Neurodiversity in the Workplace Part Two

ELISA LEWIS: And my name is Elisa Lewis. I'm a senior inbound marketing manager at 3Play Media. I'm a fair-skinned woman with dark brown hair. I'm wearing a tan sweater today and have my glasses on. And I'm joined today by Tara Cunningham, Founder and CEO of Beyond-Impact. And I'll hand it over to Tara to introduce herself.

TARA CUNNINGHAM: Hi, everybody. It's lovely to be here. My name is Tara Cunningham. My pronouns are she, her, and hers. I am a very fair-skinned woman with brown hair today, blue eyes, and loads of wrinkles. So thank goodness for the Zoom filter.

I am going to talk a bit about the next level of neurodiversity inclusion and neurodivergent inclusion. And so I just want to get right into it. Elisa, do you want to go over the agenda?

ELISA LEWIS: Yeah, absolutely. So today we'll begin with a brief recap from last week. Hopefully, most of you were able to join us. But we'll just get everyone up to speed, make sure that we're all aligned, since it's been a few days.

Then we will dive into what a barrier-free work environment looks like in terms of meetings and events. We'll talk a bit about office culture and the hidden curriculum. We'll share some best practices and ways to make communication very clear. And then, like I said, of course, we'll be happy to answer any questions that come up.

So like I said, hopefully many of you were able to join us. But if not, the session is recorded. And again, we'll just kind of go through it briefly. And then we have lots more to talk about today.

But last week, we covered a few things. First, we talked about neurodiversity and defined what that could look like. We talked about some of the benefits and the business case for hiring neurodivergent individuals and some of the strengths that they bring to the table. We talked about steps for getting started with a neurodivergent program in the workplace.

And then we shifted to talk a little bit about actionable accommodations. And that's where we're going to continue today, is talking about what it looks like when you're actually in the workplace after the hiring process and onboarding and things like that, so what it looks like working in a barrier-free environment.

So I want to kick this off with a statistic. And it may seem a little bit irrelevant, because it's about Netflix not the workplace. But I think that it's really important to share this number as it's really impactful and a good indicator of the workplace. So the stat is that 80% of Netflix users use subtitles or captions regularly.

And the important thing to note about this is that this is all-inclusive of Netflix users. This is not specific to users who are deaf or hard-of-hearing, or who have a learning disability, or who are non-native speakers. This is all-encompassing. So it really goes to show that a ton of people, 80%, are finding that captions and subtitles, which is traditionally thought of as an accommodation, are really useful and there's a benefit to all individuals.

So I think that this, again, while it's specific to Netflix, it really shows that individuals do prefer to watch things with captions. And again, it just goes back to show you that a lot of things that we think of as accommodations or things that very well may be in accommodation for one individual are really helpful for many individuals.

TARA So just to go and add to that point, when we started trying to make captions the way all meetings are run, **CUNNINGHAM:** whether there's a person who's deaf or hard-of-hearing or not, or neurodivergent, or who has disclosed their disability, we just say standard best practice is to have closed captionings.

And when we started putting that in place in big Fortune 500s, the increase in knowledge-sharing went through the roof. So people listen. But to listen and read are two different things, aren't they? They add on top of each other.

It makes the experience more enjoyable, which is probably why 80% of people have the subtitles on in Netflix. You don't have to try to figure out what are they saying. It's there for you. So it's a lot more enjoyable from a viewer standpoint.

Think about it in a work context. If your work is easier and more enjoyable, you're going to have better employee retention, higher productivity, better employee engagement. So it's a really cool way of showing that these simple accommodations that set out for one purpose are making a much different message for everybody else. So it's really super cool.

ELISA LEWIS: Thank you. Thanks, Tara, for adding some of that context. So I want to use 3Play Media webinars and some of the things that we've done and do as a little bit of a case study. And by no means am I saying that we're perfect. There's always-- I think there's really no such thing as perfect when we're talking about accessibility.

But hopefully, we are doing pretty well. So I do want to share, like I said, some of what we do here in terms of accessible events and meetings and take a look at some best practices. And with that being said, we've also learned a lot as we've grown our events and webinar program.

So a couple of things that I want to cover in terms of best practices. First is sharing an agenda at the beginning, making it really clear what's going to be covered, what the format and what the expectations are. So we shared the length of time of this presentation, what the expectations are in terms of questions, the style of presentation.

Are you doing a fireside chat? Is it something that you-- is it a presentation like this, with a slide deck and presenters? So that's the first thing.

The other thing is making sure that individuals understand the user controls. So this can include, again, accessibility features, how to-- we have captions available. We have an ASL interpreter available. How do you turn those on? How do you access those?

But also, where do you ask questions? We talked about the chat window, the Q&A panel. In this particular session, we're not using things like polls or annotation.

But those are certainly things that you may use in another event or in a meeting, very popular in a work environment, maybe for internal presentations and such. So really, just making sure that, again, individuals are aware and have all of the information at their disposal that they may need to use those controls and tools throughout.

Of course, ensuring that the presentation is accessible. So here, we're talking about if there's a slide deck or visual components, is there sufficient color contrast? Is the text big enough? Are you using text that are really decorative, or are you using text that's actually legible and readable?

Keeping in mind things like including GIFs or videos that autoplay or shooting images across the page, flashing moving objects, making sure that you're limiting those, because they're not necessarily accessible. They can be very triggering for individuals, maybe who are prone to a seizure or have light sensitivity, things like that.

And then making sure that you are describing what's on the screen. So you want to make sure that you're, in some sense, audio describing and covering things and not assuming that a viewer can follow or see or read what's on the page.

And then the other thing that I want to mention about accessible presentations is a little bit-- there's a little bit of controversy around this, but offering a brief self-description. The necessity has kind of been debated. But typically, we do offer a sentence or so description of the physical appearance of the speaker.

And then lastly, as follow-up, provide a recording. This really allows people to review the content at their own pace. You can also add-- you should add captions and a transcript to that so people can go back. It also makes it really easy to, if individuals weren't able to attend, to parse things down and share that information with colleagues and whatnot.

And this can also help with long-term comprehension and absorption of the material. Some people don't retain things on the first pass, so having that as an option can really allow users the flexibility to review and to find what learning works best for them. And we'll dive into some of this a little bit deeper on the next slide.

So here, I'm going to talk a little bit more specifically about captions, transcripts, and audio description. Like we talked about with that stat and some of the things that Tara shared, captions can be extremely helpful. So making sure that there's live captioning during the presentation is really important. It is important to also know that there are a range of quality of captions, particularly in live. So you want to make sure that your captions are as accurate as possible.

Consider if they include a speaker identification or things of that nature. Make sure that if you're using certain terminology or jargon, that you provide that information ahead of time, if that's an option with your live captioning, to make sure that things are accounted for correctly. If you're doing just-- if you're in the medical field, for example, and you're presenting on things that have really complex vocabulary, you want to make sure that if you're having a meeting in the workplace that it's accurate and that that's prepared for.

TARA And it's also great, if you think-- sorry to cut in.

CUNNINGHAM:

ELISA LEWIS: No, go ahead.

TARA That's super important when we talk about the hidden curriculum in the workplace. So there is corporate speak.

CUNNINGHAM: Every organization has their own acronyms.

And if you remember the very first day that you started in your job and you were listening to a meeting and you wish there was a translator for you, [LAUGHS] those definitions in advance, a glossary so that your corporate speak can be looked at, and having live captioning so that they can write down the word, or-- I know we're going to go into the transcripts-- really important, so that you can go back and look at it and translate what has been said and into a meaningful context. So sorry, Elisa.

ELISA LEWIS: No. Thank you for sharing that. And also I took a moment to catch up on the chat. And it looks like some individuals are sharing great suggestions as well about different context of whether this is a presentation in the workplace or something more like a film.

And also, we had some input on the best types of font and the most accessible fonts. So that's great. There's a lot of information out there. But thank you for sharing that directly in this conversation.

So yeah, moving on to transcripts. We talked about this a little bit already, but just allowing another format for individuals to consume information is really useful. A transcript is also a great way to go back and revisit, similar to how we see students using this, going back and recapping the meeting, highlighting important takeaways.

If you didn't have someone taking meeting notes, it's a great way to have everything documented there for you, and again, pare it down. If it is something that's not a meeting and maybe more event-focused, it can be a great way-- a great starting point for derivative content, maybe creating a blog post or something from the presentation. So lots of different use cases and benefits of the transcript as well.

And then audio description-- I covered this a little bit already, but explaining what's on the slides is really important. I think we see a lot of times, presenters will say, as you can see on my screen. And we can't assume that. So instead say something like, I'm sharing my screen. It has a graph that displays X, Y, and Z, and share those takeaways and share what the visuals really look like, if they're meaningful.

And I think also on that note, making sure that you're limiting, again, visuals. It's great if they're meaningful, and that's very important. But making sure that you're not just adding things, because those who are able to see the slides and looking, it still can be a bit overwhelming and confusing if the slides are all covered.

And Tara, I'll hand it back to you.

TARA CUNNINGHAM: Thanks. So office culture. So we started digging into this and then I'm seeing that there are people that are putting glossaries together, acronym glossaries. Those are brilliant things that are set up for people with disabilities but work for everybody. Can we go to the next slide, please?

OK. This is one of the most shocking statistics I've seen in a long time. Gall-- I just went to say Gallaudet. [LAUGHS] The Gallup poll recently put out their employers index. And it showed that only 46% of employees know what is expected from them at work. That means 54%, the majority of people in your office, have absolutely zero idea what is expected from them.

So why is that happening? This is an insane way. So can we have the next slide, please?

OK. And this is what we're calling the hidden curriculum. So the hidden curriculum are things that are concealed, ambiguous, and undefined. And then you've got the actual curriculum, which would be the information that is in your handbook. It's visible. It's clear. And it's understood.

The problem with the two things is that what's written in your handbook may not be how it's actually done in real life. So for example, your handbook may say you're to work from 9 to 5 with an hour break for lunch and a 15-minute break sometime in the morning and the afternoon.

But in reality, people work hours from 8 to 10 o'clock at night. Some people work in the evening. Some people do-- every person's job has a different impact and resource requirement, right? Some people are required to be at their desk. Some people are required to be at a counter. It depends on the role.

One of the things that is really important is to understand that if your handbook says 9 to 5 and lunch from 1 to 2 and you arrive on your first day at work, neurotypicals will look around and they'll say, are they eating at their desk?

Are they going out in groups? Do they leave? Do they go to the cafeteria and bring the food back? What is the norm of eating? Neurotypicals know to figure that out. Neurodivergent people, on the most part-- and I don't like painting big brushstrokes-- but on the most part, are very literal. The rules are written down, and this is what I'm supposed to do.

And if they leave from 1 to 2 for lunch and that's frowned upon, that is a hidden curriculum. That person is breaking the hidden curriculum rules, and they don't know it. They think they're doing work OK.

And if there is not a culture of feedback to explain, you know what, lunch is from 1 to 2, but we all eat our lunch at the desk. It's probably not healthy, but that's what we do. By being honest with the individual and explaining what is actually expected, that is very important. Because from the very beginning, they're going to have a appearance of not being attentive at work, goofing off, for example.

Another big problem with the handbook versus the hidden curriculum is the 9 to 5 day. Legally, everybody's contracts is 9 to 5. The occasional time you'll be working later. Well, if Bob is at his desk working 9 to 5, and he sees Mary come in at 10:30. And then every Friday, she comes in at 10:30.

Well, why does Mary get to come in at 10:30 on Fridays? I'm going to come in on Fri-- we have the same job. What they may not realize is that-- or that what Bob might not realize is that Mary works in the evenings for the company on the Thursday evening. And because she does that, she has permission to come in late for an hour and a half late on Friday mornings.

So that has been agreed and negotiated between the company. It hasn't been shared with everybody. So when Bob doesn't show up on Friday until 10:30, Bob's getting in trouble. And he doesn't understand why. Because she's able to, why can't I? OK?

Don't underestimate the power of the hidden curriculum. So in order to really think about what barriers could be created for that, go back to your first day, your first weeks on the job. What were things that you knew to look out for that you didn't understand, that you knew you needed to negotiate?

Coffee breaks. Do you leave for coffee? When can you go for a cigarette break? Do people smoke here? Do we have a running club at lunch? All the different, silly things that add up to an office culture. Most of those things do not exist in anywhere that's black and white.

In addition, there is a lot of communication that is coming at employees right now. And you may have it in Slack, in email, in Teams. There's a thousand-- text messages, IMs. Where is the communication coming from? Is an employee responsible to read everything coming from corporate?

I was working with one company, a massive company, and they couldn't understand why one of their neurodivergent employees couldn't get their work done. And it turned out that he thought he needed to read every single email that came in from corporate. And by reading every email, it was reading the text, following the links, reading the information there, following those links. And he thought he was doing his job because it came from corporate.

What he needed to understand, and what the team realized, was, actually, that stuff's not really that important. What you need to do are these priorities. And so being able to define what is important and what is not, what's the main type of communication, and what is a tertiary piece of communication, these things cause huge difficulties for both new employees and neurodivergent employees.

So it takes a while. But I would ask everybody, the 100 participants that are here today, to look at their office and think about the things that you just know are your norms that are not written down anywhere. And if you could go back in time and reintroduce new staff members with that knowledge, if you had that knowledge, how much faster would you get up to speed at the office?

How much better would you be with doing your job? Would you understand what was actually expected from you? Probably. So really dig deep and see what those hidden curriculum pieces are and then think about people that may be struggling with that around you. They may be neurodivergent, or they may have difficulty figuring out what's important and what's not. And it's really helpful to try to accommodate everybody by explaining the hidden curriculum.

I've got a question here. How should we-- it just popped up and disappeared. Sorry, I can't do the-- how should we be addressing--

ELISA LEWIS: Do you see it?

TARA Yeah. Thank you. How should we be addressing neurodivergent workers in a hybrid environment? Super question.

CUNNINGHAM: I'm going to be hitting on that in a few more slides. So if you can hang on, Victoria, that would be great.

Sounds familiar. That happened to me. I went to lunch one day and came back. There was a meeting addressing it with lunch breaks. [LAUGHS] Until weeks later. Yeah. How are you supposed to know?

If it's not explained to you, how are you supposed to know? Thank you for sharing that story. That is a huge problem. Lunch is a problem. So sharing what is the rules is really important. It helps everybody, OK?

So let's go to the next slide. So we talked about this. Somebody's already doing it. Acronym glossary. Super important to have, all right? And we all-- it's really, really important.

Real rules around start and end times of the day and when breaks can be taken. When I say real rules, I mean real rules. These are the standards. It's not-- it is illegal to tell your employees they have to work 65 hours a day-- a week. It's illegal.

Is it practical that a company is expecting 65 hours of work a week? Well, you know what? If you work in an accounting firm and it's tax season, you bet your butt it is. But it's 9 to 5 on your job description.

So can you be fired if you don't do the 9 to 5? That's a great question. And the courts are full of those questions right now. The best thing you could do is to be very clear and explicit from the very beginning, so that when employees come into the company, they understand the culture and what is expected of them. So they don't find out when it's too late.

You definitely want to-- the informal rules are as important, if not more important, than the real rules. Because the informal rules are what the collective have decided. You don't want to be on the outside.

Written and clear expectations around working from home. This became evidently important when we switched from being in the office to work from home in two weeks. Miraculously, we were able to do what was impossible in two weeks back when COVID hit.

One of the things that managers were doing were making everybody put their cameras on so that the managers could see the top of your head working. And that really didn't work. And it took months before people started giving-- I'm like, stop looking at me. This is horrible. This is a horrendous feeling. I don't want to be monitored. And so things started coming out.

Now, one of the most exciting things-- and I wish to God I was a sociologist and I knew that COVID was happening in January versus July of 2020-- our teams that had neurodivergent team members-- not the whole team was neurodivergent. There was a employee that was outed as neurodivergent.

The managers and the team knew how to communicate effectively with clear and explicit instructions. I'm going to dive really deep to what that actually means. They were outcome-based. Their work was based on here's what we're going to do, here's the skill strengths, this is what we're going to-- Tara's going to do this. Lisa's going to do this. Michelle's going to do this.

Everybody's clear what they're going to do. And they did it. It was a miracle. Work got done. And it was because-- and there was no staring at people's heads. And they were more productive. Their teams were more effective. And everybody started copying their way of working.

I'm telling you, as I'm standing here right now, the reason things changed as fast as they did were neurodivergent teams and managers said, this is the way you got to do it. And things started changing properly.

Somebody is saying having my camera on all the time is the same as watching over my shoulder. In my perspective, my anxiety went through the roof. Thankfully, that's changed. Whose anxiety wouldn't go through the roof with somebody being stared at all day long?

Like, you know when people say, don't stand behind me? I can't work if you're standing behind me. That was effectively what people were doing. Time at desk does not mean work productivity, does not mean outcomes.

I had a brilliant man who did-- it was-- this was for a company that was a tax assessment company. He did an entire week's worth of work in two and a half hours, and then collapsed, needed to go home, needed to sleep it off for two days.

Came back on the Wednesday, did it again. Two and a half hours. Showed people how to do the work better, collapsed, went home, came back on the Friday, did this consecutively for four weeks. He did eight weeks of work in four weeks and did not get the job because he did not sit at the desk from 9 to 5. Just let that one settle in, OK? That was the biggest mistake that company could have ever made.

So what we did is we passed it on to a client that really understands neurodivergent behavior. And this guy is flying it. He's almost five years in this job. Well, he's been climbing the ladder. He's extraordinary. He's an extraordinary individual.

The other-- exactly, Liza, I think, they lost a valuable person. The other company got a valuable person. And so this is one of these things that you need to think what is actually important. As a manager, as a team member, what do you want from your team?

People that arrive and they're at their desk and they don't do anything? Or people that actually get work done and help the team to progress? It's the second one. But we're still got systems with time at desk.

The other thing is, what is the primary form of communication your team works with? The primary. There are too many ways that we're communicating. And that is adding to people's anxiety. They're not able to turn off from work. They're constantly on.

It's affecting people's mental health in a huge way. And you don't have a clear expectation of what's due when, who's doing what, where is there a problem, if you're spending half your day trying to find the information you need. Before you do any project, before any team does anything, you must agree on the form of communication you're going to use. Agree we're going to use closed captioning. Agree we're going to have transcripts or we're going to have a rotating note taker, like we talked about last week.

These things are very important for both mental health, but for productivity, for employee engagement, and for employee retention. If you don't know what you're doing at work, after a few months, you're going to look for another job where you can understand what you can bring to the table. That costs companies a lot of money. So you have to think about the full story of the workplace, OK?

Yeah. Michelle is saying, we've got people no camera required policy. That's the best policy. For the record, I want to put my flag down. No camera required is extremely important. That is probably one of the most important things.

Zoom, I mentioned, I'm all fuzzed out so I don't look at my wrinkles. People don't want to see themselves. And it's really distracting to see yourself or seeing other people or who's going in their room and, oh, look at their cat. Who cares, right? So that's a really, really good thing from a workforce rule.

And based on need, there's always been more-- OK, yeah. The primary form of communication based on need, but there's always more being added. That's IT's job, is to give you guys more ways to communicate. What a manager and teams job is is to figure out which form of communication will work best for us right now.

Right now. Not forever and ever and ever, amen. Right now, for this project that has a deadline in three weeks time, we're going to use X. You're not getting married to one. You're not divorcing others. You're saying these are our priorities for this project.

That makes a lot of sense. It makes your life so much easier. It's a tough decision to begin with. Not everybody's going to be happy. But we're not living in a democracy when it comes to communication.

If you live in a democracy when it comes to communication, you've got nine different versions to choose from. It doesn't work. We know it doesn't work. It's driving everybody nuts, OK?

And I've already talked about this. Do you need to read every email from the company? If you don't, please make that very explicit to your team members. And if communication-- if you're getting too much from the company, feed that upstairs. Feed it upstairs.

Let them know the communication you're sending us is too often and it's of low quality, so it's of no use to us. So we would prefer to have a higher quality email once every three weeks instead of 16 emails a week. This is really, really important.

Feed it up. If all you do is complain and say, oh, don't bother reading that, they're going to keep doing the same thing. And communication is going to not-- it's going to be passed out and passed by. You don't want it to pass by, OK? Can we go to the next slide, please?

Company-related social events. Do you want to take this one? You're up. Yep.

ELISA LEWIS: Yep. Thank you. Sure, I can jump in here. And Tara, there's a lot we could say about this, so definitely feel free to interrupt and add your thoughts. But yeah, I think this is another thing that we've also seen change tremendously with COVID and this post-COVID environment, so to speak.

But they're a mixed bag. I'll start by saying that social events are a fantastic way to bring people together, particularly when individuals are working behind a computer from all different places, remotely, hybrid, whatnot. But it's incredibly important to make them accessible and inclusive for everyone, whether they're in person or they're remote.

So a few tips and things that you should consider are, first and foremost, the physical environment. Is it in the office? Is it somewhere that is easily accessible to even get to by public transit? Or is there parking? What does that look like to even get to the social?

I think also communication around that is important. So it's great if you, the planner of the event, know that there's parking and a train. But are you making that information available and easy to access to those who may be wondering or concerned or who really need that information? So making sure that everything is communicated clearly and well in advance.

What is the-- again, we talked about agenda in terms of events and meetings. But what is the plan for the event? Are you going out to eat? Is there an activity? Sharing all of that information ahead of time and making sure, again, that expectations are really clear.

This could include a whole assortment of things. What should you bring? What time will things start? Is it required? Or is it just a social-- an option that's available?

There's so much that we could talk about here. Is there a setting? What's the setting like? Is it going to be a place that's really loud? If you're going out to a restaurant, what does that look like?

Is it a bar where there's going to be a ton of noise and background? Or is there a private room where it will just be the individuals from the company? What food is going to be available? Are you taking into account dietary restrictions and preferences? Is food labeled?

Even if you have gluten-free and you have vegan and everything, fantastic. That's a good start but is it labeled for the people who are looking for it? Same thing with all kinds of allergies and preferences.

Again, what are the expectations, providing agendas and information up front and ahead of time. If the event is something where there is a presentation or there is any speaking or video, are there captions? Is there an interpreter?

What accommodations other than-- like I said, getting there and the physical accommodations are super important, but what else is going to be provided? And are you asking what people-- are there any other accommodations other than the ones that are spelled out and available from the beginning?

Again, are there any materials? Maybe it's a trivia or something. Or maybe there's a scavenger hunt. Are the materials accessible? Are they-- are they screen reader accessible?

Do you know if it's on the computer or it's virtual? If you're playing-- I think one of the big things that we saw during the pandemic was teams playing online games together. Are those accessible? Are they-- do you need any additional skills or training beforehand that goes into that?

And then, again, we covered a lot about presentations, but making sure that you're using inclusive language and avoiding acronyms and jargon and corporate speak and all of that. But really, again, asking and getting impact from team members and making sure that it's clear who to go to and how to get to them to ask for this information or to ask for accommodations that are not already available. Anything you would add?

TARA
CUNNINGHAM: That's brilliant. I would like to add for company social events, that could be going out to lunch. If you're lucky to live in a city and there's loads of locations and everybody goes out to lunch, do you have a list of places that are accessible for seeing eye dogs, that are accessible for wheelchair users? Are there elevators if there's two floors?

Is there a space for a wheelchair to go through? Is there a quiet room if something is too loud? Is there-- are there restaurants that are better able to be accommodating to people that are really noise sensitive? Can you request a table that's away from the kitchen? Because some smells are terrible for some sensory problems that some people may have.

So having a list of restaurants that you can say, oh, we're going to lunch, we're going to go to X, this is a really cool thing, because the person who's a wheelchair user or a neurodivergent person who really gets upset over loud noises or too many things going around because it's the newest, coolest place, and there's dangly stuff with lights bouncing, having a place that's accessible so that everybody feels OK and safe on where you're going to lunch is just reducing another barrier and being accommodating and thinking about everybody.

I love that. They include their mac and cheese wherever they go. That's a great, great, great thing to do. I can't-- that little thing shows-- just having some mac and cheese, being allowed to do that, and knowing that there's places where that's a safe thing and you're not going to be othered because of it is enormous.

You cannot-- and this is a coworker's idea. But how great is it for everybody else that's around that's like, oh, there's Bob with his mac and cheese. That's his thing, you know? I go out and I always order X, because I'm a late diagnosis auti. I didn't realize it, which is hilarious since I was in disability for 20 years. And the autis that knew me thought I knew that I was autistic, which is brilliant.

But when people realized my little quirks and they took those-- what I call quirks now-- but they took on board, oh, Tara's useless at her calendar. She's going to forget that we're doing this. So the gentle reminder, don't forget lunch today, blah, blah, you know?

That was-- it wasn't annoying. It wasn't talking down to me. It was being inclusive of me. Because I'd be sitting at my desk going, where is everybody? Forgetting that something was agreed and I said I was going. I just did that Friday night. A friend of mine had loads of people. Totally forgot.

Just-- it was in my calendar. So when people can go, oh, that's just Tara. She screwed up her calendar again. It's her executive function. It makes me feel included. It doesn't make me feel bad.

And when you-- and it makes everybody else feel better too, because people want to be good. People have high empathy. People don't go on this Earth going, you know, I'm going to really piss off Tara today. Nobody goes into this world saying that, right? So when you could be proactively kind just by being accommodating, it's magic. It goes a very long way.

And also, company-related social events. I actually quit a job. I used to work at Ogilvy and Mather, an advertising agency. And on Friday nights, we were forced to go to the bar with our clients. By Friday night, I was done. I needed to go home and sleep and get some energy up so that I could go out and enjoy my social life.

I had to go to the work and socialize. My mask was cracking at that stage. I just had nothing left, and I was being forced to do it. So when you're doing social events, think about, is this mandatory? Do they have to be there?

Giving permission to turn off their video cameras is the very same as giving them permission to not attend an event. If it's not-- give them permission. And the other thing, it wasn't mentioned, what to wear. That is a neurodivergent's greatest nightmare. We're going to the bar.

Are you going to the bar? Can I wear the clothes I'm wearing-- this? Are we getting dressed? Or do I have to bring something? Just let people know what to wear.

If it starts at 7:00, our guys will be there at 6:45. Neurodivergents are pretty timely, unless you have my executive function issue. Pretty timely. They'll come in early. If people are actually going to start showing up at 8:00, are they going to leave because they think no one's there and they were being joked out, where there's people trying to bully them into going to a place that nobody was there? Because that's been their life's experience.

So if it starts at 7:00, but people show up at 8:00, let them know people show up at 8:00. They'll show up at 7:30, and they won't wait an hour and a half for everybody else.

What the heck is business casual? Great question. Love to know the answer. I don't think anybody has it. So if it's chinos and a top, say chinos and a top. If you're business casual at Gucci, that's a way different story than business casual at the Target lunch party, right? Totally different. So you really need to understand that. Next slide.

ELISA LEWIS: Before I go to the next slide, Valerie has a great question. They asked, some environments aren't as open at this point. I'm curious if any ND folks have tips for navigating without necessarily disclosing. You have any thoughts on that?

TARA Yeah. So in America, you do not need to disclose your disability if you have an accommodation need. OK? I'll say
CUNNINGHAM: that again. You do not need to disclose your disability if you have an accommodation need.

So if you require a bigger screen for vision, you could say, I need a larger screen so that I can do my work appropriately. They are not allowed to ask you for proof that you need a bigger screen. OK? It is an accommodation. It is something you need.

If you want your lights turned off because they're too bright over your desk and wearing a hat isn't something that works for you, you are allowed to say, the light is giving me migraines. Or the glare is too big. I need to turn the light off. And they should turn the light off, if it's only affecting your space. If it's ruining everybody else's space, you need to talk about a new location.

It is extremely important to know you do not need to disclose your disability. OK? In a safe place, disclosing your disability can make it a lot easier for you to get accommodations, like flexible work time.

If everybody's got to be back at the office, knowing that on Wednesday I need to work from home, it'll give me that time-- remember the one young man who did a week's worth of output in two and a half hours. He needed that extra day. You give him the day because the output is there. OK?

If you can make a case that says, it is really important that I need this extra day because I'll be able to continue to hit the goals that you've set for me and-- yada, yada, da, da, da-- as long as you can support your outcomes will be stronger because of this accommodation. You get to have it, OK?

So if a company is saying, we need to see your diagnosis, we need to see-- you could say, I really don't think you do. And this is my problem. And the American with Disabilities ask that reasonable accommodations are taken to care.

I'm talking about the United States of America. This is the USA. There are similar laws, very similar across the world that-- I just did this on an international call yesterday. There's laws that are all based on the American with Disabilities Act. And the thing that stays the same is reasonable accommodations.

That does not mean that your company buys you glasses. It does not mean that a company buys you hearing aids. Those are things that you need to function in this world. It's things that you need to function in the workplace. So noise-canceling headphones, that counts as an accommodation, all right?

Not wearing a suit. You might need a lot of neurodivergent people, autistic people, specifically, need loose clothes, because clothes feel like sandpaper. If the outfit is supposed to be business casual-- I'll use that since that was brought up-- and that doesn't work for you, you can say, I can't wear chinos. I'm going to wear these sweatpants. If that's a problem for you, you need to explain why that's a problem for you, because it's not affecting my work.

Your job at work is to produce what the job needs you to. If wearing chinos makes you uncomfortable and you're spending your whole day scratching your body instead of doing your job, clearly wearing sweatpants is a good thing.

I'm seeing, if employer-- medical accommodation, doesn't the employer have to-- it doesn't have to list diagnosis, but don't they need to provide confirmation from a physi--? That is a legal question. And the broad interpretation of the American with Disabilities Act is reasonable accommodations.

So is it unreasonable to ask for a light to change? Is it unreasonable to ask for a desk-- in a hot desk situation to say, I want desk number 42? It's where I feel most comfortable. I don't get a lot of people, blah blah, blah. It's not the corner desk with the view of New York City.

It's just my desk. That's a reasonable accommodation. You do not need a medical letter saying you need desk 36. A good employer just goes, sure, you can have desk 36. If that's how you're going to do better outputs, go for it.

A lot of companies spend a fortune trying to minimize how much they're going to spend on accommodations, because it's not from a generalized fund. If the fund comes from your manager's budget, there may be discomfort both for the manager and the employee saying I need a bigger desk. That's coming out of the manager's budget. That's going to hurt him to not be able to give somebody a bonus at the end of the year.

If the accommodation is a generalized accommodation, then it's no skin off the manager's back to get you that computer, that monitor. So these are-- OOD can buy hearing aids if there's no insurance and needed for work. Yeah. Those are individual things.

But the company doesn't have-- does not have to buy you your hearing aids. That's the important piece of that, that point I was trying to make. That's not a reasonable accommodation. Hearing aids are not reasonable accommodation. That's what you need to live your life.

That's like saying a car is a reasonable accommodation. No, it is not. The company does not need to buy you a car so you can get to work. So it's that word reasonable accommodation is the important bit. And the askjan.org is one of the best sites that you can go to.

It's a government site. It's free. And it explains all the accommodations that are available from the government that companies should be adhering to. So it's a great site to take a look at. Askjan.org.

ELISA LEWIS: Great. So I just want to be mindful of time. We have about six minutes left. But we've been having some great conversation. So thank you, everyone. I'm going to quickly run through this next slide on digital platform accessibility.

So in addition to all of the other components of accessibility in the workplace, it's also important to ensure that any third-party platforms that you're working with or any tech are accessible as well.

So a couple of things that this could look like is making sure that the technology that you're using works with assistive devices, keyboard navigation, screen readers, things like that. Also, making sure that you're following or that the technology follows Web Content Accessibility, or WCAG, guidelines as a benchmark, and also asking the vendors during the procurement process for VPATS, or a Voluntary Product Accessibility Template. So this, if you're not aware, is a document that explains how the technology satisfies Section 508 requirements for IT accessibility.

So if a company says they don't have one, that's a pretty good indicator that they are not up to speed in terms of accessibility. And if they do, it's a great starting point. But certainly, you'll want to continue digging in further. But as best practice, like at 3Play, we really don't move forward with a vendor or any sort of tech company that is not accessible.

Because ultimately, in order to provide an accessible experience for our audience and users, that technology that we're expecting people to use has to be accessible as well. And I will pass it back to you to wrap us up on clear communication. Oh, you're muted, Tara.

TARA
CUNNINGHAM: I'm sorry. Well, let's do this. So we've talked a little bit about this already. So when you're doing a project, you want to talk about who, what, where, when, how. If you, as a manager, do not understand those answers, the answers to those questions about a project, you need to talk to your manager to find out what we're doing, why we're doing it, where we're doing it, when it's due, how we're going to do it, and how does it fit into the greater strategy of the company.

If you don't know those things, you're not going to be able to explain to your team what clearly needs to be done. Again, you want to agree on the best form of communication for that project, OK?

The team decision-- all right-- teams should decide-- the people of the team should decide the skills that they can contribute best to the project. If there is a hole in skills of the team, so let's say we need to do a project and nobody wants to do the budget, is it that nobody wants to do the budget, nobody knows how to do the budget, or nobody can do the budget?

If this keeps coming up over and over again, as a manager, you should realize this is a skills drop we have, and we either need to get somebody to stretch and learn this skill, or we need to work with another team to try to add to our team to fill in this hole.

Or alternatively, this is going to keep coming up, so the next time I have an FTE, I'm going to make sure that this is one of the requirements so that we can have a strong skills strength team. There's no such thing as a well-rounded individual. So we should not assume that the team is well-rounded.

You check for understanding. You make sure everybody on the team knows what they need to do, by when, and how, and they know how to find out information if things change in one location. Next slide, please.

Bulleted email, OK? After the manager has done this, everybody knows what they're doing-- takes five minutes, just five minutes-- the manager should send an email to everybody saying, Elisa is doing this, Meg is doing this, Monica's doing this. Here's the timeline. If anybody has any problems, this is where we're putting the information.

This ends water cooler discussions. We don't want water cooler discussions, because the only people that are involved in water cooler discussions know what's happening next. People outside of that are still guessing, OK?

And then you want to go, as a manager, back to the team and see how everybody is reacting to the work that they're going to do. People have had time to process the information now. Do they have questions? Did things-- did we forget a piece? Is there something that we need to work on to make sure that this works seamlessly?

And the final thing is when problems come up, we don't wait until the next team meeting. It's an immediate collaboration opportunity. I just came up with this idea, or I've hit this wall. It's going to affect our timeline. We need to get back together.

Having it in one location helps you follow this train of thought. It's very simple project-based communication. It takes about an extra 15 minutes of the manager's time, but the productivity is huge on the other side. Because, if we remember, one of the first statistics we shared is 54% of employees have no idea what's expected from them at work.

That's because this is not happening on a daily basis, OK? Does that make sense? Hopefully? OK. No more-- OK.

Oh, and performance reviews. So it has been showed that if you feed back to employees what they're doing well often and what they're doing wrong is really important and improves tasks' performance accuracy by 100%. That's before you give out money saying, if you do really well, I'll give you five grand. There's no money involved in this.

So it's-- when somebody does something wrong, you should explain it to them before they do the same thing again. So right before they're about to embark on a project. The last time we did this, you did X. What we need you to do is Y. And here's the reason. Do you understand? Can you feed it back to me?

So when we do it this time, that's the way you're going to do it, yeah? No questions? No? Cool. Off they go. Lo and behold, they're going to do their work correctly. You do not want to sit on negative feedback until an annual review.

Because what typically happens is you blow up. You go, for the ninth time, why aren't you doing-- blah, blah, blah. You didn't even realize you were doing your work wrong. OK? Conversely, if you don't know you're doing your work right, you're working in a tunnel and you're not sure if you're doing it right or wrong. And so you're getting less and less engaged with the work, because you're not sure if you're even doing it right, if you're adding any value.

So managers that have, and employees that are trained to receive feedback, have increased task performance by 10% to 30%. So just these small changes work for neurodivergent individuals, work for people with disabilities, but they work for everybody. And they're all necessary today. So I'll pass it back over to you.

ELISA LEWIS: Yes, thank you. And I realize that we are just a minute over time. So I do want to be mindful of that. We had some great questions and conversation throughout. Thank you so much, Tara, for presenting with us today.

Thank you to our ASL interpreter and to our captioner. And thank you to everyone who joined. I sent a couple reminders in the chat, as well as a link to a quick feedback survey and some information on upcoming webinars, as well as our annual accessibility conference coming up at the end of April. It's called Access.

Please take a moment to share your feedback. And as a reminder, the recording will be sent out with the slides. And we'll include some of the resources that we talked about and that individuals shared in the chat today. So thank you, again, for joining us, and we hope that everyone has a great rest of the day.