

Ep #145: What I got wrong about accessibility

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With Your Host

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Hey, I'm Simone Seoul, and I'm your Korean mom. I'm going to show you that it's entirely possible to attract *your* people to your business and creative pursuits, and turn your marketing experience into one full of pleasure and marketing-gasms, just by being yourself. Let's go.

Hey, everyone. So, guess what? At the time of recording this podcast today, which is May 18 of 2023, it's Global Accessibility Awareness Day. And I thought I would celebrate this day by telling you some things about where I got this whole accessibility thing really wrong. Now, for a long time, honestly, I avoided looking into accessibility issues in my business. I had this vague sense that it mattered, and that I should look into it and make some changes and learn some things. But I put it off, I procrastinated, I filed it under 'I'll do it someday, when circumstances line up perfectly'.

I have to tell you why I was procrastinating. Number one, I was afraid that if I were to start learning stuff, I would find that I'm already doing a million things very wrong. And everything in my business is inaccessible and that I would hate my business, hate myself, and feel like a terrible person.

Secondly, I was afraid that there's probably so much to learn and so much to do, that no matter what, I would just end up feeling like I'm doing something wrong and I'm doing something inadequately and people are going to get mad at me and then I'm going to feel like an asshole.

And third, I honestly wasn't even sure there was that much of a need for it in my audience. I was like, "I don't even know what percentage of my people experience disability, it's probably not that many." And I was like, "That might be for other people's audience, but not mine. Is it honestly worth going through all that trouble? Obviously, it's good to do, but does it make sense in terms of business math?"

So, those were all the thoughts I used to have, and all the things that, honestly, held me back. And I'm also going to tell you what was my impetus for changing my mind enough to want to look at it again, enough to want to learn, and it was when I got pregnant. Two things happened when I got pregnant. One, I experienced an experience of disability for the first time in

Ep #145: What I got wrong about accessibility

my life. That sounds weird to say experience and experience. You know what I mean? I had an experience of disability for the first time in my life.

Of course, compared to lots of people with disability, what I experienced was a teensy, tiny, little decimal point fraction of what a lot of people experience. But I didn't have an easy time with pregnancy. I was very sick for a lot of it, and my mobility was very limited. There were like weeks and weeks when I couldn't even walk five steps without vomiting. I had a hard pregnancy.

And because of that, my perspective changed. I was like, "Oh, I've never experienced this before." A lot of normal everyday life things that I used to take for granted were no longer being accessible. And that got me paying attention to, "Wait, there are other people out there who have different experiences than me. Who need different accommodations than what I was used to as a mostly able-bodied person, most of my life."

The second thing about when I got pregnant was there was a time when I had no idea what was up with my baby. I didn't know what kind of brain he would have. I didn't know what kind of body he would have. I was contemplating all the possibilities. And I remember thinking, "Wow, I literally have no idea what my kid's going to come out being like." I would hate it, as his mother, if he was held back in the world in some way because the world was unable to meet his needs, whatever they may or may not be.

And that's when I really started thinking seriously about the issue of disability. That's when I learned, I was humbled to learn, for the first time, that a disability is far more widespread than I thought. And the world is far more inaccessible than I thought. And another thing that I learned, is that even someone like me, who was able to be oblivious to a lot of this... Even I experienced temporary disability in my life, for example in pregnancy. And if I am lucky and get to live to a long age, then at an old age I will also experience some form of disability.

So, I had this awakening of, oh, disability isn't over there, it's here, it's everywhere. It's a part of life. I'm kind of embarrassed to admit to all of this,

Ep #145: What I got wrong about accessibility

because a lot of people listening will be like, “Wow, congratulations. You learned that when you were like 35. Like, how oblivious were you?” And I really was. That was a real turning point. But that was when I learned, right?

Once I had that turnaround point, here's what I learned about all of the assumptions that I had, that had me procrastinating on looking into how I can make my business more accessible. And I want to tell you, because I know that at least some of you might be having some of those thoughts.

And the first thing I want to tell you is, this whole story of, “You're probably getting it all wrong now and you better get it all perfect overnight. You better learn everything there is to learn. Otherwise, you're doing accessibility wrong, and then you're a huge asshole. And everyone's going to hate you,” you know that whole story. I know that many of you must have it because I had it, too. Well, guess what? It's not true.

The truth is that, just on average, almost nobody is even thinking about accessibility in the wider world. Just the fact that you care, that you want to learn, that you have the desire to do something, anything, about it puts you in a minority of people who are really cool and care. It makes you the opposite of an asshole. And if you happen to mess something up by accident, nobody's going to be mad at you about it. Somebody might correct you, like, “Hey, it's actually you should do this and not that,” and then you get to learn and do a little bit better.

And if anyone is like angry at you and calls you names, and is mean to you because you're not getting something perfect when you're in the stages of learning, that's their problem. They're an asshole, not you for trying to learn, right? Plus, in different kinds of activism, and just trying to make the world a less shitty place, an important thing I'm learning, across the board in different areas, is if you're able to do a little bit differently at a time. Let your work be slow and incremental and do one little thing at a time, at a pace and rhythm that feels manageable and fun.

Ep #145: What I got wrong about accessibility

And you can enjoy yourself while you're pursuing accessibility. You can enjoy the process of learning. You can have fun with it. Then you're actually a lot more likely to actually stick with it, and have it be a sustainable and permanent part of your life. And then you can have a much bigger impact with accessibility for the entire span of your life.

Versus being somebody who is hustling hard and putting themselves in all this pressure to get it perfect and do everything right and learn everything overnight, otherwise thinking that they failed. You know that's a recipe for burnout, resentment that is unsustainable. That is not helpful for anyone.

Literally the most helpful thing you can do for people with disabilities, is to not try to get it all perfect tomorrow, that's a good thing. Doing a tiny little bit at a time, at a pace, at a rhythm where it's not too stressful, it's sustainable, you're enjoying the process, that is the best thing you can do to further this cause. Right?

So, now let's talk about the whole "I'm not even sure my audience needs accessibility accommodations. How many people with disability even are there in my audience," kind of thing. And I have to say, this is where I am embarrassed, because what I eventually realized was that it was a ridiculous chicken and egg situation of me thinking, "Oh, my audience doesn't need accessibility."

And then I don't take steps to make my business more accessible. And then people who have disabilities aren't able to participate in my business, and therefore because they're excluded, I don't see people with disability. You, see? I saw this and I was like, "Oh, wow, that was stupid." Right?

Also, statistically, I was just grossly misinformed. According to the studies, at least 15% of the world's entire population experience some form of visibility. The majority of them are online and use the internet. There are multiple trillions of disposable income, that's going to be spent by people with disabilities and their family and advocates. And that figure, the 15% of the world's population with disability, increases significantly when also

Ep #145: What I got wrong about accessibility

considering temporary and situational disabilities, like the one that I talked about with my pregnancy.

So basically, it's literally, statistically, unless you are somehow a weird statistical outlier, a significant... 15%, that's a big percentage of the audience that you could be having, experiencing some form of disability; 15% or likely more, right? And if you are not being inclusive of them at all, then you can basically consider yourself to be losing out on a huge percentage, huge proportion of people, who otherwise could be participating in your business and paying you money. And they're not, just because your business is not inclusive of them yet.

Once I started taking measures to be mindful of accessibility, and speaking out about my commitment towards accessibility and taking action, then it was a whoosh. Suddenly all these people came out of the woodwork wanting to participate in my business, started buying from me, and started thanking me for creating spaces that were more inclusive of them. So, when I started to be more accessible, the more people came out to patronize my business. you know,

I hope my agenda here is clear. I've been transparent. What I really want to impress upon you is that any little, tiny step that you can take towards improving accessibility for your business, no matter how small it is, no matter how imperfect, no matter how slow you're doing it, is a win-win-win. It's good for your business, it's good for your heart, it's good for the humans, it's good for the world.

Now, I'm relating all of this to you not as an accessibility expert; hohoho, I am so, so not an expert. But as a fellow student, who is learning alongside you and doing all of this very imperfectly. However, there is one thing that I did right. There are so many things I could be doing better, I have so much to learn. But there's one thing that I did, right, and I really want to kind of offer that to you as well.

Which is that, one, I decided that working towards accessibility is for me. Like, this is my work. I am a part of this, like I'm in it. And second of all, I

Ep #145: What I got wrong about accessibility

decided to throw perfectionism and self-judgment out the window, and decided any amount of slow, incremental, tiny progress is good enough and I'm going to celebrate myself for it. This is never going to be a reason that I'm mean to myself. And three, I decided that it also gets to be fun.

So, I want to invite you to decide that with me today. Decide with me, right now, "Hey, I'm going to decide right now that accessibility is for me. That I'm going to throw perfectionism out the window, that slow is good, incremental is good, tiny little bit at a time that I can do is good. And I'm never going to use this to beat myself up. And that it gets to be fun. Whatever I can do sustainably is good enough, and I'm going to enjoy it." I think that's the best.

And I say that was a really good decision, because guess what? It kept me in the path of learning. It kept me in the path of continuing to be open. And as a result, my business, once again, not even close to perfect, but has become incrementally more accessible over time. I think there's no way I would have been able to accomplish that if I use this whole thing against myself and held myself to an unrealistic standard of thinking, that no matter what my constraints in time, money, resources, I have to get everything perfect, otherwise I'm an asshole. Right? So, don't do that.

Now, I want to offer you, before the end of this podcast, some ideas for action you can take today, and also not today. Maybe you want to take it slow and implement it over a period of time. Remember, this is a lifelong project, to make the world a more sensible place. It is not flash and burn, it is not get it all perfect overnight. So, whatever we can implement sustainably.

I want to share some what I call low-hanging fruits, which are relatively easy to do. And then some other ideas that may be relevant to you if you have a bigger business with a bigger budget, and there's more resources for you to play with. So, here's some low hanging fruit. Number one, I'm going to assume that you most likely use Zoom calls in your business. If you use Zoom calls, enable captions on your Zoom calls. If you're not sure what that means, you can google how to enable captions in Zoom calls, but

Ep #145: What I got wrong about accessibility

I swear it is literally so simple. And once you have the right setting, there's a button on your Zoom that lets you do that. It's really easy.

Number two, you can make your social media posts more accessible by following certain design principles and accompanying your images with alt text. I'm going to link... One, it's not going to be too effective. And two, I'm not even sure I could do a good job of walking you through the how-to of that. So, I'm going to link a link to a great resource, to how to do that, in the show notes.

Third, if you offer live classes, it's easy enough you guys, to make replays available. Make it easy for people to access asynchronous learning as much as possible. So, offer video-audio replays. That's going to go a long way for people who have different learning needs.

And lastly, amongst the low-hanging fruit, I think that it can be really tough to anticipate every kind of accessibility barrier that every kind of person with every kind of disability might need. So, I think one really simple step you can take, is that whenever you're marketing, your course, your coaching your program, your service, whatever, I think in your marketing, on your sales page, whatever, you can include simple language that really comes from your heart. Like, "Should you require any accessibility accommodations, please let us know. You can contact us at this email address," whatever, "And we will be happy to work with you to figure out a solution." Just let people know that you actually care about accessibility and that you're willing to work with people.

And if somebody needs something that you honestly can't provide, because of your limitations in your budget, whatever, then it doesn't mean you're a horrible person. Sometimes you just can't, certain things are beyond your ability. And then, that's okay. That's okay. People realize that you're not Pepsi, you're not Disney, you're not Google; you don't have infinite resources.

I think a lot of people, my guess is that most people would be touched that you have the right intentions, and that you will try. Even if you can't do

Ep #145: What I got wrong about accessibility

everything that everybody needs. And I bet there's a lot that you can do for a lot of people that you don't even know. So, those are some of what I think of as low-hanging fruits.

And here are some other things that I think, again, you could look into if you have a bigger business with a bigger budget and more resources. Number one, hire ASL interpreters, American Sign Language interpreters, for classes. I started doing this a while ago for my one-time master classes, they almost always have ASL interpretation. And it's been amazing.

Secondly, I recommend getting an accessibility audit for your programs, for your website. Once again, this obviously takes resources. So, if you have zero budget and you're just getting your business up and running, this is probably not realistic for you. Although there's things that you can look up online, that you can check yourself. But if you have the resources, it's a great thing to do, to get an accessibility audit.

Third, if you offer a structured learning program, where there's a set curriculum and each week you go through something different, and stuff like that, I think goes a long way to offer catch-up sessions, integration sessions. I think the assumption that everybody is able to learn at the same pace is a kind of ableist assumption. And somebody could have the best intentions and be able to put in as much effort as they can, and still, just because they have different brain-body needs, not be able to learn at the exact same pace as everybody else.

And what I'm saying only applies if you have, for example, a curriculum that's like, I don't know, eight weeks long, and you cover something in week one, something in week two, and then it just keeps progressing. It really helps everyone's learning if you assume that some people are going to fall behind. Not because they're lazy, not because they don't care, but because of accessibility issues. Offer even one catch-up call, one integration call; that's going to go a really long way.

Now, lastly, once again, this is if you have enough of a budget, enough resources for this, when you offer classes, courses, whatever, see if you

Ep #145: What I got wrong about accessibility

can have video, audio, and text accessibility wherever possible. So, for example, I have weekly calls in my flagship program. And for us, it is unrealistic to have professionally produced transcripts for every single week's call. Because each weekly call can run like three, four hours, and that's just like way too much for us; we can't afford it.

However, we turn on Zoom captioning, so that there's some form of text that people can keep up with if hearing is difficult. And we also have a private podcasting service that we use to make an audio only version of my Zoom call replays, that people can just stream into their podcast thing. And we use a service called HelloAudio.fm. It's pretty affordable and we're very happy with it. And so, if you have a thing, service, where there's a lot of video-audio content, and with video content you can make audio, this is something that you could consider for yourself.

And what else? Yeah, just every time, when you have something, ask yourself, is there another way, another format that I can turn this into where it'll make learning easier for people? So, I think that a lot of the things that I just mentioned, again, literally not applicable to smaller solopreneur operations, not accessible to businesses with smaller budgets. If you are like, "I don't know if I can pay for that?" That is not a problem. Please don't use that against yourself.

I think if you do a lot of social media marketing, website, like making that stuff more accessible, I think is going to take you a long way. And even as I'm saying stuff, I'm like, "Am I right?" I think I'm right. But if I say something wrong on the podcast, that's like very wrong, please let me know, and I will correct myself. But I do think that the standards, just in the wider world for accessibility, are so low. And that people are, by and large, not super informed about it. So, if you do the basics, I think it's a great start.

Again, do what you can. Decide that this is for you. And then no matter how slow your progress, no matter how little you can do, it's amazing, you're doing great, and that you're going to enjoy it. Because once again, that's the best way to make it sustainable for the rest of your life. Okay, happy Global Accessibility Awareness Day.

I Am Your Korean Mom with Simone Grace Seol

Ep #145: What I got wrong about accessibility

Again, I'm going to add more links, to more helpful accessibility resources, in the show notes. So, if you want to learn more, you can refer to those. And also, Google it. Google "accessibility resources", specific questions that you might have about the specific social media platform you're using, or a special kind of program you're running. I'm sure there's a lot of resources out there.

Once again, I'm not speaking to you as an expert, I'm speaking to you as another student, who is maybe a little bit further ahead than you in some areas, and maybe a little bit behind you. I am learning with you. I am sharing this podcast episode as like, "Hey, let me share with you what I'm learning," sort of place, as opposed to, "I'm an expert so let me teach you how to do it," kind of place. Okay?

I hope that in maybe in a few years, I'll be able to record another accessibility episode and be like, "Wow, I was such an accessibility baby back in the day. And now, I'm doing so many things better and with more finesse." I'm excited to get there. So yeah, happy Accessibility Awareness Day. I am looking forward to the day where no one is excluded from anything that could benefit them. And thank you for being part of the group of people, community, around me who are all working towards that day and all the different ways that we can.

Alright, talk to you next week.

Hey, if you're looking for a one-stop shop where you can find the best of my teaching, all organized into a beautiful and actionable sequence, guess what? I got you. I took the best of my podcast episodes and created a whole damn workbook around them. It's called *The Simone Starter Pack* and it's the ultimate marketing cheat sheet. I got countless emails from folks who downloaded it, saying, "This free resource is worth more than all these courses I paid thousands of dollars for." So, what are you waiting for? Go grab *The Simone Starter Pack*. The link is in the show notes. I can't wait to see what amazing results you'll get from it.