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Inclusivity Does Not Exist

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It is an honour to be representing Australia at the United Nations today.

Good morning to you all.

If I were to ask you to describe an item I am holding with your eyes closed, what would you think?

If I were to ask you to listen to my presentation on mute, what would you think?

How about hailing a bus if you cannot see it approaching?

I could keep going with hypothetical scenarios, but they are only hypothetical for those who are not considered disabled by society.

If we take one of the aforementioned scenarios further, and put you in the middle of a metropolis and ask you to hail a bus you cannot see, some of you might take the challenge, but most will not.

If you do take the challenge, you will be frustrated at some point throughout the experience.

This is why inclusive spaces are so important. Because if we take society's rules, able people will be considered disabled if they take the challenge: even if it is for a short period of time.

Inclusion is a collective effort. There are three key points we must be aware of in order to make inclusion a fact of life.

- Inclusivity does not exist.
- Do not be inclusive because it is the right thing to do.
- Inclusivity is only hard if you make it hard.

The 3 points above go against everything that we are trying to do with inclusion around the world. However, sometimes we must break stuff before we can fix it. And believe me, this is one of those times.

1. Inclusivity does not exist.

Inclusivity is a dream, nothing else. Inclusivity is:

- only as powerful as the condition in question
- as easy as that condition is to understand by the general population
- as admirable as that specific condition's thought leaders are and
- as powerful as the organisations that represent those who have that particular condition are.

If you are vision impaired like myself, you know that audio, large print, bright colours and Braille are not the only ways of making something accessible. However, that is the assumption that everybody who designs for us makes. And, that applies for all disabilities under the sun: even those disabilities that are still yet to be classified. I do not want anybody to misconstrued what I am saying to mean: inclusivity is not possible. Rather, it is easier to achieve as long as we are all on the same page.

- **Do not be inclusive because it is the right thing to do.**

The second point is very important. Inclusivity is not something that should be done because it is the right thing to do. That "feel good" state does not last forever.

We all know what the right things we should do are, and yet we don't always do them:

- Don't litter.
- Don't talk behind somebody's back.
- Be kind to others.

Subconsciously, or consciously we all break these simple rules. So, we must do ourselves a favour. We should not pretend that the complex issue of inclusivity can have

the same “feel good” attitude apply to it. There are many reasons to make spaces in our lives inclusive, but, here are 2:

- Inclusivity makes life better for able individuals, and
- Inclusivity makes financial sense no matter where you are in the world.
- **Inclusivity is only hard if you make it hard.**

Anything is hard, but it can also evolve into something easy. Our battleground: our world, is the biggest inaccessible space there is. I am disabled because the sighted world says so, but not for anything else. I am not the only one. We are disabled in the eyes, ears and minds of the able world: just because they say so. But not for anything else. We approach inclusivity and inclusive spaces as a retrofit and as a protectionist measure.

Be inclusive from the beginning, no matter the project. My company: Hailo, has developed an accessible system to hail buses. This will be tried in Sydney, Australia using phones. Instead of waiting for a bus hoping the driver sees you, you can alert them in advance, and never be left behind again. This started as a way of making public transport accessible for vision impaired individuals. However, the benefits are for all. People in wheelchairs, people with prams, people new to a city, ETC.

Please let us fail. Otherwise, how are we supposed to learn from our mistakes? Just because somebody with our specific condition has not done something before, or it is scary, it does not mean that it cannot be accomplished. I have driven a car, gone scuba diving, gone rock climbing, piloted a plane, ETC. And, I am better because of the experiences. From the simple things in life, to the complex, we ought to experience them all.

We, as disabled people rely on the kindness of strangers, and hope that their kindness will make our world accessible. That only gets us so far: now, for the rest. Our world can be made accessible, and it doesn't need to be hard. Do not idealise thought leaders for any condition. By doing so, the ambition for an inclusive world with inclusive spaces disappears. Because for every thought leader, there are billions of people who just want to get on with their lives. If you don't know, just ask.