

## Women in Business and Technology

Transcript of Episode 009 - Driving innovation with Accessibility Architect Mary Bellard

Featuring: Mary Bellard

Summary: In this episode, Colleen speaks with Microsoft Senior Accessibility Architect Mary Bellard to learn more about how to incorporate accessibility into product development processes. Colleen and Sonia network over beers to support Techbridge Girls, an organization dedicated to advancing opportunity for girls in STEM. Our hosts wrap the show with a discussion about representing jobs in the tech industry that don't require technical skill sets.

*Find audio and more information at [Microsoft.com/WIBT](https://Microsoft.com/WIBT)*

Every release needs to keep getting better or, at the very least, maintain the level of accessibility, is really important and that check box alone just does not suffice.

[MUSIC]

Retail's big show, The 2018 National Retail Federation, or the NRF Conference is returning to New York City from January 14th to the 16th.

For more than a century, NRF's annual convention has been an important gathering for industry leaders. Microsoft is one of the largest sponsors of this event, and this year, we are looking forward to having an in-depth conversation around home and online, front of house, back office and connected supply.

For more information about the event, visit [www.nrfbigshow.com](http://www.nrfbigshow.com).

>> [MUSIC]

>> You're listening to the Women in Business and

Technology podcast from Microsoft.

In each episode, you will hear from women in amazing tech and business roles.

As well as male allies who are helping make the industries more inclusive.

We are diving into programs that are promote greater diversity in the pipeline and bringing you tapes on how to build a successful career in a supportive community.

Welcome to Women in Business and Technology.

[MUSIC]

>> Welcome to episode nine of Women in Business and Technology.

I'm Sonia Dara.

>> And I'm Colleen O'Brien.

>> We're kicking things off in our community connects segment with a visit to a recent event called BE(ER) AN(D) ENGINEER, a fundraising initiative for a non-profit supporting girls in STEM called Techbridge Girls.

>> And then we'll jump into an interview I had with Mary Bullard, a Senior Accessibility Architect here at Microsoft, helping make our products work for people with disabilities. Finally, we'll wrap things up in our cutting edge segment with the discussion on representing jobs in the tech industry that don't require any coding expertise.

Let's jump right in.

[MUSIC]

>> Sonia, welcome back from Thanksgiving.

I know that you had a great time in Atlanta,

I was back here in Seattle.

But now we're in the thick of the holiday season,

which is always a pretty reflective time for me.

I'm looking back on 2017 and doing some personal and professional goal-setting for 2018.

>> I'm doing a bit of that planning, as well.

One training, though,

that you should consider is offered by Duarte Academy.

I was invited to attend a training session with them just prior to Thanksgiving break, and

it was a one-day workshop called Captivate.

And so we're learning how to be more effective presenters.

And so they teach you how to be more comfortable, how to be dynamic, and how to actually be empathetic to the audience.

So it was awesome, I highly recommend it for any marketers, product managers, or entrepreneurs out there.

>> Yeah, that training has definitely been on my radar for a little while now.

I first learned about Nancy Duarte, whose company provides those trainings, when I watched her TED Talk.

It was called The Secret Structure of Great Talks, which is pretty meta.

She's giving this TED Talk about great TED Talks.

>> Yeah, they talk about the talk.

>> [LAUGH] Yeah.

>> That's cool.

>> We used her Harvard Business Review Guide to Persuasive Presentations book in my business school communications class.

And lastly, I picked up her book Resonate after she visited Microsoft in 2015.

So I am a major fangirl of Nancy Duarte's work.

>> Number one fan in the room right here.

>> [LAUGH] >> Yeah, so for you listeners, whether you're interested in honing your storytelling skills or putting together an awesome presentation for say, an end of your meeting.

>> You can find a ton of great training, links to books, and free content at [duarte.com](http://duarte.com).

D-U-A-R-T-E.com

[MUSIC]

>> Community Connect,  
get involved and stay connected.

>> Earlier this month, Colleen and

I headed to Optimism Brewing in Capitol Hill, in Seattle.

For an event called, Beer and Engineer or Be, B-E an Engineer, depending on how you interpreted the great stylistic usage of parenthesis in their logo.

The event was a fundraising initiative for Techbridge Girls, a non-profit organization that seeks to expand the academic and career options for girls in science, technology, and engineering.

Career women and young children alike worked on engineering activities at tables in the brewery.

Both Colleen and I donated virtual beers to the cause, and connected with a few of the dozens of attendees.

Marian George is an applied scientist at Amazon.

She explained how important it is for women in STEM to inspire the next generation of girls at these types of gatherings.

>> These kinds of events, I think, are really good to boost some confidence and encourage women to approach this field, and make them feel they are welcome.

>> Leah Bar-on Simmons is a software engineer at Microsoft.

She attended the event to learn more about volunteer opportunities and ways she can encourage girls to pursue computer science.

>> I noticed how influential we can be to freshmen coming in.

Freshman girls coming in and

taking a class as difficult as an introductory computer science class, they need role models that are also women.

It makes a huge difference.

You can have a role model, but

if you can't connect in that same kind of way,

knowing that they went through the same thing you went through.

It's really important for that to happen.

And so seeing that this is for

even younger kids, it's super important to me.

I'm also new to Seattle, and so

I wanna be a part of that community.

And I think knowing that these things happen makes me really excited and I'd want to be able to be a part of that.

>> Kyleen Junier is a Senior Project Engineer at Skanska who wants to help more girls find their way into STEM intentionally.

>> I didn't know what engineering was until I was an engineer.

And I think it would have been very helpful to have known, at least have some exposure to females in engineering, when I was in middle school and high school.

And also to understand some of the career opportunities that were available to me.

Cuz I kind of stumbled into civil engineering and got really lucky that I have loved it.

>> Kyleen was hopeful about the impact of Be(er) an(d) Engineer,

but noted an opportunity to represent even broader diversity at future events.

>> Hopefully, more women in senior executive positions, I see a lot of women at my position, senior project engineer, and project engineer.

And not so many in the vice president level and project executive level.

And it'd be really encouraging to see more senior level women involved, especially women of color.

>> For more information about Techbridge Girls programming, or to make a donation to the nonprofit organization, visit [techbridgegirls.org](http://techbridgegirls.org).

And now let's get on to the interview.

[MUSIC]

>> I'm excited to welcome to the show today

Senior Accessibility Architect Mary Bullard.

Mary, thanks for being on the show.

>> Thank you so much for inviting me.

>> You work on Microsoft's Corporate External and Legal Affairs team, in the Technology and Corporate Responsibility Group.

What does your role as an accessibility architect entail?

>> The Corporate External and Legal Affairs team's role

is to support our engineering organizations across Microsoft. And the Technology and Corporate Responsibility team within that division is a group of experts in specific topics, like accessibility, that work to support our current initiatives but also impact and influence what we're gonna do next. The accessibility focus within the team is led by Microsoft's Chief Accessibility Officer Jenny Lay-Flurrie, who is the coolest person ever to get to work with.

>> [LAUGH] >> I've learned so much from her, both in how to be an advocate for people with disabilities, and how to become a leader within my own career. And this architect role that I'm currently in is about understanding what innovation projects are going on, both inside and outside the company, supporting them Whenever appropriate and helping to formulate the strategy of how we're going to stay on the cutting edge of how technology is gonna empower people with disabilities into the future.

>> Can you tell me what a typical day in the life of a senior accessibility architect looks like?

>> Every day's different. It involves recording podcasts like this with you.

>> Yes. [LAUGH] >> This evening I am going to accept an award on behalf of a project that I was involved in called Seeing AI, which is an app for people in the blind and



low vision community leveraging our artificial intelligence within Azure Cognitive Services.

And we're receiving an award from a local organization.

So those are the things that were happening today.

Typical day involves a lot of discussions with product teams like Windows and Office and Cloud and Enterprise and Research.

And helping them answer questions that they have, getting the resources that they need, brainstorming about new ideas that they have.

And this architect role on that team at its core is about understanding what innovation projects are going on, both in and outside the company, supporting those projects where appropriate.

And then helping to formulate a strategy for how we're going to stay on the cutting edge of how technology empowers the disability community.

And the short way of saying that is, this architect role is basically my dream job.

>> [LAUGH] That is great to hear.

I'm so glad to be talking to you on the day that you're receiving the award for Seeing AI, because that it is one of the coolest applications I have ever seen.

>> That's very kind of you to say.

>> Yeah,

I saw it demoed internally at one of Satya's Q & A sessions.

And it was a really powerful experience to see a visually impaired person using that app to navigate the world to see how much a product costs. Or to identify that the person standing in front of her was a 40-something year old man. It was Satya.

>> Yeah.

[LAUGH] >> Yeah, it's a really cool product, and amazing that you had some impact on that. That's very impressive.

>> It was such a fun thing.

It was an idea that came out of a hack-a-thon project, which is sort of our company event every summer. And the people that were involved in it, and I was just one person, but all the people that were involved in it kept pushing and kept working to get it out to our customers in the market. And it's definitely a highlight of my time here at Microsoft.

>> Cool, how did you actually become interested in accessibility?

Did you know that this was your dream job from day one?

>> I did not.

My interest as a child growing up into an adult spanned from everything from wanting to be

a bartender to a DJ to a doctor to everything in between.

And so this interest and passion that has formed around accessibility was kind of a combination of things.

In high school, I was a camp counselor in Brooklyn, New York where I grew up and lived for most of my life.

And this camp was intended for children and adults with physical and cognitive disabilities.

And I was a part of the sports program during my years there.

And it was kind of about trying to figure out games or activities that everyone could participate in.

So that was really the first sort of domino in this situation, and then the second one was in college.

I took American sign language classes for many years.

And that's when I was first exposed to the deaf community and deaf culture.

I learned a lot there, not just in how the deaf community cultivates its own identity, but also in understanding etiquette, and how I could best advocate for and serve as an ally for that community.

And then after college I had some jobs all over the place kind of, and eventually landed in an IT position at a non-profit that served the blind and low vision community and I worked there for about six years.

So those are sort of the three dominoes that were a part of me figuring that accessibility was really interesting, something that I wanted to do.

>> And did each of those experiences sort of build on one another?

At that camp counselor job, did you realize, hey, I really like developing inclusive games or doing this research?

>> It didn't, it was later.

And it was really the role at the nonprofit where it kind of clicked for me that this was what I wanted to do for my career.

And that position allowed me to figure out what I wanted was to help people find technology more useful in whatever way they wanted to use it.

And also find a way to make technology better.

And being able to help people and technology.

The only company that I could accomplish both of those was Microsoft.

>> That's great to hear.

And I would really like to take a step back here and talk a little bit about vocabulary.

How does the team describe the audiences that you're surveying?

I've personally heard descriptors like impaired or disabled.

What is respectful language that we should be using here?

>> Yeah, so everyone has an opinion on this, and every person's opinion is justified.

The golden rule is to ask how someone would like to be referred to.

The approach that Microsoft has taken is to whenever possible use people-first language.

So we'll say a person with a disability,  
a person who is blind, a person who uses a wheelchair,  
where the person comes first, not the disability.

We try to avoid the term impaired for  
any disability community because it's kind of related to  
the medical model of disability where there is something that is  
air quotes wrong with someone.

And we try and spend more time focusing on what someone's  
ability is rather than what their disability is.

So those are the guidance that I would say.

We're not perfect, we can make mistakes.

The part that you can always trust is learn from other people  
and ask what they would prefer that they'd be referred to as.

>> I think that's great guidance.

I've heard it referred to as the platinum rule.

The golden rule being, treat others as you wanna be treated.

The platinum rule is,

treat others as they want to be treated.

>> That's good. I like that one.

>> [LAUGH] >> I like that one.

>> Yeah, you recently gave a talk at your team summit for  
the corporate external and

legal affairs team about signage on gender inclusive  
restrooms that you encountered at a recent conference.

Would you mind relaying that story to our listeners?

>> So I was at a conference a couple of years ago, and I went to use the restroom during one of the breaks. And there was a sign outside the room that said that it was a gender inclusive restroom. And there was a couple stick figures representing the traditional man stick figure, woman stick figure and then the stick figure that has what appears to be half the dress or the cake depending on how you think about it.

>> [LAUGH] >> And half not and then there was also a person in a wheelchair. And underneath the words, gender inclusive restroom, there were braille dots. And so if you are not sure how someone who's blind uses technology or consumes reading material, sometimes they will use audio experiences like screen reading software where they audibly hear what is happening on a screen or some kind of device. And then the other tactic is braille, which is a tactile language represented through dots. So there's sort of an alphabet and a grammar structure around how to convey printed sentences and concepts through this tactile language. And so The dots on the page were intended to also read the words gender inclusive restroom, but they were not tactile. They were printed dots on paper.

>> No. [LAUGH]

>> And so,

the intention was totally there.

The people who had printed out these signs, wanted everyone who encountered those restrooms to feel like they were welcome to use them.

But the execution of that intention was not necessarily right on point, because the braille was not actually useful to someone who would benefit from braille.

So that will a little story that we had, it was an experience that I shared at a company event and the take away that I wanted my team members to get from that is it's really important to have the intention in the right place.

But we also have to match that with execution, and it really speaks to this concept of accessibility is not just a checkbox, it's not something that you just consider at the end of creating a document or at the end of creating a application or mobile app.

It's something that is part of the entire process.

And it's sort of a different way to think about how you design and develop things.

>> And to that end I've been hearing more about accessibility as part of the product development cycle more than ever before.

I think previously in product development cycles accessibility was sort of, through of, as a bolt on.

As in we're ready to ship this product.

Can we check these boxes?

But again, now more than ever.

I'm working with engineers here at the company, who are considering this throughout their product development process.

What do you think is responsible for this energized interest in accessibility as a core component of product development?

>> I'm really happy that you are witnessing more excitement.

>> Yes. [LAUGH] >> That's really exciting.

So the first thing that is pivotal in understanding what is happening right now is this culture change that is happening under Satya Nadella's leadership. This idea that our role, as a global organization, to empower every person and every organization on the planet to achieve more is something that we need to live.

It's not just a mission statement, it is actually what we are doing day in and day out.

So that is the first thing that starts all of this, that makes this a ripe opportunity to raise the bar for what's possible in our experiences.

The second thing is there are people in this company and there are people in our external community that believe accessibility drives innovation.

And the role that the team I'm on has is to get that idea that accessibility drives innovation to more and more teams, so they understand that.

And they embrace it not as a tax but



as a challenge that benefits their overall product.

And going a little step further into that piece, what we're trying to convey is that there are multiple ways to input information and multiple ways that people want information output to them. And we can start a conversation with someone who's blind would benefit from this because x, but that conversation eventually evolves into lots of people would benefit from this because of y. This branching of accessibility being just about people with disabilities into accessibility being about supporting all people through a variety of Input and output is what is this idea of inclusive design and how we're gonna move forward.

>> Can we make that point a little bit more tactile for our audience.

I've often times heard that sidewalk cutouts were originally designed for people in wheelchairs, but when they were better served in our environment, so too were people on bicycles who also had wheels and needed to get up on a sidewalk. Or people who were pushing baby carriages or wheeling luggage. Are there any other examples that your team talks about to make this ideology real for the engineers that you're working with?

>> Absolutely.

So in PowerPoint, we have a tool called PowerPoint Designer. And what happens is, you open up the program.

You have some slides, you insert a photo.

And maybe you add some text,

maybe you add some icons or graphics.

And a pane opens up on the right side of the product.

And it suggests a design for that slide based upon the colors

that are in use and the orientation of the photos and

the number of bullet points that you might have.

This was started as an idea that this would make it really easy and quick to create a visually engaging Powerpoint slide. Great.

So

we have people who are short on time or short on interest in learning all the complexities that the Powerpoint product has.

Great Powerpoint designer can give you an aesthetically pleasing slide fast.

>> Yes, I've used it many times.

[LAUGH] >> Cool.

But then you think about, okay, who else benefits from this?

People with dexterity disabilities, so limited or no use of one or

both hands would also gain from this experience because when you think about PowerPoint slides that you have seen before.

With very extensive graphics and animations,

there are a lot of clicks or key presses involved in arranging all of those objects, selecting all those colors, layering the different elements that are on the screen.

And by just inserting the core parts to your slide,

the bullet points that you want to convey,

the images that you wanna use, PowerPoint becomes a tool

to then rearrange that through far fewer clicks.

>> What a great example.

I'm even thinking, sometimes I don't have my mouse with me, and not having a mouse accessible makes that entire process of using Designer in PowerPoint much easier.

It's a really great example.

Thank you for sharing that.

Mary I recently read a stat from the World Health Organization which reports that 285 million people are visually impaired or blind.

This gigantic number really astounded me.

Because this is just one segment of people who have specific needs when it comes to technology.

Not even you know mentioning people with dexterity issues that you brought up here.

But for me that number demonstrates that people with these types of needs are not a niche population.

Why has it taken us so long to really start and engage in this conversation about product accessibility.

>> I think the best way to answer that is, if I take a broader view than just me as an employee at Microsoft, but think of myself as a person in the broader accessibility community.

The biggest factor in the evolution of accessible experience has been a shift from reactive to proactive.

So for a very long time and still exist today in a number of instances where someone whether designing or

building a product thinks of accessibility as a problem they have to solve, and they can solve that problem.

And if we don't learn how they came to that solution and what factored into coming to that solution for the next product you're designing or building, or the one after that, or the one after that, we're going to keep making the same mistakes over and over again.

And so the shift from reactive to proactive was inevitable and it's something that we have to keep working on every day.

Again, we're not perfect.

We haven't solved everything, but we are trying really hard to get things right for our customers.

And so Taking that proactive approach means that everyone gets involved, it's not just the engineer, it's the designer, it's the program manager, it's the director, it's the people making budget decisions.

And we are on a journey to design and build better products.

And I think that's what you're witnessing right now.

The other thing that I wanna mention that is again, not necessarily unique to Microsoft but certainly prevalent across industries is that not enough people are graduating today with

Foundational knowledge in accessibility when it comes to technology.

And Microsoft and many other tech companies including Google and Facebook and Yahoo which is now oath and Adobe and many other organizations have partner together.

With professors at universities and colleges,

to create a sort of consortium called Teach Access.

And we work together to make the computer science curriculum, the accreditation that is associated with the computer science curriculum include accessibility as a foundational component.

To graduating with a computer science degree.

And this is absolutely a long term investment,

because what we want,

we being all tech companies involved in this initiative.

We want to hire people out of college

who know the foundation and then we build on that

based upon what our particular product set is.

And so that is a long term investment and we think that we

will see the benefits from that over the years, but

that's part of this entire landscape.

We want as companies change from reactive to proactive when it

comes to accessibility, but we also want to nurture

accessibility expertise earlier on in someone's career.

In particular when they're in school.

So that way it's that much easier to ramp up on this when

you join a company and the company can start focusing more

and more on those innovative and

what some might think are impossible projects.

Because we're not worried about the foundational components of

accessibility.

>> It seems like that said a major theme in this conversation

instead of teaching a crashed course when

someone is hired out of college on accessibility,

how can you better integrate that into the process.

>> I think that it is a hugely strategic and impressive approach, through out our conversation here, you've mentioned a couple of times that the work that your team does has an external component as well.

What does the community of people that you are working with to inform your work look like.

Are they raising their hands to say that they wanna be involved, who are these people?

>> These people are fantastic, there are all over the place.

There are people from the disability community, there are people from the accessibility community.

And the approach we've taken internally is, we have employee resource groups for employees with disabilities and they will collectively make suggestions and feedback on our products.

That's key, we also include

people with disabilities is when we're doing user studies.

And we're doing testing on our products.

We also have a customer support channel called The Microsoft Disability Answer Desk and there's also an Enterprise Disability Answer Desk.

And we pay very close attention to the information that comes through those channels.

We also have support from our retail stores, people from the local communities going in wanting to learn.

What's happening, Windows 10, what's new with Windows Narrator, those kinds of things.

And so, all those kinds of channels are constantly impacting our prioritization and our focus.

We use that to prioritize what we're gonna work on and how we're going to approach something.

We also want to think about what trends we're seeing in the market.

What's happening outside the company?

What research is going on at colleges and universities.

And we want to stay ahead of what is coming down in innovations and technology, so that we are sure to include accessibility as part of those early conversations.

So we can make sure that the final baked product is very, very high quality.

>> It sounds like have a lot of input from different channels.

A lot of feedback coming from customers or subject matter experts or people living with disabilities who are actually feeding into your feedback forums.

Which presents you and your team with a lot of data to make compelling cases to engineering teams that they should prioritize features, capabilities, etc, to make their products more accessible.

Have you encountered any push back in getting engineers to prioritize accessibility and what are some of the ways that Microsoft has really adopted this data feedback as an input to the development cycle?

>> Anytime you are asking someone to do something that they were not anticipating and

they are not positive how to do, you will always get push back.

Our journey in the accessibility space has been to influence the culture of Microsoft employees.

So, when they meet with our team, that's not the first time that they are ever hearing about accessibility, so that's part.

The next thing is, making sure that there is training available to our employees, so they have the right tools and resources to understand

why a bug has been filed against their product and how to fix it.

And we also want to celebrate with product teams when they have done it well.

And that is, in my mind, just as important as correcting someone when they have done something incorrect is celebrating when they have done something really well.

And being able to convey a customer story about how a person in the world, maybe who has a disability, who has found something like learning tools for OneNote to be useful and impactful in their life.

Motivates and energizes all the people who are designing and building products like that.

And it motivates people in the surrounding teams to say, I wanna do something with my product that has that kind of impact.

And so, sparking that motivation is really pivotal to making sure that we can change what that conversation is like.

So again, it's not about accessibility being a tax, but it's more about accessibility as a challenge that is going to make your experiences more inclusive.



>> And getting more people to use your product and getting more people to use more features within your product.

>> Yeah, I love that positioning.

>> Taking a step from Microsoft, and sort of surveying where our listeners might be working more inclusively.

Why is it important for organizations to shift away from the mindset of checking the box on accessibility?

>> So this concept for my experience, this concept of checking the box refers to I've built something and I'm gonna ship this something. And I need to make sure that I am meeting whatever regulations are appropriate for my experience.

And I'm checking the box that yes, my product is accessible.

And when you check that box, it is kind of answering a question with one of two choices.

Is your product accessible, yes or no.

And there is a lot of complexity that goes into making an experience accessible.

So it's making sure that someone using a keyboard instead of a mouse, or voice commands instead of a keyboard, or touch input instead of voice can interact with your product.

And that information is conveyed.

Meaningfully back to that user, after they've taken their action.

And so there's a lot of layers to it, and it's not as simple as checking a box.

The other way to look at it is that when you check that box, it means that you haven't necessarily considered accessibility or implemented any of the best practices around accessibility up until that last point.

And so, the story that I think a lot of people within software development are familiar with is you've created this thing, you're about to release it, and you can't check that box that it is accessible.

And now it is a fire drill to go and fix it, and in that fire drill, decisions are made.

Bugs and features are cut to prioritize what we absolutely have to release or fix and what we don't.

And that's a really negative place to be in and it's one that is not conducive to innovation.

We want to be thoughtful and consistent in how we design and build our products.

And this idea that checking the box is enough, is just untrue.

And what we need to do is we need to have milestones throughout the entire ideation process.

Making sure that people with a variety of abilities could use that experience effectively.

And so it's a larger process than just checking a box.

>> Yeah, I hear you saying that it's business critical to incorporate accessibility as a multiple checkbox on your product development cycle both to make your product available to the greatest number of people.

But also to ensure that it survives its launch.

Otherwise, it might be a Frankenstein version of

the product you hoped to ship if you weren't considering accessibility all along.

>> One other thing is,

we want to avoid regression in experience.

And so, the checkbox, is just about,

at this point in time, is it accessible.

And it's really, during the entire process of design and development, have we learned lessons that have changed the way that we're going to update this product, or how we're going to create a new product.

And that idea that every release needs to keep getting better,

or at the very least maintain the level of accessibility,

is really important, and

that checkbox alone just does not suffice.

>> Mm-hm >> Many of our listeners are in

the technology field but

many of them were generally are working in business.

What are ways that our listeners can practice more inclusive behaviors around accessibility in their day-to-day work and communication.

>> The first thing I wanna say is, if you are working at

an organization, work to cultivate the community

of employees with disabilities at your organization.

Employee resource groups are one way to do this,

there are others.

That approach has really helped Microsoft.

And it has really helped our employees feel that they can bring their best selves to work.

Related to that sort of the next step is making sure that when you are recruiting.

And interviewing and hiring people that you have a diverse talent pool from which to hire.

And that includes people with disabilities, so making sure that the interview process and recruiting process allows for accommodations is really critical.

So someone who maybe uses a wheelchair, making sure that they can get into the meeting room, and that they have the software or hardware that they need to best do an interview activity, like writing on the white board or whatever.

Figuring out ways to accommodate people with different abilities so that way you are interviewing a diverse talent pool and then you can bring in the best possible candidate into your company is really important.

The other day-to-day recommendation is all of us at one point or another are authoring content, whether it's writing an email, sending a text, making a post on social media, creating a slide deck, editing a video.

You name it, we're all creating content in some way.

And I would challenge all the listeners to find ways to make the content that we author accessible.

If you're using Microsoft Office, we have a tool called the Accessibility Checker.

So while you're creating your Word document or your PowerPoint file, you can run this checker and

sort of understand what things you've added or taken away that impact the accessibility of those files. That's one little small way to do it.

>> I saw in your presentation at the summit, that you also mentioned if you're writing comments in email, to put your initials before your comments.

>> Yes. The team that I'm on is the corporate external and legal affairs. So there are a lot of lawyers in that group. And this concept of comments inline is a common one. So if you send me an email asking me a series of questions, a common tactic is that I reply to your email saying, comments inline. And so, underneath each of your questions, I put in my response. And what I wanted to share with my co-workers and encourage them to do is, when you are doing that, replying to an email with comments in line. Put your initials at the beginning. So someone who is using a screen reader or screen magnifier can more easily understand what are Mary's comments, what are Colleen's comments and, if you have lots of people on a thread, what everybody's comments are. It helps make that email exchange a little more inclusive.

>> Yeah, that was a great quick and easy tip for me. I'm often just using color coding like my comments

are in red.

And that's a really quick fix.

Something that I can change in my  
behavior to make my communication more accessible.

>> Mary, what does accessibility allyship look like beyond some  
of these ways that we can take more responsibility ourselves  
for making accessibility a part of our lives?

>> The approach that I take to allyship is,  
learn more everyday.

So I have worked in accessibility  
as a professional for more than nine years now, and  
I still learn something new everyday.

Whether it's about how best to support a coworker with  
a disability.

Or how best to solve a technical problem being  
raised from a customer feedback.

It's constantly thinking that there's always more to know,  
and being open to that, and not feeling like you have to know  
all the answers to everything because you never will.

And so having this openness to learning more and  
working to get better is really key.

>> And are there any resources that you can recommend to people  
who wanna make this investment in learning more about  
accessibility?

>> Definitely the [Microsoft.com/accessibility](https://microsoft.com/accessibility) site

is our accessibility homepage.

Lots of great information on there.

If you're interested in job openings at Microsoft, there's  
[Microsoft.com/inclusivehiring](https://microsoft.com/inclusivehiring).

And if you're really just wanting to learn more about  
disability or accessibility or looking for  
resources to share within your own companies and  
communities, we publish our internal accessibility  
one-on-one training course online.

And the short URL to get to that is [aka.ms/introacc](https://aka.ms/introacc),  
so I-N-T-R-O-A-C-C, and it'll take you to  
that video that's online that is free to share out.

>> Mary, thank you so much for being on the show today, for  
bringing us up to speed on all of these great resources.  
And thank you for your contributions to this company.

>> I appreciate the invitation very, very much.  
I'm happy to talk about accessibility at any time  
you want.

[MUSIC]

>> Cutting Edge, our take home stories in the business and  
technology world.

[MUSIC]

[MUSIC]

In this episode, we're gonna discuss a November 15th post on  
Stackify by Adrienne Weissman, who is a female executive at  
the commercial software and services company, G2 Crowd.

The post is called, The Potential for Women in Tech Goes Beyond Coding.

And personally, I first learned about this piece after a friend of the podcast, Emily Daundrea, shared it on LinkedIn.

>> Weissman talks about a theme that we've discussed on the show of couple of times now.

That the tech industry is not exclusively for software engineers.

She very importantly identifies as a big believer that girls, and young women should be encouraged to code, but also acknowledges that, hey, there are many other jobs in tech. Marketing, accounting, writing, and you don't have to have to code in that job.

>> But of course, with shows like HBO's Silicon Valley, shaping public perception of what it's like to work in tech, there's this significant lack of representation when it comes to those other jobs that you mentioned, like marketing or accounting or writing.

And let alone, women filling those other roles.

As we've discussed often with many of our communities and guests on the show, representation is really important.

And I can vouch for this firsthand, whenever I watch a Shonda Rhimes' show- >> [LAUGH]

>> I immediately want to be the characters that she creates.



After watching Grey's Anatomy, I wanted to be a surgeon.

After watching How To Get Away With Murder, I started studying for the LSAT, thinking that I was going to be a lawyer.

There is so much inspiration in just seeing what's possible.

>> Having not seen How to Get Away with Murder, I thought that was going in a different direction-

>> [LAUGH]

>> [LAUGH] when you wanted to become a murderer at that point.

So glad there's a little clarification,

I need to add that to my watchlist apparently.

>> Yes, you do.

>> I know, I need to, okay.

So, yeah, Weissman wraps up her post with an intention to showcase a greater diversity of careers in tech.

But there's a subtle call to action for readers as well.

And it's all of our responsibility as parents, teachers, friends, and

role models to make sure that girls understand the constellation of opportunity that awaits them in STEM fields.

So as someone in a non-technical role, like I'm on marketing for the Surface team, the statement has really gotten me thinking more critically about how I can be a more public representation of what's possible in the tech industry.

>> And that can actually become problematic, to add another layer of responsibility to your plate, as a woman in tech.

Too often, we are asking women not only to do their jobs, but to be present at networking events, or to sit in on interview loops, to model diversity and encourage the next generation.

So I would never personally charge anyone with that additional responsibility.

But whether it's through volunteering some time to tell girls about my job in tech, which is non-technical, or teaching an hour of code, which is fairly easy to do for even people who don't know how to code themselves.

I'm up for the challenge of representing part of that tech job constellation that Weissman references.

[MUSIC]

I learned a lot from this episode, a lot about accessibility, a lot about great communities of women in STEM here in Seattle. And a lot about the importance of representation of different jobs in the tech industry.

I feel like this was a strong show for us.

>> Yeah, totally, and to our listeners, this is just a reminder to rate, review, and subscribe to the show. If you think a friend might enjoy this content, please let that person know.

>> As always, you can find us on Apple Podcasts, Google Play, or

wherever you listen to podcasts, including Spotify,  
where we recently launched.

>> Woo hoo.

>> If you have any feedback or questions, please email us at  
wibt@microsoft.com or tweet us @microsoftwomen.

[MUSIC]

>> All right, people.

Your mission for this episode, if you choose to accept it,  
is to learn a bit more about accessible communication.

So before you share out that next PowerPoint presentation,  
click the review tab on the ribbon and  
then select check accessibility.

You'll then see a list of recommendations for  
ways to make your presentation more accessible.

It's super easy and a way we can all start contributing to a more  
inclusive workplace.

[MUSIC]