**Transcript – Session 2 – Inclusive Work Environments –**

**Virtual AFB Leadership Conference**

**Part I: Presentation**

**Narrator:**

Thank you for connecting online with us for the AFB Virtual Leadership Conference 2020, and this session about inclusive remote work environments. Now, a welcome message from Kirk Adams, Ph.D., President and CEO, AFB, and Roslyn Adams, Spouse and AFB Ambassador.

**On screen:**

Dr. Adams, a man with salt-and-pepper hair, and wearing a business suit, sits next to Ms. Adams, a woman with dark wavy hair, and wearing a bright purple blouse.

**Dr. Adams:**

Hello, I am Kirk Adams. I am President and CEO of the American Foundation for the Blind.

**Mrs. Adams:**

My name is Ros Adams, I’m married to Kirk and I’m a longtime supporter of AFB.

**Dr. Adams:**

And we thank you all for joining us from your living rooms and home offices across the country. We are in our apartment here in Arlington, Virginia, and we welcome you to our Virtual AFB Leadership Conference. Now our Leadership Conference is really the highlight of our year, we bring hundreds of people together, all dedicated, passionate individuals, who are all committed to creating a world of no limits for people who are blind. This year, for obvious reasons, we’re bringing you our conference virtually.

**Mrs. Adams:**

We’re really excited that you’re joining us, and as an educator I’m particularly happy about the fact that we’re using technology to help us stay connected at this time.

**Dr. Adams:**

We wouldn’t be able to present you with this virtual conference without the help of our supporters and partners and friends. I want to thank Bridge Multimedia for lending a hand in creating this virtual content, and our sponsors who make it possible for us to provide this content free of charge for anyone who could find it useful. Please do share!

**Mrs. Adams:**

So I just want to stress that this is our opportunity to continue to learn from each other. So do enjoy the session and please take the time to visit us online at AFB.org/VirtualAFBLC.

**On screen:**

A photo shows a dark-haired woman in her home office working on a desktop computer.

**Text on screen:**

Inclusive Remote Work Environments.

No limits.

**On screen:**

Photos show a woman with light shoulder-length hair and a man with short dark hair.

**Text on screen:**

Meet the Presenters:

Erin Lauridsen - Access Technology Director, LightHouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired. Lighthouse-sf.org/programs/access-technology.

Social media handle: llighthouse\_sf.

Tanner Gers – Business Development Lead, AFB Counsulting, afb.org/consulting.

Social media handle: @afb1921.

**On screen:**

A woman with light shoulder-length hair speaks from a remote location.

**Erin:**

Hi, I'm Erin Lauridsen. I'm the Director of Access Technology at the LightHouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired in San Francisco.

**On screen:**

A man with short dark hair speaks from a remote location.

**Tanner:**

And I'm Tanner Gers, Business Development Sales Lead for American Foundation for the Blind Consulting. And today's webinar is about: how can we start to make progress towards creating digitally inclusive, remote work environments? And this was largely stimulated, and kind of forced upon us, because of the COVID-19. And our hearts go out to everybody who's been affected by that, but that -- unfortunately work has to go on. And so that's what this webinar is about, is preparing us to be digitally inclusive through this transition into remote work from home.

**Text on screen:**

Impact of COVID-19:

- Some organizations already had employees working from home;

- Others had to adapt quickly to remote work environments;

- What are the lessons we’re learning when it comes to remote work and digital inclusion?

**Erin:**

That's exactly right, Tanner. At LightHouse, we were primarily an in-person working team. We provide a lot of training and direct services to blind people in the San Francisco Bay Area. And as of March 16th, we had to become a remote organization temporarily.

And we find that our LightHouse community is still just as much in need of our services, training, and resources as they ever were. And so we had to transition very quickly to not only being a remote work organization, but also delivering services and training remotely to a community of people who are at all points along their digital literacy journeys.

So it's been an interesting time for us as well and I'm excited to be here with you today to talk about what that has been like for us and some takeaways that can apply not only to this season but to remote work in general.

**Tanner:**

Very well said. And I am so grateful for y'all’s organizational agility to be able to transition so quickly like that because people still need your services. It is truly crucial and critical to the quality of life and their ability to perform from day to day.

So, one of the things that is so crucial to ensuring that your remote work environments are digitally inclusive is procurement. That's where accessibility really starts when we're talking about remote work environments or just work environments in general, because your software decisions will open or close pathways, or employment pathways, for candidates with disabilities. And that's why we have to make sure that accessibility is a part of our procurement vendor requirements.

And we have seven questions here that everybody should be asking their vendors to make sure that they are digitally inclusive. So Erin, if it's okay with you, I'll share these seven questions and then we can talk about their importance.

**Erin:**

That sounds great.

**Tanner:**

Excellent. So the first question is: Can you tell me about your accessibility policy? Two: how long has your company been actively working towards ensuring digital accessibility? What types of accessibility testing have you done? What standards do you focus on? Have you worked with a third party to audit or validate your product for accessibility? Did you receive a VPAT as a result of that? And do you have an internal accessibility department?

Those questions, while they seem really remedial at first, often they're just not asked at all. It's critical as a third-party vendor-management, digitally inclusive strategy to be asking these questions. Erin, do you find that these questions really start to open up the conversation to evaluate whether or not a vendor is prepared, not only to be accessible today, but maybe tomorrow?

**Erin:**

Absolutely. I very much appreciate that you've put these simple questions together to open that conversation because sometimes the person in an organization who's initiating the purchasing conversation may not be the accessibility expertwithin their organization. So just knowing what to ask can be so critical.

**Text on screen:**

Live Q&A to follow...

**Erin:**

I have found that as we've transitioned to remote work, some of the purchasing decisions that we've made in recent history have really laid the groundwork for the success of our time as a remote organization. There was a piece of software that we had a contract with that had some accessibility barriers. And I was relying on a sighted colleague to implement some functions of work using that piece of software.

As soon as that contract ended, we made a very quick switch to something where, you know, the answers to these questions that you've laid out would have been -- were very positive. And once we did that, I removed the need for a different accommodation of that function. And I'm -- I'm saying “I,” but this is many of us within the organization. And I'm so glad that we made that purchasing decision before we needed to rely on this for remote work. Because when you're working remotely, you can't just pop down the hall and get someone to click the unlabeled button for you. You really need things to be robust and accessible while you're working remotely.

Another thought that I had on this is that many of the solutions that work well for remote teams are cloud-based. That means that the company using them doesn't have control over when updates happen. I've called this sort of the digital version of someone else could sneak in and rearrange your furniture overnight.

So if an update to a cloud-based system happens, it's important that you're relying on a product where the company designing that product does have an accessibility strategy and policy, and is doing the testing as they roll out new updates because you, as the users of that product, don't have control over when updates happen, and you need the product to work for you when you buy it and keep working for you when it is updated.

**Tanner:**

Those are such great points, Erin, and I think that often times too organizations, especially when we're thinking about procurement, and later on in the conversation we're going to be talking about accommodations, but procurement doesn't have to be expensive, right? There are many, many tools that are paid and many tools that are not paid. And I'm so grateful that many screen readers across platforms, whether you’re a Windows- or a Mac-based organization, there are a ton of free tools to make sure that we're ensuring digital inclusion for our workforce.

The other thing that I think is so important about asking vendors questions is the opportunity to hear their answers, right? And so, anybody can say that they're accessible, anybody can say that they've done testing. But the quality of answers that you get through that conversation can really uncover the policies and processes that they have in place to ensure, longitudinally, that they will be inclusive. Because again, today it could be accessible or you might be told it's accessible. But like Erin was saying, when they push an update, do they have the policies and processes in place to ensure when that update goes live that everybody is included?

So, let's go ahead and move into the next slide, and talk about inclusive technology solutions, and side-by-side compare some of the differences between how LightHouse is ensuring digitallyinclusive remote environments versus AFB. And really what we're trying to outline here is that there's not one approach to digital inclusion. And that's so important because every organization, just like every individual, is different.

**Erin:**

That's a great point, Tanner. Multiple tools can be used effectively and inclusively. And often it depends on the particular use case of the organization team, or even at the individual level, what tool you might choose in what situation. So as we talk through some of what our organizations use, we're not going to put these tools necessarily in a cage match against each other. There isn't a right or wrong solution as long as it is inclusive and meets the needs of the organization. But we thought it might be fun to compare notes on the things that we are using and having success with during this time.

**Tanner:**

Yeah, absolutely. So let's get right into that, and starting with, you know, what we're doing right here: meetings and phone calls. So some of the tools that we're using right now: we're on this conference using Zoom. How has Zoom been critical for you guys in terms of ensuring that communications are fluid in this remote situation?

**Erin:**

Zoom has been huge for us. One thing I want to highlight about Zoom is that every aspect of it is accessible. So when I am moderating a Zoom workshop with 50 LightHouse students, I have full control from my keyboard as a moderator to hear what's happening and control what needs to happen in that Zoom conference.

Zoom has also been really great for us because there are multiple points of entry. My team at LightHouse provides digital literacy training to blind people and some of our students are just beginning. So they need to call into Zoom from their landline phones; other folks have mastered the iPhone, they can use the app; others are using their computer and are able to take advantage of those keyboard shortcuts.

But it's a solution that's that we hadin place previously for different remote meetings. And weused it fairly lightly, but now we're using it very heavily, both for internal meetings that are somewhat large and also when we are providing services and programming to the broader blind community in the Bay Area.

**Tanner:**

AFB also uses Zoom, but we primarily use G Suite to do a lot of our operational stuff, you know, email. But we also use it for Google Voice, we've used RingCentral in the past. One of my favorite meetings, though, is Google Hangouts on desktop and Meets on mobile. What I really love about that is, is whenever I've got a host of meetings throughout the day, and I primarily schedule those through Hangouts and Meets, is that through the Meets app on my iPhone, I can see what meetings are coming up, who's going to be in those meetings, and I can join -- I can move in and out of those meetings really easily. It really makes things fluid and allows me to seem, [chuckles] seem quicker and better than I probably deserve.

**Erin:**

I wanted to circle back quickly to Google Voice. We, when we are in the office, we're using ShoreTel phones. And we have access to our voicemails by email, which is great for someone like myself who doesn't remember numbers very well because I can actually play the voicemails on my computer and transcribe the number of someone whose phone call I need to return. But now that we're at home, several of my staff have been using Google Voice to communicate with their students so that they can text or call students and keep their personal cell phones for personal use.

So that's a tool that we've sort of added into the mix during this time just to make sure that we're able to make all the phone calls we need and sort of keep our, our personal and work life balance, a little bit. Although we're all working from our homes so work life balance is not high priority right now. But in the, in the cases we can keep that separation, we do.

**Tanner:**

Communication is critical to the effectiveness of any team, whether you're in the office or you’re remote. But also critical isfile sharing andcollaboration. We've got tools like Dropbox, Google Drive, Google Docs, Sheets, and Slides. And it's so important for us in these remote work environments to be able to collaborate like this. Erin, talk to us a little bit about the tools that you guys are using to create that collaboration.

**Erin:**

Yeah, this is a little bit of a growth area for us. We are used to being able to have in-person meetings and maybe have someone be the scribe on a document. Or I've, I’ve been using track changes in Office-- in Microsoft Word for years in terms of editing grant proposals and different documents.

But now that we're dispersed, we do need more tools to share those files remotely. So we have been using Microsoft OneDrive in terms of backup and file storage and file sharing within our organization. And I know that, that some of our teams, and again this is sort of a -- there are many solutions for many different use cases. Some of our teams have been using things like Google Docs and Google Sheets to have living documents that are easily and simultaneously editable by team members.

**Tanner:**

Thanks for mentioning OneDrive. I love the, the syncing because we've talked in previous conversations that, you know, you guys are using OneDrive really effectively so that you guys are getting your -- all your documents backed up and they're syncing to the cloud on OneDrive. And so if you're at a -- if you're away from the office and you need to get access to a document, you've got it right there on your mobile device. And the same thing is true with Google Drive. It's -- these tools have been really, really effective for us in terms of making sure that across departments, across the organization, that we're able share files effectively as well as collaborate within those electronic files.

Another crucial component to remote work environments is the messaging and product -- project management. How -- some of the tools that organizations are using for the internal messaging and project management include Slack, Microsoft Teams, Trello, and Salesforce. Tell me a little bit about that, Erin. How are you guys using some of these tools to facilitate internal team communications, messaging, and project management?

**Erin:**

We use Salesforce very heavily as an organization. We get a lot of phone calls and those are created as Salesforce inquiries. We use Salesforce to manage our external contacts and mailings. We also use it to track our service reporting. So on my team we have multiple funders who support the digital literacy work that we do.

So for each student, we need to track certain things about their demographics, and how much time we spend with them, and which funding source applies to their digital literacy journey. And Salesforce allows our team to track all of that work as it's being done. And I, as a program director, I am then able to go access reports to look at how we're doing on all those different fronts.

And this is where tools kind of stack nicely together because I'm able to pull the reports out of Salesforce and get them into Microsoft Excel where I'm able to leverage the power of my screen reader a little bit more to manipulate thatdata.So Salesforce is how we manage a lot of our projects.

We also use Trello for kind of a very niche use case. I have some projects, Boards, in Trello where I track contacts that come in that are still sort of in that hypothetical or exploration phase. Someone might be interested in meeting some blind users and getting feedback on their, their project, but it's not yet locked in.

**Text on screen:**

Live Q&A to follow...

**Erin:**

I use Trello because I've been able to set up a -- an email address that will add things to my Trello board. So when I get a new email and I just want to track whether it becomes something or not, I can blind carbon copy that email address. And by BCC, it just adds something to my inquiries, Trello Board. And that helps me when I sit down with my team and I look at kind of how those are moving through the process. We've got them in Trello and then can shift them around to a, a different Trello Board as things progress.

In terms of communication, this has been a big adjustment for us as we've gone remote. Often, we'll just pick up the phone and dial someone's extension or walk down the hallway and get to stretch and talk with our colleagues. But now we're dispersed.

And so different departments at LightHouse have been using different tools for that. There are departments who have asynchronous chat through something like Slack or Teams. My department really likes to use a group text message because we are often delivering services on our computers. So we don't want our screen readers to necessarily get shouty in the middle of a demo that we’re, we’re doing. And so we separate that communication out onto a different device.

**Tanner:**

And I think that there's a lot of opportunities, whether it's Trello in the cloud, or on the mobile app, or it's Slack on the desktop app, or it's on the iPhone or Android. I have primarily been email driven when I was working on -- in other organizations, using Microsoft and 365. And it's been really, really great, you know, using Slack as an internal team communication channel, not only to, to keep in touch but to share files.

And in the spirit of updates pushing live, we were talking about this previously, Erin, is that Slack just pushed a new update. And I couldn't, I couldn't use it. I was like, “Oh my gosh!” It was slowing down my productivity and that influences my performance. But that wasn't really a factor of it being inaccessible or unuseful. I just didn't know how to use it.

And so a week ago, I might've been really frustrated with Slack. But today with that new push, I'm actually able to use Slack more effectively, quicker, and easier. And so whether I am communicating with our consulting delivery team on Trello, making sure that things are going along, updating or, or uploading scopes of work or master service agreements and seeing the notes of the delivery team is putting on Trello. Or we're talking about more day to day stuff in Slack channels. You know, internal messaging and project management, again it's, it's critical and crucial in today's remote environment. So I hope that some of these tools are going to be used by your guys' organizations.

And that's a great segue into what else we can do in terms of creating digitally inclusive environments through accommodations. Erin, I think we can agree that accommodations are going to be different for different individuals. Everybody has their preferences: some are Mac, some are Windows, some are Android, some are iPhone. Tell us a little bit about how San Francisco LightHouse approaches accommodations for such a tremendous organization.

**Erin:**

Tanner, I love that story that you just shared about the learning curve that was introduced with a Slack update. I think one important part of the disability accommodations process is training, whether that is just having the time to self-learn a new product, a significant product redesign, or an access technology tool like a screen reader, or whether that isworking with a professional toget that done quickly so someone can get on with their work day.

At LightHouse, when we rolled out upgrades to Windows 10 and Office 365, we offered intensive training for employees that wanted it, so that they could really focus in on learning those tools quickly so that as soon as their systems were updated, they were back to work. Other times and with other people, it's just a matter of sharing good resources, like finding those keyboard commit -- the new keyboard commands that were introduced or a good description of the new layout of a piece of software.

**Text on screen:**

Disability Accommodations for Remote Work:

- Hardware;

- Software;

- Visual assistance.

**Erin:**

So a lot of what's done around accommodations is just around information sharing and learning.

The next thing I wanted to mention is hardware. And often a blind employee in an office setting doesn't necessarily need particular hardware. Maybe they're using a braille display, but their laptop is standard issue. I have found that with remote work my -- some very inexpensive hardware accommodations have made a big difference for me.

I have a second, simple USB sound card that I can connect to my computer so that I can put my screen reader in one ear bud and then use a separate set of headphones for Zoom so that my audio streams are a little separated. And it's more like when I have a conversation with people in a room and then just have my screen reader quietly in the background, rather than trying to mix everything into one headset. Or just the, the goofy gaming headset that I pulled out of the cupboard to use for this webinar to make sure that, that everyone could hear me and not hear my whole neighborhood. Somehow these -- sometimes these accommodations are quite ad hoc.

One other example of that is a, a keyboard. A Bluetooth keyboard for an iPhone doesn't really seem on the surface like a disability accommodation. It just seems like a personal preference. But if someone is using a tool; for example, Tanner and I both mentioned that we prefer Trello on the iPhone. But if I need to enter notes, I don't want to use dictation and deal with all of those errors or type on the onscreen keyboard on the iPhone. So if something is most accessible or most efficient for me on my phone, then a keyboard to, to have text entry quickly integrated into that process can become a very inexpensive, but very effective accommodation.

**Tanner:**

What an incredible takeaway, right? Where organizations can make you know, a $50, $60, or even $100 investment in such a simple accommodation that would normally not be considered, in air quoties [sic], “an accommodation.” But it's crucial to ensuring that your, your diverse workforce is able to have high productivity and performance. Do we want someone spending an hour every day doing something when it can really be done in 10 minutes if they have such a simple accommodation, and over time, those things more than pay for themselves? I love that.

And I love the idea of the sound card being applied to maybe a call center opportunity or even these remote work environments, really great example there. I, you know, being in sales, I'm often interfacing and doing presentations and putting together proposals. And they have to be, they have to be incredibly perfect in terms of their visual aesthetic appeal, right? I don't want a bunch of formatting errors or anything like that.

One of my favorite accommodations is Aira. Aira is a team of sighted individuals who are specifically geared and set up to help the blind and visually impaired community navigate, execute, and perform in the sighted world. Because as much as we can try to ensure that everything’s inclusive, everything’s accessible all the time, the fact of the matter is that it just isn't yet. We hope that it will be soon, but until then, I'm able to tap into Aira at 24/7.

So there are so many different accommodations, and I hope that you guys are starting to conceptualize that: while accommodations might have an an expense, like I said earlier, whether it's NVDA, or Voiceover on Mac, or TalkBack on Android, or even Voiceover on iOS, there are a ton of low-cost to no-cost accommodations that we can really, really take our inclusivity in our digital remote work environments to the next level.

So now I'd love to move into question and answers. Understanding how to better approach procurement, with regards to Microsoft 365, G Suite, all the different types of products and services that we talked about, including how do we incorporate that through accommodations and empowering our employees to be their most productive, high performing selves. I'd love to hear – and so would Erin – we would love to hear what questions that we can answer for you right now.

**Text on screen:**

Live Q&A to follow...

**Narrator:**

Now it’s time for our Q&A. Please submit your questions. We won’t have time to answer all of them, but we will get to as many as we can.

**On screen:**

Dr. Adams and Ms. Adams sit together in their living room.

**Text on screen:**

Kirk Adams, Ph.D., President & CEO, AFB.

Roslyn Adams, Spouse & AFB Ambassador.

**Mrs. Adams:**

Hello again. Now as we move into the live portion of our Q&A, we’d like you to please be patient if we encounter any technical difficulties. And please enjoy the content.

**Part II: Q&A**

**Tanner:**

I just got notified I’m up on the video. And we also have our ace in the hole, Aziz, helping us out with the questions. Do you have any other thoughts, Erin, before we get into the questions?

**Erin:**

Happy to be here with you today Tanner, and I think I also have managed to wrangle my video and audio. So with any luck, our good wishes from Mrs. Adams will carry us into the Q&A. So, excited to dialogue with all of you via the Q&A function.

**Tanner:**

Right on. Aziz, you want to introduce yourself?

**Aziz:**

Ah yes, my name is Aziz. I work as an IT admin at AFB and I will be reading out the questions.

**Tanner:**

Awesome, awesome. Aziz is the guy we turn to when we have issues and he's the one, the man behind the magic in making sure that we're able to do our thing. So Aziz what have we got for us? What's, what's on the top?

**Aziz:**

Okay. We have a couple of questions at the moment. We're being asked if we've had any security issues using Zoom. And similarly to that, if we’ve encountered any concerns with client privacy using the cloud-based programs.

**Tanner:**

Erin, do you want to start off with that one?

**Erin:**

Yeah. When some of those concerns around Zoom security started coming up, I did get some inquiries from people in our community sort of asking why we were still using it. And we had at that point invested quite a bit of time in establishing some Zoom events, providing training for our emerging learners on how to use it. So we've been sticking with it. We've been employing the security features as they roll out, things like: using the Waiting Room in Zoom, requiring RSVPs for meetings rather than publishing our Zoom meetings on the web, disabling screen share for participants in meetings where we do not need it. And so far, those have proved quite successful for us.

**Tanner:**

Excellent. I know in AFB Consulting, a lot of my correspondence is with external partners and clients, and we do run into some issues where some of our external clients cannot jump on a Zoom call. Not on their devices, no corporate machine are they able to get on a Zoom call because of those privacy issues. And I think what Erin talked about is layering in those security measures in terms of allowing people into the meeting is going to be something that we're going to be seeing across all video meeting and correspondence.

Within Google Meets, my preferred modus operandi for scheduling meetings, I have to do that exact thing. If someone outside our organization’s coming in, I let them into the meeting. And we haven't seen any “Meet bombers,” in our meetings. So I feel really protected with, with the Google Meets in Hangouts.

**Erin:**

Yeah, one other thing to add to that. We have recorded some of our meetings, some of our small group trainings for technology, and I used some visual assistance to discover that the screen recording that I had made had captured -- it captures the handles of the people calling in or their usernames. But because we have a lot of emerging learners who call in with cell phones, their cell phone numbers were part of that recording. And so we had to do some converting and editing on that recording before it was shareable.

So I think for us, it's just being really aware and cognizant of how people are connecting, what information it is involved in that and what we do with it. So the first step to security just starts with us being vigilant and mindful of the data that we're handling.

**Tanner:**

Absolutely, couldn't agree more. What’s up next on the...Aziz?

**Aziz:**

The next question I have here is: is Google Docs and Google Classroom accessible with JAWS or ZoomText? A lot of schools are using it.

**Tanner:**

We've been very, very, very fortunate to have supported the advancements in Google Docs and the collaborative nature of that. More recently, it is becoming more and more and more accessible, and we're still working hard to increase that. There are some, a couple hiccups here and there, but as someone who is a JAWS user myself and has collaborated with Google Docs, now I do it all the time.

Today this morning, I was collaborating on a Google Doc and effectively using it. It's a little bit different than Word, right? But it, it takes some getting used to, but it's definitely inclusive. It's definitely something that you can be confident in. And like we were talking about in the webinar with regards to that Slack update, it's just about a learning curve. And so how, how teaching someone how to use it is, is critical.

And, you know, that's why we have incredible partners like the San Francisco LightHouse to help our students and people who need those individualized trainings and services to make sure that we're up to speed with regards to collaboration, productivity, and performance using Google Docs and those other collaborative electronic files.

**Erin:**

Yeah. Just to elaborate a little bit on what Tanner just said. There's a bit of a learning curve when you're using Google Docs or Sheets or Slides with a screen reader because it's an app that runs within your browser. So often when you're using a screen reader, there's a certain set of keyboard commands that you use to deal with web content, and different commands that you would use with the desktop app, like Microsoft Word. And G Suite functions as an app within the web browser. So if you sort of learn a new set of rules or kind of reframe how you're thinking about what's happening in your web browser, it is quite usable. And Tanner’s team and my team are, are happy to to support folks who might need some guidance on ramping up that skillset.

**Tanner:**

We're so blessed to have an internal accessibility team that Aziz heads up. And one of the guys on our team, Syed, ran through a training with me on how to use G Suite, these cloud-based products, more fluidly. And when I learned that I can turn-- as again, I'm a JAWS user, when I learned that I turned the virtual PC cursor off, and then I was able to tap into the power of, of what Erin just talked about, is leveraging the shortcuts that are embedded into those cloud-based platforms effectively. Now even with Gmail, I am cruising!

And so that's the importance of getting training and actually understanding how to use these tools and getting over that learning curve. So keeping in mind when, when an employee says that they're having an issue, is it really an accessibility issue? And not to downgrade that question, or is it more of a learning curve issue?

**Aziz:**

I have another question here. It could be either for you or Erin. D**o** you have any suggestions to help blind people ensure that their video presence is professional?

**Tanner:**

Erin, go ahead with that one.

**Erin:**

I think... some things are still best solved with human feedback. So my biggest suggestion is to do a practice call. The first time I jumped in a video Zoom, someone said, “Hey, your, your super stylish purple vacuum cleaner handle is behind you.” And so I moved it out of frame and it wouldn't have occurred to me quite how that frame was was set up.

So for me, I like to use my computer so that it's very stationary and the camera isn't moving, as if I was holding my phone. I like to use a chair that doesn't move so that I can, if need be, jump on another quick call with someone ahead of time, get those angles right, and then just use where I've placed my computer and where I've placed that chair to frame myself when it is go time for the presentation. So a lot of those are I guess analog hacks for a digital task, but that's what I've been doing.

**Tanner:**

My personal hack, right now you can't even tell, is that I've got both of my hands on my machine. And so I know that my shoulders are pointed at the machine. And before we started is I touched the top of the lid of my laptop - we're doing this on a laptop right now - so I kind of have the idea of where the camera is. That's how I'm able to look right into the camera. I've got my hands on the machine and I'm looking where the top of the lid is.

**Aziz:**

Great. Are all of your students able to be reached using Zoom or other programs? What strategy do you use for someone that is not able to use assistive technology? I work with older adults and some are not able to use assistive technology. Wondering what you would recommend?

**Erin:**

So we work with adults at all points along that sort of digital literacy spectrum, from people who have a landline phone in their house to people who have a feature phone, cell phone that is not a smartphone, to smartphone users, to computer users. And we have a variety of programming.

So we've been doing what we can to reach folks all along that spectrum. For some folks, it is providing dial-in information so they can call into a Zoom group event. It's a little easier when we are providing one-on-one services, like one-on-one technology training or just our, our social work services or other check-ins that we provide. We're able to reach people in whatever mode is available to them, even if it is calling their landline. And that's where we've used some, some Google Voice numbers for staff who might be needing to make direct phone calls from their home phones or cell phones that they wouldn't typically be making.

For technology training specifically, I've seen members of my team be wonderfully creative. Sometimes what they have to do is call a student on their Google Voice account on their computer so that their cell phone is free for demos. Then they might demo something with the student, hang up, have the student try that out on their cell phone (which is their only device), and then call back and talk through the troubleshooting.

So there's, there's no one size fits all and we know that we won't be able to meet every need while we are remote. But we're certainly throwing all the tools at it that we can. And we definitely see people who are on the more analog spectrum of the tools that they have access to them. And the good old-fashioned telephone has been our primary tool for reaching and engaging with those folks during this season.

**Tanner:**

Erin, I absolutely love that. You know, when I became blind as an adult, I thought everybody was totally blind like I am. I didn't realize there was such a continuum, a spectrum of severity of disability, from low vision to my visual impairment level: total blindness. And so understanding where someone is -- or when someone asks for an accommodation or they're having an issue, having experts to be able to call on -- organizations like the San Francisco LightHouse or AFB -- to understand the nuances and the needs, that wherever they fall on that spectrum is incredibly important. So it's just something to keep in mind. Aziz, what's next?

A**ziz**

Next question is: do you have any, any visually impaired / blind IT staff? If so, how have you accommodated their needs?

**Tanner:**

Well, I think we both can say a firm “yes.”

**Erin:**

[chuckles]

**Tanner:**

And Syed, who I'd mentioned earlier, he is in, he's in my boat and he was educating me and educates our sighted staff on how to do stuff. So, he's phenomenal. Erin, how about on your team?

**Erin:**

Yes. Actually our blind IT technician was formerly on my access technology team, so has [sic] a background in access technology training that he has really leveraged to provide some amazing technical support to our team. I'd be happy to follow up later with specific tools that he uses to do his job. But I can certainly say that he's doing it very well. But I'm a little biased since he has worked for me in the past.

**Tanner:**

And from the employer perspective, just like with me who's someone who became, who came into the community as an adult, there's-- and even otherwise, there's a ton of IT professionals with computer science degrees and advanced degrees who are really incredible resources to have. So, just keep that in mind in terms of, you know, how a visual impairment or any disability really isn't the limiting factor in terms of being able to be that resource and support your organization.

**Aziz:**

All right. We have a little bit of a general question about Trello. Somebody would like to know if, if you could just explain a little bit more about how you use Trello again?

**Tanner:**

Sure. I can start off with that one. So we're using Trello for project management. So again, we're integrating both sighted and blind and visually impaired staff into that. And so from the consulting perspective, again, we're mostly client and externally facing communications. But with regards to the contracts and the agreements that we’re fulfilling and satisfying, we're housing our scopes of work there, our master service agreements there. We’re putting comments associated with the projects, how many hours are left, has it been invoiced. And we're, we're using it as a project management tool. And for me, I find it to be easiest if I'm accessing that through my iOS device. But are you guys using Trello? Erin, how are you guys using it?

**Erin:**

We are using it particularly to sort of track inquiries before they move into the scope of work stage. And I also use it to track other projects with moving parts that, that either don't yet fit in the scope of what we're tracking in Salesforce or might be outside of that scope. I really enjoy that I can have boards that I share with other colleagues that within those boards I can have lists. So for me, when I have things that sort of need to be sorted into moving parts, I use Trello.

And the thing that I mentioned in the recorded bit was: if you log into Trello on the web, which is doable with a screen reader, but I definitely agree with Tanner that for day to day use the iOS app is quite nice, but when you log into the web interface, you can set up email addresses that direct to your Trello boards.

So one thing that I do when I get a brand new inquiry about consulting work or user testing that is just in the sort of “we're feeling each other out” stage, I can BCC my own contact to my Trello board and put it on there. And then when I sit down with my colleagues, we can have our phones out and have access to that Trello board and have conversations about where things are at in their emerging stages of a project. So similarly, we use it for project management, but I find that sort of the, the ways that I've made it work for me are very specific. I don't know that I use it as robustly as you do Tanner.

**Tanner:**

Well, I was learning from you in terms of that automation aspect, in terms of getting things onto the cards. That, with setting it up with the emails that, that was awesome for me. So I hope that's helpful for everybody else, too.

**Erin:**

Yeah, that's made a big difference for me because oftentimes a cell phone interface, an iPhone app, is a more efficient way to interact with content that already exists. But I don't necessarily enjoy having to enter lots of content on my iPhone; I prefer to do that on my computer. So sometimes I'll have an input channel, if you will, on my PC and then work with the output on my iPhone.

**Tanner:**

Well, we're got a few more minutes left for questions and answers and we're going to share some details with us to connect with us right before we close. So if you guys have questions that we don't get to, Erin and I are committed to ensuring your digitally inclusive work environments. So please don't hesitate to reach out to us when we get that information to you. Aziz, what else we got going on in the questions?

**Aziz:**

I think this might be a good one to end on. We have a person who is in the process of creating online classes and they want to make sure that they're fully accessible for their students. Can you both recommend which learning management systems would work best for creating inclusive and accessible virtual trainings?

**Tanner:**

Well, so I don't really have a lot of experience in terms of from that creator perspective. What I do have experience in is from a student perspective in my graduate programs. I really like D2L as well as Moodle, which is a Blackboard product. Now, none of these are going to be perfect. And what we really need to understand too is that the accessibility and inclusion is going to be largely driven in terms of from the creator's perspective.

So how are we equipping our teachers, our instructors, our professors? How are we equipping them with the knowledge and resources needed to create those environments, right? Are we, are we programmatically coding our tables in the right way so that when I'm navigating through, I know what column and what row I’m in, and what the data in the cell that I'm navigating within actually means as it relates to other information in that table? Am I ensuring that all of my images, all the visual content is conveyed in alternative text, right?

So I'm a screen reader user. So when, when I see this beautiful image of Erin, it's going to say shoulder length, hair, V-neck shirt, the color of the shirt, or whatever it might be. And as we get into more complex things, what we, what we need to really understand is: how are we equipping the people who are creating content to make sure that programmatically it's coded and prepared correctly so that all users -- who are relying on assistive technology can access the information in the ways that it was intended to be consumed?

**Erin:**

I would say that in terms of choosing the learning management system, to reference back to those great seven questions for purchasing or procuring that we put up earlier in the presentation that Tanner has developed. Because your learning management system is one key part, making sure that it does not put up any barriers itself in terms of how the menus are structured, how the content is uploaded. And then the accessibility of the content as Tanner was just describing is another piece. And making sure that all of the instructors have those, those guidelines in place of how to properly structure, you know, if it's a large document with many sections using the semantics of proper headings so that a student can easily jump from bit to bit. Labeling those images, as Tanner mentioned, so we don't miss out on the educational or fun parts of online presentations.

I would point to webaim.org as a good beginning resource if you're wanting to wrap your head around those accessibility guidelines and how to apply them to your content. Another great tip is the Accessibility Checker if you're using Microsoft Office 365. Now on your review tab of your ribbon, you have an Accessibility Checker that will point out things. So if you're creating a Word document or a PowerPoint, and you yourself don't use access technology, you can actually run this accessibility checker that will point out areas of your document that can be improved for accessibility. And that's been a really powerful tool that I have been pointing folks who are new to the accessibility space to, to start to learn what they can do to improve the accessibility of their content.

**Tanner:**

And let's not forget too that your employees and content creators can also use free assistive technologies like NVDA or VoiceOver to do those spot checks before they publish content and information. And of course, if all of that seems too complicated, there's always great organizations who are ready and willing to support you in your digital inclusion strategy. So Erin, what is the best place for people to connect with you after this webinar?

**Erin:**Yeah, well I will give both LightHouses and my Twitter handles ‘cause they're nice and short, and then my email address, which is nice and long. So you can reach out to LightHouse at lighthouse\_sf, as in San Francisco, on Twitter, and I am at lifeinbraille on Twitter. And if email is better for you, you can email me directly at elauridsen, E-L-A-U-R-I-D-S-E-N, @lighthouse-sf.org. And if you're reviewing the slides after this presentation, we've got direct links to our website as well.

**Tanner:**Love it. I’m everywhere at Tanner Gers on social and Gers because my family wanted to make it really hard, is spelled G-E-R-S (so Tanner Gers) and then my email is T-G-E-R-S @atafb.org. And of course, if you like phone, which I, you know, as I've heard I like to talk, you can always catch me at: (212) 502-7633.

Thank you guys so much for joining us on this webinar. We really hope that this content information is helping you get on the right track to ensuring a digitally inclusive work environment, and we appreciate you being here today.

**Part III: Sponsors and PSA**

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AFB: American Foundation for the Blind (registered trademark).

**On screen:**

Visually impaired children and adults interact with their peers at school and at work.

**Narrator:**

The foundation we’re built on is creativity, independence, determination, and the pursuit of happiness. We are the American Foundation for the Blind: changing the way the world sees blindness. Together, with you, there is nothing we can’t do. To learn more, visit AFB.ORG.

**Text on screen:**

Expanding possibilities for people with vision loss.

**Narrator:**   
Again, Kirk and Roslyn Adams.

**Mrs. Adams:**

Thank you so much for joining us.

**Dr. Adams:**

And if you would like to help support our work creating a world of no limits for people who are blind, you can do so at AFB.org/Donate, and we would immensely appreciate it.

**Mrs. Adams:**

We truly would.

**Narrator:**

To find out more about this session and all of the Virtual Leadership Conference activities, go to AFB.org/VirtualAFBLC.

**Text on screen:**

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**END**