JENA WALLACE: Thank you so much for joining us for today's session, "Am I Doing This Right? Imposter Syndrome and Accessibility Maturity." My name is Jena Wallace. I use she/her pronouns. And I am a Content Marketing Specialist for 3Play Media.

I am a white woman with wavy light brown hair, green cat-eye glasses, and I am wearing a black shirt. And with that, I want to welcome Soren Hamby. We're so glad to have you with us here today. And I will pass it off to you to get started on the presentation.

SOREN HAMBY: All right. Just give me a second to share. All right. Hi, everyone. I'm Soren. I am a white non-binary person. I'm wearing some hexagon metal glasses. I have short silver hair. And I'm wearing a forest green shirt.

I am here to discuss "Am I Doing This Right?" And I'm delighted to be a guest here for 3Play Media today. I have a UX certificate. My pronouns are they/them. And I'm the senior manager of UX Digital Design as well as a DEI Board Member and the product owner or business owner for accessibility at Benjamin Moore.

I founded or co-founded several accessibility initiatives. I'm the maintainer-- I'm a maintainer on the maintainer team at the A11y Project. I have a bunch of certifications. If you really want to check them out, I have them all on my LinkedIn. But the one that's probably the most relevant is that I have an Accessibility Program Management Certification from Deque.

I'm in the City University of New York Graduate Studies. I'm a student in disability studies. And I'm editing and proofreading a book for designers on accessibility and writing a workbook for organizational accessibility. So I'm a little busy right now. It's really nice to meet all of you.

Today, the lens that we're looking at accessibility through is inclusivity, which is key to achieving holistic accessibility. It's not enough to simply provide accessibility. We must strive to create an environment that's welcoming and inclusive for all.

One of the first things I just want to do is put the baseline of our definition of accessibility for today. A lot of people really rely on governance or what's compliance for accessibility. And one of the things that I want to do is just like set the terminology for how we're going to talk about accessibility today.

So what I have on this slide on the screen is that accessibility is the process of removing access barriers and providing the right support to fit people's access needs including and especially people with disabilities. So just to update any of your notions of how many people have disabilities. 19% of the total US population has a disability.

And what is holistic accessibility? Across an organization, that every role and every person having a hand in accessibility internally and externally understand the accessibility and implements it. So just thinking about organizations and who would be in an organization, that's working age people. And to update that figure of 19% of the working-- of the US, 34% of the working age US population has a disability.

And to further narrow that number, that's civilians that have a hearing, vision, ambulatory, and/or cognitive disability. So that's ages 18 to 64 and under living in a community setting. So that's not folks that live in institutional settings or are veterans, so that we're really narrowing it to general population without any kind of outliers there.

And there's a great study at the Disability Compendium that really talks about different needs for accessibility and different populations and how we could change some of our systemic issues that lead to people having access barriers. So if you're interested in reading more, it's linked the slide show. And I will also put it on my Linktree after this, which will be at the end.

So there is a need for holistic accessibility. It's an important part of-- oh, sorry-- access. I'm having trouble with the accessibility of Google Slides. I apologize.

Here we go. I apologize about that. The need for holistic accessibility-- accessibility is such an important part of creating a welcoming and inclusive environment for everyone. Holistic accessibility is about taking into account the needs of all users and involves all roles in providing accessibility and is also shifting the burden from one or two people to making everyone equally responsible in an organization. So holistic accessibility is really focusing on moving beyond the technical cycle. So a technical accessibility cycle is where you look at the UI, you identify a barrier, you develop a solution, and you implement a solution.

So, let's talk about roles really quick, and we'll touch on careers a bit. So your normal EPB-- or EDP roles is you have design and engineering. You have product, leadership, content, operations. And I put leadership again because apparently haven't had enough caffeine.

But you think about these roles and you think, OK, well you've got design. You have your design ladder. You have different engineering roles. You have different product roles. You have leadership from a VP level to a C-suite. You have content roles, like content design, copywriters. You have operations roles like design systems and design operations.

You have dev ops. And now a new emerging field would be accessibility ops, which would be really related to this presentation. And now you have even accessibility leadership, which is a really exciting new field.

JENA WALLACE: Hey, Soren.

SOREN HAMBY: Yes?

JENA WALLACE: I just want to jump in. There was a quick question related to the last slide. Someone was asking, what is EDP?

SOREN HAMBY: Sorry. I try not to use acronyms but then I end up doing it. EDP is Engineering, Design, and Product. So that's when we're thinking about the life cycle of products, people use EDP a lot to think about like how do we create digital products? It's engineering, design, and products. So thank you for asking that question and giving me the chance to explain it. I try to sometimes fill these out as I'm going along or come back and do it, and sometimes I miss things.

So when we're thinking about the different ways that you can be involved in accessibility, a lot of people stay in the same sort of engineering, design, and product roles. And they just add accessibility onto that. So they just become experts in accessibility on top of the role that they already have, which is a really great way of holistic accessibility because you're making it part of excellence for your role. So just like you would say, OK, well part of being a good developer is knowing how to do code well, well, part of doing code well would be accessible code.

Part of being a good designer is being an accessible designer. Part of being a good leader is knowing what kind of accessibility requirements we need to put in our product requirements and what needs to be part of the business case for something. So that's one way that I actually have taken before and now where I am a senior manager of UX and digital design. And I don't have a formal title for-- or a role for being the business owner for accessibility. It's just something that I've kind of taken responsibility for because I have a lot of experience in. But it's not a title that people have at my company, just like people don't have the title of like business owner for any particular project.

Like we have a color of the year project, and people don't have the title of business owner for a project that's seasonal. So hopefully we won't need the title of business owner for accessibility for very long. It's just making sure that we get the right tools and processes and people in place. And then once we do that, we won't need me to be business owner anymore. Everyone will be equally responsible.

Then we also have technical accessibility roles. And these have been around for a very long time. Accessibility Subject Matter Expert, that's what SME stands for, and then accessibility coach. And then there's also lots of like design accessibility roles or developer accessibility roles, even QA, like a QA specialist in accessibility. So there's those very specific roles.

What is kind of new in accessibility is seeing these accessibility leadership roles come in, like an accessibility program manager, accessibility director. We're starting to see VP of accessibility. And my projection is in the future, we'll start to see C-suite level, like a chief accessibility officer, which would be really exciting. So the reason that we would have still like some of these specialized roles is because there still needs to be somebody that's responsible for vision, for tracking, for metrics, and for making sure that everyone is on the same page and kind of going at the same pace and receives the same training and is measured by the same standards.

Otherwise, you could have different people within the organization that are kind of thinking of different things as a standard for accessibility. Or once you have a disagreement, it ladders up to somebody that maybe doesn't have as much experience as some of the more technical people on the team. So having somebody that is an expert in accessibility at a leadership level is very helpful in that regard. So that will lead us into one of the pitfalls that we'll discuss later.

One of the things that I think holistic accessibility can really help with is it can answer complicated questions. One of the things I've run into as a designer is when you start getting into really complicated domains is what happens when you have something like GDRP, which is-- I hate, I'm sorry, acronyms start losing their meaning to me, so it's a privacy statute in Great Britain. So you have all these rules around privacy and what kind of data you can collect and cookies you can put on your website.

So as a designer, I'm not a data expert and I'm not a privacy expert. So I rely really heavily on other people to give me subject matter expert opinions on how I'm supposed to implement data collection and, say, forms, like what can I ask? And what kind of things do I need to implement? What kind of micro copy might I need to make space for to assure people that we're following these regulations?

So like with privacy and accessibility, a question that has come up in a lot of these webinars that I've taught is like how do I research or test with people with disabilities without asking people too much or asking too invasive of information? Like, how do I ask, do you have a disability, if I want to test with somebody that has a screen reader to make sure that my product is accessible? So having people that are all involved with different areas of the business and can answer those sorts of questions, you start to build this network of people that are all involved in accessibility and all have a sense of accessibility.

And if 34% of people that are working age in the US have a disability, and you have people that have disabilities working throughout your organization, and you go in and you ask them, hey, I have a privacy question for you. What's the best way to go about this, then you might actually end up talking to somebody that has perspective from lived experience of either working with somebody that has a disability, a family member that has a disability, or they themselves having a disability.

And the best answer to this that I've come up with is ask them what kind of tech they use. So in most situations, if you ask somebody if they use a screen reader or if they use magnification or if they use a switch device or any number of different kinds of tech that you might want to be checking for to make sure that your interface is compatible with, you can find that information out just by asking what kind of tech they use. You don't have to know the details of what kind of disability they have or how it affects them.

Really what you want to find out is like what kind of tech they use and maybe like how long they've been using it or how they would rate their comfortability with that tech. Like how comfortable are they using a screen reader on desktop or mobile? So those are some ways that you could possibly benefit from having a lot of people on board with accessibility and knowing a lot more about accessibility than most people in a security department or a data department know about accessibility, which is right now zero.

So the three P's of a robust accessibility plan-- so when we're talking about holistic accessibility, a lot of people focus on one thing. And that's making their product UI accessible. But what I like to do is the three P's which is people, process, and products.

And so the first, people-- you take surveys. You do training. There is staffing strategies and working on the employee experience internally. So surveys would be like asking people what their comfortability with disability and accessibility training is, if they've had accessibility training before, asking what their comfortability is with different systems, like are you comfortable with using accessibility assistive technology like voiceover or JAWS or any of these other devices?

Staffing strategies-- making sure that you have some people that are subject matter experts so they can coach and kind of like defuse some of that knowledge institutionally. And then working on the employee experience-- so not having things that are hard for people with disabilities to use in your tech stack is like a really great way to start increasing your employee experience. Because if you start having a bad employee experience for people that have disabilities, it's really hard to retain people with disabilities to work for you and then to be giving you that experience of having somebody with disabilities on your team.

Process-- so standards, governance, having inclusive vendors and third party content, that's one thing that a lot of people skip, is that they're like, OK, we've remediated our site. We've got the bullet point list. We've put in the Jira tickets. We're going to fix all of these bugs, and now we're done.

But if you do just that, and you fix what's already broken, and you're not working on the next step like doing training and putting in processes to make sure that you don't make the same mistakes over and over, then it's a rather Sisyphean exercise. So you're just going to keep pushing that boulder up the hill. And it's going to keep rolling back down because you're not changing the way that you're doing things. And so you're going to keep building things the exact same way.

And with products, there's a maturity model, which I could do an entire talk on, that has several levels. And you probably heard of maturity models for software, for design, and now you're hearing about it for accessibility, but building products that are not only mature and adapting accessibility in the UI, but then just building solutions that meet accessibility needs.

A really great example of this was if you've heard of Waymo. They are a driver-less car company that I did some consulting work through an agency for. And they just won a Department of Transportation award for having really great accessibility features. Essentially, they wanted to make their app more accessible to people that had visual disabilities, whether it be low or no vision.

And so we did an assessment of the different features that they were proposing and tried to narrow it down to what would give the most benefit and what would actually help people? Because a lot of them were kind of just suppositions of people that were able-bodied that were like, oh, this would be really great. And a sighted person saying, oh, well I think this is really useful for somebody that doesn't have vision isn't as helpful as having somebody test it out and tell you if it is helpful.

And also, we discovered in that process that there was a lot of user preference involved because there isn't one singular blind or low vision experience. So I lost vision later in life. So I don't know Braille. I learned how to do white caning from the internet. I didn't go through a school for the blind or a traditional orientation and mobility instructor because I just didn't have access to the resources.

But there are some people that come up knowing that skill from their childhood and that they're very comfortable with it. So there's different needs that different people have because they've had a completely different experience of their disability. So having ways of having those experiences represented in one UI is very, very difficult. So having ways that people can really kind of personalize their experience based on what they need is really key.

So we built in several things like having a light be able to flash for people that had like a hearing disability or had low vision and play a sound for people that had low vision or no vision. So instead of it pulling up and flashing your name on a scrolling banner, it would play a sound. And it would also play the sound in the app before the car approached so you knew what to expect.

So things like that, and then when you arrived, that it would give you walking directions to your destination, especially since cars sometimes have to drop you off somewhere different to drop you off at a safe place. That goes beyond just like saying, OK, we're going to make sure a screen reader can use the UI. This went beyond that to making sure that the app was safe for people with disabilities to use. So that is a more holistic approach to building products for people with disabilities. And that's a place that we need to get to for our product design.

So let's talk about common pitfalls. One I love to talk about is the accessibility bottleneck. Or sometimes I call it the accessibility sherpa. It's where a company will hire one accessibility subject matter expert and expect that one person or two people to carry teams of hundreds of people. So you hire like maybe a QA person or a developer that knows about accessibility or is a subject matter expert. And they're then going to bottleneck all of the work that is being done by the company.

Now, on the screen right now, I have essentially like the bottleneck effect diagram. It has a lot of bubbles inside of a bottle. And someone is trying to shake them out, and only a few are coming out. So you've got hundreds of bubbles inside of this bottle. And only about five or 10 are coming out at a time.

And that's how it is with work inside of a product company. You get this very small opening like the neck of a bottle. And the more stuff that has to pass by a very small opening, the more things get held up, and the more that people and leadership get frustrated with the idea of accessibility because it's something that they don't want to do. It's costing them money. It's costing them time. It's lengthening time to market. There is an opportunity cost for them.

So re-framing it and having it be something that's more like, OK, well, it's something that we have to do for this to be an MVP, and also framing it like that's not enough people-- everybody needs to be responsible for accessibility will keep this from being a bottleneck and will keep people from being frustrated with it.

Another common pitfall is low commitment to the three P's, like having just an accessibility person come in and then get really frustrated and burnt out because they're just sitting there trying to affect change. But there's no governance and there's no support for making like systemic change across the products. They're just fixing small bugs. And it feels like there's missing pieces to the puzzle. They don't have people with disabilities inside the organization that can test.

Sometimes accessibility professionals are the only people with disabilities, if they do have a disability, in the entire organization or in the entire product organization. That can be a really frustrating place to be. And if leadership isn't committed to providing training to the rest of the team, then it can really hold up completing that entire picture and having holistic accessibility at an organization.

And I would say the most common pitfall is no involvement of disabled people. Like I just can't tell you how often I've seen accessibility folks that aren't disabled and just going back and forth with people that aren't disabled or people that aren't disabled talking over people that are disabled about accessibility. And while I said not every disabled experience is the same, like my experience is not the same as every person that's ever used a screen reader or magnification or has any other kind of visual disability, I definitely have a little bit more insight than somebody that maybe has never had any kind of visual disability before. And me being involved in a product gives it a little more insight than no people with disabilities being involved, especially since I've had some academic training as well.

So I would say this is one of the most common pitfalls that I see companies get involved in is not having any disabled people involved from start to finish, not in the requirement gathering, not in the building of the product, and not in the testing of the product. And when we're talking about holistic accessibility, you want people involved in the other departments of the business as well. So when we're talking about governance and compliance and legal and just like vendor procurement, all of these areas, content creation, these are all places where people with disabilities can be involved and could increase the accessibility of your entire organization.

This is one of my favorite examples of good intentions gone bad. But it's also used by a lot of people as an example of top-level accessibility. This is a photograph of a famous town square in Canada. And it is a set of stairs that lead down into a sunken area with a ramp built into them. So there's varying staggering terrace levels, and the ramp cuts directly through the stairs.

So there's not a clear path. There's no handrail on the actual ramp. And for somebody like me that uses a cane, this is a literal nightmare because you have ramps that are cutting across the pathway of the stairs. And you don't have any handrails that could guide you to a clear path.

All the stairs are the same color as well. So there's no markings on any of the stairs to tell you where they end and begin. And because the ramp cuts through them, they also end and begin at random places, as far as there's not a defined like staircase and then a defined ramp. So this kind of thing, it looks beautiful. It sounds like a good idea. Like, oh, everybody can use the space together.

But also, children could run down the stairs and cut people that are using wheelchairs off and make it very dangerous for them to use. There's just so many things that could go wrong with this. But I feel like just simply involving somebody with disability could have saved us a lot of headaches with this particular architectural feature.

But technically, it meets compliance. It doesn't technically violate any of the rules of the-- it's the Canadian Accessibility laws or the Americans With Disability laws. So it's technically OK but it's actually not OK. It's really good intentions, but it's bad execution. Good taste, bad execution is the theme of this one. But I love showing this because people all the time go, oh, it's so beautiful. It's so great. I go, yeah, but try to walk down it blindfolded. You cannot.

So I just want to touch on these maturity models really quick. I mentioned I could do a whole talk about it. But the first kind of awareness level is where you start getting into accessibility. You're like, wow, this is something we really need to be paying attention to. This is something we need to invest in.

Number two is where you start hitting those UI changes. You're training up your product folks. You're like, OK, we got to make these changes so that people can use a screen reader so that we can make sure that people can use all the assistive technology with our product and that it's compliant. We want to be compliant.

Number three is that service design level where you're thinking about building your requirements so it's safe for people with disabilities to use, so that it has features that make people's life better that have disabilities. And number four is that organizational change where it becomes everybody's responsibility, everybody's center of excellence. We don't just have one group that is the only people that do that accessibility.

So it's definitely a journey. I don't have any kind of place that I've ever worked where I've walked in and it's been perfect instantly or within a year or two years. I always say that it usually takes about a year to even get to awareness. Like I had to work on several companies that I worked at for six months to a year before they even were aware enough to go, OK, let's move to stage two. So they knew that accessibility was a thing, but they had to be able to really be worked on and convinced for almost six months to a year before they would even start entering phase two and start thinking about maturity and working on moving up that maturity ladder.

So if you are on an accessibility journey and you are just getting started, you've done boot camp, and you're like, I want to do the next thing, this is kind of that blueprint. This is the next step. You're doing the technical work. You're assessing all of those changes. You're saying, OK, we're finding each of the problems, the barriers. We're correcting them. We're implementing that.

This is the next step is you start-- after you get the UI changes and the technical cycles down, you start doing the service design. And you start moving on to the organizational change. And there's tons more that I could say about this, which I'll take questions in a couple of minutes.

So setting goals-- that's the other really big part of thinking about organizationally doing accessibility. If you don't have an action plan for success, you won't know that you're successful, so defining goals, like identifying these desired outcomes and objective benchmarks for progress and accountability. Otherwise, you won't be accountable. Then you just got to create the action. Sometimes I like to break things down like this. It sounds like it's really simple, but you got to define what actions you have to take to reach it. And then monitor the progress.

Now, I would like to be really careful about setting timing for monitoring. Because a lot of people start monitoring the first year right after boot camp. So we did not do that, and I'll tell you why, because it's really demoralizing. If you have just started doing something, let's say you're a software engineer that's been coding for a decade and then you go to boot camp and you're told, you know what, all the stuff you're doing is just a little bit wrong, that's a hard pill to swallow.

And then you go and you're told, all right, now we're going to start tracking every single thing you do wrong right out of boot camp. That's a really, really, really hard thing to do. Because not only have you just learned something new that you never knew before, but now you're told that somebody is tracking everything. And they're going to be watching everything that you do wrong. And it kind of feels like the anti-fun squad, where accessibility should be something that's celebrated and hyped like, oh cool, we're doing something good. We're doing something that's challenging. And we're learning.

But setting timing for monitoring at starting right away, I would not publicize those numbers. If you do want to start monitoring right away, I would not share that with your team. I would keep that in accessibility leadership only kind of circles. But other than that, I would say that setting up monitoring like some sort of sight listening, starting to adjust as needed, that's really great. But I would not start really sharing out those numbers until about a year after.

You'd also want to start getting like an accessibility statement together. And once you start getting some good numbers back from monitoring, maybe getting an independent audit and have what's called a vendor-- called a VPAT. Again, acronyms are hard. Vendor-- it's an accessibility statement essentially. But it's like basically, they've looked at it. They've audited your site. And they tell you, you can put this on your site. It's a statement of accessibility.

You can also put like a roadmap of like known issues and say like, hey, these are things that we're doing. If you have a compliance department that's really interested in accessibility for that reason, that can kind of ease some of the compliance burden. But it can also increase transparency with the community that you're working with.

And I just want to hit on compliance versus inclusion. Compliance tends to protect companies. So that's why I tend to favor inclusion. Because compliance is really about protecting companies. And like I said about that particular photo that I shared, it's technically compliant, but is it safe? Not exactly. Compliance isn't really flexible. So when we talk about personalization and the project that I worked on for Waymo, you could make it compliant without making it flexible and personalized.

Compliance often only takes one disability into account at a time. And not everybody that has a disability has only one disability. So that's something that it gets really complicated. But once you start working with people that have disabilities and you start seeing how they use things and build in personal use into their like OS settings or how they change different kinds of things to personalize their own experience, you start really understanding how the intersection of those different disabilities can really affect an experience.

And if you kind of like make things towards only one experience, like an overlay company sometimes does, you can only turn on like one kind of experience, then you'll see exactly what I mean by that. Compliance only takes one disability into account. Inclusion thinks about intersections, so like mobility and vision or how vision and hearing accessibility features can benefit everyone.

So that's really all the prepared remarks that I have. I find that I usually get a lot of questions. And it looks like we do have a lot of chat and some Q&A. But I have this book list. So I usually share this. And the slides should be available because they're on Google Slides. I also have a bunch of resources that I've worked on with the great team at the A11y Project.

I do some mentoring. So if you'd like to set some time with me once I come back from break on ADP list, you're welcome to do so. And I have a Linktree that I share resources on. I will put a link to these slides as well as any of the resources that I mentioned in the presentation. So Jena, what questions do we have?

JENA WALLACE: We have a lot of questions, Soren. And this is a fabulous presentation. So thank you so much. I'll dive right in.

One of the first questions was, how does one make the leap from working on accessibility as part of an instructional design role to a full-time accessibility professional?

SOREN HAMBY: That's a great question. The way that I did it was by-- I wasn't an instructional designer, but I was in design and I started working on design systems. I find that design systems are a really great way to increase the accessibility of a product because you can start testing on small pieces and making sure that those are really well vetted and tested before kind of like putting it together into larger pieces. Now, you still have to test it when you put it in a larger page because some things don't play well together. And some atoms require other atoms when you're thinking about small pieces in a design system to work appropriately.

I can go into a lot of technical detail on that. That's something I would love to nerd out about. But essentially, you just have to start really bringing that up in your work and start pushing it forward. Once you start building a portfolio that has projects where you've worked on accessibility, it's actually a lot smoother to move into accessibility because accessibility is a really big but very understaffed area right now. And any job where you would want to do your job title with accessibility, you can do that pretty easily. Because people would be like, oh, bonus. I get accessibility expertise on my team, which is what happens with the manager position I'm in right now.

But if you're looking to move into an accessibility subject matter expert, you might have to build a little bit more expertise. It might help to take like maybe a certification or some classes to kind of like back up academically what you're learning on the job and to fill in any of those gaps. I will mention that Deque, if you do have a disability, last I checked, they offer their certifications for free to people that have disabilities. And they don't ask questions about it. So you don't have to go through some kind of long process where you explain your disability or have to prove financial need-- Some Other programs where they ask a lot of really invasive questions.

So I've really enjoyed working with Deque when I got my certification. I actually paid for it before I found out that they had free scholarships for people with disabilities. But because of that, I would also recommend that people that don't have disabilities use them. Because I feel like that helps people with disabilities also because what you're paying is going towards funding scholarships for people that have disabilities.

JENA WALLACE: Cool. That's very, very helpful information. Our next question, I'm going to combine this with another question we have since they're on the same topic. But it's around the idea of resistance and skepticism from colleagues and stakeholders who don't understand the importance of accessibility. How do you convince your org move into that very first awareness stage if they aren't even there yet?

SOREN HAMBY: That's a good question. I would say find out who the decision makers are and find out what's important to them. Just like there's a lot of models of disability, there's a lot of models of inclusion and there's a lot of models of accessibility, which I have some talks on as well. But you have to find out what's important to them to find out what approach will work. Because if you walk up to somebody that's really concerned about doing the right thing and is concerned about being a corporate good citizen and you start telling them about all the money that they'll make by including people with disabilities in their marketing, then they might be turned off.

If you walk up to somebody that's only concerned about innovation and you start talking to them about the efficiency model where you're going to be more efficient, and people will be happier, and they're going to innovate so much because look at the curb cut effect. And look at Segways. Segways were created for people with disabilities. And voice assistants were created for people with disabilities. And that's the innovation argument.

If you start talking to somebody like that about innovation when they're not interested in innovation, then they're going to be turned off. So you got to find out what kind of projects have they backed before? What kind of decisions have they made before-- a little bit of a detective thing.

And then sometimes you can just have an honest discussion with them. Sometimes you don't have to be sneaky or manipulative or go behind their back or feel like that. You can just say, hey, what kind of things are important to you? I want to have a conversation on it. And then you can sit down and say, hey, this is why accessibility is important. And this is why it aligns with what you're interested in supporting. And this is why it's aligned to our company tenants. I think aligning it to the strategic pillars of your company is also a really great move, because those are things that they're supposed to want to support. And if you put it in the strategic pillar zone, it's really hard to argue with that.

And if all else fails, if your company is failing on the compliance end of things, you can always find out if they've been sued, which is sometimes the impetus to get people to move into awareness. Because sometimes they're just kind of skipping through the field happily. And then the cartoon character with the hammer comes in and is like, it's a lawsuit. So sometimes it just kind of like breaks them out of that mold of being like, I don't have to worry about anything because I'm untouchable. Because they will get hit with lawsuits eventually if they get big enough.

Because people are just-- there's good faith lawsuits, and there's bad faith lawsuits. So that's kind of what divide them into. And people that file what they call good faith lawsuits are people that want change and have genuinely been hurt by the inaccessibility of the product. Bad faith lawsuits are people that are just going around looking for something to sue over. And so they're using them, some kind of crawler to find something that has enough mistakes on it to sue for. And you have no way of knowing if it's a good faith bad lawsuit or a bad faith lawsuit, so you have to treat them all as good faith.

And it doesn't really matter if it's a good faith lawsuit or a bad faith lawsuit. They'll still take your money. And so if they're concerned about money and compliance, that's sometimes the way to push them into the awareness state. And once they start learning, sometimes it's easier to push them into these other states.

JENA WALLACE: Definitely. That was a great way to put it with the cartoon character frolicking through the flowers and then getting hit over the head. I really like that. Our next few questions are a little more technical. So what KPIs or data metrics are you utilizing in this area of work given the limitations with data reporting and privacy and identity?

SOREN HAMBY: So there's definitely just like number of errors, time to fix. There's severity of errors. So there's definitely ratings out there already on how severe an error is and if it's a blocking error. So there's also the kind of like, is it on a path of something that is-- this is very technical, I'm sorry. If anybody's confused by this, you can definitely ask follow-up questions.

But if it's a user path that's a critical journey, so like if-- let's take my website for example. I am a-- I have a personal website. And the point is to maybe like talk to me or book me for a speaking engagement or maybe sign up for this webinar. If you can't do those things on my website, then you can't do the critical path on my website. If the point was to maybe go to my Instagram and the link to my Instagram is broken, that's not a critical path. So that's a less severe error.

Now is that still a problem? Yes, it's a problem, but it's a less severe error. So you can definitely rate those issues and keep track of that. I also really like to gauge what people's comfortability with accessibility and knowledge is. It's not like a test. It's kind of more like employee satisfaction surveys and finding out how much do people feel like they know? And you can kind of rate that against the output. So it's more anonymized.

So it's not like, hey, Soren. I'm going to give you a test on how good you are at accessibility. And I'm going to test how many like bugs you're putting out. It's like, we're testing the code. And so the company over wide is putting out like 87% OK code. And the company wide, we rate that we're like 78% pretty comfortable with accessibility. So we need to get that number up so this number will go up. So those things are connected. So those are two of the example KPIs that you could use.

JENA WALLACE: Cool. Thanks. The next question is, so besides the free browser-based tools or screen readers, do you have any recommendations for companies that due to budget constraints cannot afford automated enterprise tools that help developers and testers identify issues or cannot yet-- they're not at the point where they can hire an outside company that offers people with disabilities for testing? Any advice around that?

SOREN HAMBY: Yeah. So there's definitely a lot of tools out there that offer free versions that you can use if you can't afford the enterprise version. One of those is, of course, the [INAUDIBLE] DevTools. Stark Labs offers free versions of many of their tools, like they produce a Figma and sketch tool for designers. They provide in-browser tools for most major browsers.

They're launching some really cool new stuff like a Mac and a web app for auditing accessibility. Their tools are just really powerful. And I would say that those are probably the lowest cost tools too that I've run across. Deque and all of these other companies that I've been doing accessibility for a very long time, they're going to be based on volume. So they often have a baseline per user seat. And then they're also based on volume.

So if your company has a lot of content, like my employer has a lot of content because we have lots of colors. We're a paint company. And we also have lots of products. And we also have lots of editorial content because there's architectural styles and article pages and all this stuff.

So we got a quote for that. And it was very, very high because we have a lot of web page volume. When we think about let's scan things for accessibility as we're designing, that would be the place that I would invest in tools first, is to think about like, let's catch things at the design phase and maybe use some of the free implementation things like something that-- like a code sniffer that works with GitHub. Like the [? X ?] tools, that is free, or any of the other companies that offer free accessibility sniffers.

That's where I would probably go first. For paid tools, though, is lower cost and on the design side. So the further you can push it to the left as far as the requirements and the implementation of accessibility, the better the outcome will be because you're not having to redo stuff.

JENA WALLACE: That's all really helpful to know. And just so everyone knows, our team has been putting links to these resources as Soren talks about them. So feel free to peruse the chat and check that out. Our next question, kind of taking a step back to some bigger picture ones again, any tips on getting an organization unstuck when they plateau or even regress in terms of maturity?

SOREN HAMBY: Yeah. So this is something I've run into at several organizations, is that you get stuck or you even go backwards. And it's something I've experienced at almost every job that I've been at.

I think finding a good A11y ally in leadership is a great key there because you want to find somebody that can-- if you don't have enough pull yourself that can help influence people and that can help get you back on the radar. Also finding a pilot project is a great way. So if you know that there are new features that are out coming, if there's maybe a new initiative that's going live that you could be a part of, that can up the visibility of accessibility.

Plus, you can also prove that like, hey, this team worked together. We built an accessible product. And these are the other things that were great about it. Like we reduced build time or we didn't have any kind of time lag going to market. So any kind of other metrics that you can gather around that particular project to prove the return on investment can sometimes give you a little bit of a push over that plateau. Otherwise, sometimes it is just a waiting game of saying like sometimes you have to wait a little bit for budgets to roll over.

That's sometimes the hardest part of being somebody that cares about accessibility is that you know that there's a tool out there that will do what you need it to do. Or you know that there's something you can invest in training or hiring people or getting people with disabilities to test your product, but you just don't have the investment. You don't have the money. You don't have the backing for it.

And the best thing to do is just to remember that it's a journey and that any step that you take towards accessibility is a good direction. Even if you step to the side or have to step back or you end up finding that you can't make progress, you've still started on that road. And it's not like a destination that you can't ever reach. So don't feel discouraged.

Don't feel like-- you haven't failed. You and everybody else out there are doing the best that you can on this journey and that's the best that you can do. You can't do any better than that. So I would say don't give up and wait for next year's budget.

JENA WALLACE: Great. We-- it looks like we only have time for one last question. So I'll end it kind of on a similar note in the same vein as what you were just discussing. But how can professionals maintain their energy and passion for accessibility while navigating these challenging moments in their career journey? Like how can we stay motivated as accessibility professionals?

SOREN HAMBY: The best thing that's helped me is to find a community. I would say I've been part of several communities. In fact, Stark has one, Stark Labs. So they have a Slack community, and I've been a part of that for a very long time.

I've kind of like fallen back a bit from that as it's grown and into some smaller communities because it's a little easier for me to keep track of. So find what works for you. There's not going to be one community to rule them all that works for everyone. I would say find a community that maybe is specialized around the struggles that you're going through. There's a bunch of tech communities out there that can be specifically for UX designers that have an accessibility channel. That can be a good for people that are in the same stage that you're in.

Or if you're looking specifically for accessibility, there's a lot of accessibility communities out there as well. And you know, Discord, Slack, different social medias have specific channels or communities or servers for that.

Also, don't be afraid to vent a little bit to these communities. I would say I was really afraid of appearing unprofessional because I was frustrated with the state of things. But I found that once I found other people that were the same level of professional that I was and that were in the same level of their career and had the same challenges, once we started talking about the things that frustrated us or kind of having to talk about buttons over and over again or have the same conversation with a developer over and over again, it was really, really helpful for my mental health.

Having that support really made all the difference in the world. And I actually went through a really tough time earlier this year where I felt like I might be ready to give up doing accessibility for a moment. And having that community changed everything for me. And you know, the next week, I signed on to editing a book. And I decided I was going to go ahead with writing my book. So if it weren't for that, I don't know if I would still be doing accessibility right now because I was just really burnt out on it. So don't let yourself get burnt out. Rely on support and community.

JENA WALLACE: Great. Well, thank you so much, Soren, again for the wonderful presentation. I think everybody learned a lot. And thank you for every-- to everyone for joining us, asking some really great questions. And I hope everybody has a great rest of their day. Thanks so much.

SOREN HAMBY: Thank you, Jena.