>> Tatiana: Hi! This is Tatiana Lee from RespectAbility. I want to thank you so much for tuning in with us today. We have a very very exciting conversation that I'm very very honored to have today. We have Deb Calla and Allen Rucker of Media Access Awards. I want to thank you guys for being here with us today. Before we get started, just a few housekeeping things: towards the end, we will be able to take questions, so if you have any itching questions that you want to ask Deb and Allen, we will be able to get those answered at the end, and I want to welcome you - we have been doing a series of conversations with different entertainment professionals within the disability community - you can check out RespectAbility's website for ones that we've had in the past, upcoming ones - we have some great ones coming up, next week we'll have the Geena Davis Institute for Gender and Media where Madeleine Di Nonno will share stats and information on a study that they conducted, and it shows that disability representation is at a all-time high. We've also been doing a series of convenings for different areas of the disability community so that we can all collaborate and just unite around everything that is going on and how our lives have been changed or encoded, so please join us for those - one of the ones we have coming up, we will be doing a wheelchair convening, so a convening of wheelchair-users with disabilities or people with disabilities who are wheelchair-users, and that will be in partnership with the Christopher Reeve Foundation, so stay tuned for updates on that and check out our social media and RespectAbility and any stats and information and resources you would like related to COVID and disability, check out RespectAbility.org. So, I want to introduce our guests today. So Deb Calla has a company, Calla Productions, and is a content creator for television, film and web, as well as live events. Deborah is also the writer of two books, one for Scholastic on health and fitness and one called "Putnam," and she is also the writer for such publications as Vogue and Harper's Bazaar. Calla became involved with the disability community in 2010 when she was the chair of the Diversity Committee of the Producers Guild of America, a position she's held for 14 years. As a diversity chair, she always works with other guilds, such as the Writers Guild of America, SAG-AFTRA, Casting Society of America and the Directors Guild of America, on projects that advance inclusion of diverse groups. Deb is also an advisor and the Brazile council lead for the Geena Davis Institute. And, we have Allen Rucker, who contracted transverse myelitis in 1996 at the age of 51, and was paralyzed from the attack at the T10 level. He published a memoir about his life after getting TM called "The Best Seat in the House," which is now available in paperback and eBook. As his memoir so brilliantly conveys, Allen is on a journey, the journey that has taken Allen into a life as a speaker and an advocate for transverse myelitis in the disability community. As a TV writer/producer, he co-hosts on the experimental video group TVTV and has written numerous network special documentaries and teleplays including the award-winning cable series "The History of White People in America" with Martin Mull. He is also the longtime chair of the WGA Writers with Disability community. Thank you so much Deb and Allen for joining us. I'm so excited to have this conversation, you two are people in this industry that I admire and just love the work that you guys have been doing so thank you so much for being here. I am gonna start with first, Deb. Deb, you've been advocating for disability in film and TV for the past ten years as we said, probably even more, and as a diversity chair - and also co-chair of the Media Access Awards - into what you and Allen have built it into today, what's important for people in the industry to know when it comes to achieving their goals as a producer?

>> Deb: Okay so now I'm gonna do some housecleaning myself. [ Laughter ] I am no longer the chair of the Diversity Committee of the Produces Guild of America. I was until last year, for 14 years, and everything else is good. So, the question was, what do we need to know in terms of how to work as a producer in the industry?

>> Tatiana: Yeah.

>> Deb: To be a producer, I think that you need to have these qualities: you need to be able to dream and to follow your dream and not to let anybody or anything get in your way, because a producer starts out of nothing, maybe he or she will have a script or an idea or see something in a magazine, you have to take that all the way to a premiere and a theater or launching any edit - a broadcaster, so that person that goes from beginning to the end is a producer, and it will be a path of obstacles and you must have enough certainty and enough passion about what you're doing that you are going to have to overcome all those obstacles. So I think you need to be courageous, you need to be able to dream and follow your dream, you need to have leadership ability, because you and I have to convince a whole bunch of people to follow you where you go and we'll start with a writer and then maybe with actors finding buyers, whomever those people are, you're gonna to have to convince them that what you have is better than, will be more successful than, what somebody else has. So, and you need to have patience, because most projects will take anywhere - if a miracle happens - from a year to ten years, so how are you going to keep something alive for ten years - I can tell you for example I have a script now that I've had for ten years and now all the pieces are falling into place. I have now a successful director, I have a producing partner and I have a buyer so it took me ten years to get to here. So all those qualities is what you need and you have to be able to network. It all comes down to knowing people and you meet somebody and that person will know a whole group of people and then you meet somebody else and it's about giving time to know people and people know you in this industry.

>> Tatiana: Yes, I think those are very very good points, so you're saying dream big, bite hard, and just believe in yourself more than than anyone else in the room. [ Laughter ]

>> Deb: Without that, you're not even leaving your house.

>> Tatiana: I love that.

>> Allen: What film school teaches those qualities?

>> Deb: What?

>> Allen: What film school teaches those qualities?

>> Deb: It's called life school.

>> Allen: Yes, right. Exactly.

>> Tatiana: Speaking of following your dreams, Allen you told your story in a memoir "The Best Seat in the House," why did you feel it was important to tell that story and what advice do you have to writers that want to tell their story but may have the fear of that?

>> Allen: I don't know what the fear is except the fear of writing which a lot of people have. I don't after all these years but I certainly had it for most of my life. I told the story because I thought it was a good story to tell and it was unique and it struck me - writers are always looking for stories to tell, and if it's your own story, and you wake up one Tuesday and you're feeling fine and an hour and a half later you're paralyzed from the waist down, that's kind of a good start of a story. But also I just... writing - first of all, the greatest therapy for anyone who is disabled is other people's stories. Not theory, not pray, not therapy, none of that stuff - other people's stories will tell you how they got through it, and how they got through it will help you get through it, and writing the book help me get through it - that's the thing, right. Writing something down kind of creates an objectivity to it, it puts it out there, it's not inside your head anymore and you can kind of see it and process it, play with it. It was just a great thing to do just for me, plus I think the book came out pretty well, too. So writing your, story creating your story - there are lots of ways to tell your story. Deb and I've started our own little interview series on the Media Access Awards site, and the first people we talked to were the two people who created "Crip Camp”

>> Tatiana: Which is an amazing documentary, by the way.

>> Allen: Yes. One of them is Jim LeBrecht who's born with spina bifida and he had a story to tell, and it took him up to, well, last year he's not young, to tell that story and that story was this camp that he went to in 1971 that changed his life, where he met these people like Judy Heumann and all these people and really was the beginning of his kind of adult life as the person with spina bifida. And it took him decades to tell the story - he knew the story ever since he was 18, 19 years old, whenever he went to the camp, but until he found the right person to work with, with the - how do you..?

>> Deb: Newnham.

>> Allen: Newnham, who was a very well-known producer, director of documentary, certainly in the Bay Area - until he had a lunch with her and the idea came falling out and she said "well, we have to do this" and she claims that she only does ideas - she only pursues ideas as a documentary maker that she can't reject, that she goes to bed at night and says, "I can't let that one go" and that's what Deb was talking about, the passion that you have to have, and she didn't let this one go and it took them five years to make this film, to find footage and stuff like that. So there's a lot of different ways to tell your story, I guess is what I'm saying.

>> Deb: I mean, Jim was able to do this documentary because he had worked with Nicole on two or three documentaries before as a sound man, I'm sorry, as a sound mixer. So, it's really all about relationships - because they had worked together, even though in different capacities, he had access to her and when he went to her and said, "I feel like this is a good story," she fought to that and as they started to work together, she realized, "this is a story that Jim needs to tell and thus he needs to be the co-director," so now this person who had never directed anything, was directing with someone else who had directed many things. So it's about relationships, and they always have to be truthful and collaborative and if you really create those networking groups, that will really open a lot of doors for whatever work you want to do.

>> Allen: Can I add one more point?

>> Tatiana: Yes, please.

>> Allen: No, she's right - she's absolutely right. That's what relationships - when we asked Jim, he said, "What do you need to create a project like this?" in this case, a documentary, and he said, "find your tribe." Find your tribe, which is a finite group of people who are going to help you through this when there's nothing but an idea on the table, you get up in the morning, at least you have someone to talk to about it, strategize about it, etc, it's very hard to do anything in the entertainment business by yourself - in fact, it's pretty much impossible - occasionally people write scripts by themselves but other than that, boy, it's just - you've got to find your tribe, so, as Deb said, you find collaborators, and you may find them in the strangest way, you may be a sound man and you talk to a producer, or you may be no one and yet you know someone that can help you enter the business, maybe not as a producer or a writer but in another way - working on a production. That's how you meet people.

>> Tatiana: Yes. I agree. There's so many people that are just within our community that I consider friends but we collaborate on creative projects, we support each other and it's so so important, and you guys have always been great resources and information, I know I've called Deb plenty of times and picked your brain and asked you questions and you, Allen, as well, and you guys have always wrapped your arms around me and supported everything and that's what's needed.

>> Deb: We love you! Because you're great! You're talented, you're all the qualities we talked about, you got 'em.

>> Tatiana: Thank you, thank you. But you guys are awesome and that's what it takes, it really does, to have that tribe, you're right, and find that community of people and just cultivate those relationships, so thank you. So, Allen, I have another question while we're on the topic of writing - so you are the chair of the Writers Guild - the Writers Guild of America, Writers with Disabilities Committee - what advice do you have for writers with disabilities who want to join the guild and be in with your committee, because I heard it's been quite fun, from what I hear from people that are part of it.

>> Allen: Oh, it's fun. It's a process. First of all, you gotta hone your skills as a writer, you have to take courses, read scripts, read all those Robert McKee books, et cetera, and the fastest way to get into the guild, if that's what you're talking about - there are two main routes to get into the guild: one of them is write a script and have a guild- authorized producer want to buy it, and you're automatically in the guild - that's the hardest route to go and very hard, again, you may be working as a writer's assistant or a PA on a project and you write a script a spec script for a show or something and they like it a lot but that producer - well that producer or that studio can get you into the guild by virtue of the fact that they have an agreement with the guild that they only hire union writers, so that's one way of doing it - as I said that's the most difficult way. The easiest way to work yourself into the guild is to get a master's degree from a reputable screenwriting program and you can use that to get into what is known as the caucus, which is a part of the guild, kind of junior membership, right - part of the guild, where you could go to meetings and go to screenings and go to panel discussions and stuff like that but you can't vote, you don't really have any power to vote, and many of the members of the Writers with Disabilities committee have entered the guild that way, and what that allows you to do is commune with other writers and to learn the ropes from people, your contemporaries, and then you may get into a - there's lots of these kind of writing programs, the studios right, they have ABC, Disney has a great writing program and, where the studios and the networks have these writing programs that you could get into, and if they know you are a member of the guild or work with the guild that makes them feel good, and that way you can get a script written and probably bought and then you become a full member of the guild, which doesn't - you look the same when you walk into the room but you now have to pay dues, but it's a great great thing but it's a process, you can't just walk in the door and say "I want to be at the Writers Guild," you have to approach it one of those two ways.

>> Tatiana: Okay, thank you. So you guys hear that - while you're stuck at home work on your scripts, get writing, just be creative, just - work on those ideas and and get them moving. So, Deb - you and Allen have been doing Media Access Awards for the past ten years and you guys have done an amazing amazing job - I've attended I think the last three or four and actually was honored two years ago which thank you so much which was a huge honor - I was not expecting that, but the money that I got from the Christopher Reeves scholarship did so much for me - I got new headshots, taking acting classes and did so much to hone my craft as an actor and you guys do so much for the community so thank you, but with that said, tell me a little bit you mentioned that you guys just did a screening talking about "Crip Camp" and everything, so what are some other things you guys are planning during this time of COVID?

>> Deb: So Allen and I started, or took over the Media Access Awards back in 2010. The Media Access had run out of funding and steam and everything else by 2007 - Norman Lear, one of the founders, had moved on, gotten busy with other stuff, and all the other people that were involved also got busy with other stuff, and most importantly, the funding ended. So, in 2010, the first time ever that all the guilds, SAG-AFTRA, DGA, Writer's Guild, Producer's Guild, Casting Society - we all came together, and at that time - I say we as I was the Chair of the Diversity Committee of the Producer's Guild - and we wanted to do something together and we decided to do something for Women's International Day, and it was spectacular - we did readings of women from Afghanistan and SAG-AFTRA gave us the actors, Casting Society casted, people from the DGA directed, I produced it, Allen wrote, and so it was a collaboration. And it was so spectacular that we said, "what else can we do?" And the idea of the Media Access as this organization that had ended came up, and we said, "well, let's do something," and as Robert David Hall said, we were a bunch of people holding bagels and a Xeroxed program, but it was clear in 2010, when we had the first-second round of Media Access that this was really something very very important, and so Allen and I have been working for 11 years in growing the awards event, and also growing the organization. So besides the annual which is now way beyond a bagel and a Xerox program and it's a full-on dinner with - held for 400 people and amazing talent from the industry, we also created last year, the first 'best practices' guide for working with disabled writers which has been adopted by the Writers Guild of America for their showrunners program and, with that, we want to support the entry of a greater number of disabled writers because the likelihood is that they will write more characters with disabilities - as Allen was saying, we write about ourselves one way or another, our point of view, our experience of life, so it all starts from the writing, and so if we have more writers aware of inclusion of people with disabilities, will have more actors, more directors, more everything, so we've done that. We've also partnered up with the Blacklist and Easter Seals, which is a great organization, wonderful partners, and we created the first-ever, non-produced film and television, ten-best list which we launched last year and this year we'll do it again, and we announced last year at the Media Access Awards. And this year, because we're all home, we decided that we should have, as Allen was talking about, an interview series. So we've interviewed the people from "Crip Camp," we interviewed Kathryn Beatty who is a writer on "NCIS New Orleans," we interviewed Shoshanna Stern, and we will continue to go, and anybody who wants to watch these interviews they can check out our Facebook page and our Instagram page, and we're talking about a number of other projects that we can undertake now - everything obviously with the stay-at- home, be safe mentality, and using technology to disperse information to keep the community connected so that we can come out of this situation stronger and having pushed our activism, our mission, forward. s

>> Tatiana: Thank you, so much, and we'll have all that information, everything that Deb talked about, when we have this posted up - you'll be able to get all of that and you can always find all of their information on Media Access's Facebook page and also on Media Access's - what's the website?

>> Deb: mediaaccessawards.com

>> Allen: You have to type in - for Facebook, you have to type in Media Access Awards, and then you'll get to the Media Access Awards Facebook page.

>> Deb: Yeah. Media Access Awards on Facebook, Media Access Awards on Instagram, mediaaccessawards.com is our site.

>> Tatiana: Thank you. We will definitely, when we post this up, if you didn't get all of that, we will make sure you have clickable links where you can get all of that information. So, Allen -

>> Allen: Yeah.

>> Tatiana: What do you think -

>> Allen: Hit me. [ Laughter ]

>> Tatiana: What do you think still

>> Tatiana: What do you think still needs to be done to open up more opportunities for writers and producers with disabilities - in the industry?

>> Allen: Well, about three years ago, 'cause Deb and I've been doing this since 1846 - about three years ago...

>> Deb: Speak for yourself! [Laughter]

>> Allen: We noticed along with, actually it was Gail Williamson that first brought this up to my - Gail is a casting director...

>> Tatiana: Hi, Gail!

>> Allen: ...casting agent, which is, she said there was a scene change - all of a sudden - in terms of her clients, 'cause most of her clients or many of her clients are disabled - she was getting more calls for little roles and commercials, et cetera, and there was some kind of change that place. At the same time, more shows started appearing like...

>> Deb: "New Amsterdam"...

>> Allen: "Speechless."

>> Deb: "Speechless."

>> Allen: "The Good Doctor," a whole series of shows, and now all these, "Special," and 'Remy'? 'Ruby'?

>> Deb: 'Remy.'

>> Tatiana: "Ramy."

>> Allen: Sorry, excuse me. And "This Close," the all deaf show, starring Shoshana Stern, talking to in our series, and so there were openings, and openings for writers, and all of a sudden more writers started to get hired, more writers in our group. When I started - I didn't start it - when I took over the group 12, 13 years ago, there were four people in the room and we could have it in the afternoon because no one was employed and the idea of being employed was - I was employed off and on, but basically the whole group was not employed.

>> Deb: That's the Writer's Guild... Writers Guild group.

>> Allen: The Writers with Disabilities group, I'm sorry. Now, from that four members, there are now 30 or 40 members, 30-some members, half of them work or are working or a bunch of them are working, and if they of course encourage everyone else to work and find openings and stuff like that. The whole process - to answer your question, I took all that time to get to your question - to answer your question, what needs to be done is just board writer with disabilities in the room pitching their ideas or pitching their skills, et cetera - and that's a difficult thing: first of all, it's not that people in show business I wrote this the other day, and I think the industry is not the enemy, okay. Really. Ignorance is the enemy. It's not even - there are prejudices, there there are kind of preformed thoughts or you know unconscious fears, et cetera, but those are pretty easily overcome I think in the face of meeting someone who can write who happens to be in a wheelchair or happens to have autism - you get over those things pretty fast, but it's the fact that most producers, most show runners in television, for instance, it's just never dawned on them. It never - and somehow, that's one of Deb and my's duty is just, let them know, knock on the door and say, "listen, you ever thought about this? You ever thought this guy or this gal or this kind of person could improve your scripts? Could broaden the range of your show?" And when people do that, it does that. The show "New Amsterdam" - you know "New Amsterdam"? It's show on NBC. It's a medical show. I was with some other people in Denver when they premiered that show, they showed it for the first time, and there were no disabled people in there, there's no mention of disability, and because of Russell Boast who - they had of this Casting Society of America and some other people, kind of hip them to the fact that, this is a good show where you can involve - and now the show has characters, guests with disabilities, almost every week, and they just realized this could broaden their show, this could make their show more interesting, more inclusive, and reach a different audience to. So the ignorance is the big thing - there's fear and there's probably outright prejudice - people are afraid that, "oh, if I hire I disabled writer all of a sudden, I have to make accommodations and all of a sudden, I have to make sure he gets along with - or she gets along with the rest of the cast, the rest of the writing room and what do we do in writing room and what happens if I decide to fire that person because they're not a very good writer, will I get sued?" All those fears go on in people's mind so, if they do think about it, they probably exit out even before they've really thought it through because of those - most of the, fictitious or mythical fears.

>> Deb: I mean, I think that there are two, really - two very big obstacles and that was actually the birth of the best practices guide for the Writer's Guild, because it came out of a conversation, where meeting with a number of top showrunners, because I don't have a disability, they felt comfortable in saying to me and asking me, "well, you're here to ask us to sort of really go out and petition and ask and talk to other show runners about hiring writers with disabilities, but what about this, what about that, do I have to make special accommodations, what does the ADA say, I mean it's all too complicated," because remember if showrunners, once they get a green light, usually, they just call up their friends that they've worked with in all the other shows, so now - and that goes for any minority, all the minorities have to break the showrunners out of picking up the phone and saying, "hey, Bob - Bob who I went to AFI with or Bob who I went to USC with," to not make that call and to call -

>> Allen: Or Bob who I went to high school with. I mean the attachments are very - they could go back a long way.

>> Deb: Right. So it's human nature to want to work with who you know, who you're comfortable with, that you have a level of trust - it's human nature. Now we have to ask people in power to not - to break some of their comfort level and now try out other people - women, people of color, people with disabilities - so that's the first hurdle, is to ask these people not to be so comfortable and to call up other people. But the argument is, by including others that are different from Bob, you are also including different points of view, original stories, a way of seeing the world that is different from John and Bob, so this is the upside of inclusion, is that stories that haven't been told, points of view that have not been explored, that it can. So, going back to the best practices is really addressing these fears like, "what can I ask a person with the disabilities in an interview? Can I ask them what kind of disabilities do they have?" It's like, "can I ask them how and they can contribute to a show?" I mean there is the proper way of asking things and there's also a law, so this guide addresses that in a whole box to help showrunners to feel more comfortable and be more excited about tapping into this huge, underserved audience, which has an incredible buying power - so we try to give answers and at the same time, give the reasons why this is a good idea, it is a good idea commercially, it is a good idea humanely, it is a good idea artistically - it's just a good idea. So I think that that's what we have to continue to do, is to talk to show runners, give examples of successful writers - in "The Good Doctor," in "NCIS: New Orleans," in "Speechless" - I mean all these —

>> Tatiana: And "Special" and so many...

>> Deb: And "Special," and all these shows had and have writers with disabilities in they're writers rooms, so we just need to continue to go out and advocate. That's so so important and actually Rachel who got to be an actress on "New Amsterdam" and it just shows you the fact that - Allen, you did one thing and mentioned to somebody and how that all trickled down and Rachel she said she wears a prosthetic leg and she's been a reoccurring co-star on there as a nurse and then she said no one could see her leg but she loved how inclusive the casting was and that was so important and then we at RespectAbility got to consult on a couple of the episodes - the episode with the woman with Down syndrome, consulted on that and then the episode where they had someone deaf and we helped with a lot of the casting, so that just lets you know how one person says something and the whole community surrounds and it has a huge impact outside of the community, so I think that is so important.

>> Allen: Let me add something to what Deb was saying. Which is that, the show like "The Good Doctor" - David Shore created that show, and even though the lead character is not autistic, he plays it so well that other characters that come on as guest stars who are autistic completely buy into his character. David Shore has at least two writers - one with autism and one in a wheelchair on the writing staff, right. Well guess what? They've been around... David, he's been around for a couple of years, worked at other shows, but now he's David Shore's new 'Bob,' all of a sudden Bob becomes a guy in a wheelchair and it doesn't really matter that he's in a wheelchair - to David Shore, it just matters that the guy is a good writer, and so he goes to another show and he goes, "Bob, i.e. David, you gotta work with me on this show," so that old boys club as it was, all of a sudden starts expanding, it includes women and people with disabilities and people of color and they all become Bobs, and that's the way it's going - it's absolutely the way it's going to work. What we're trying to do is speed up the process so it doesn't take a hundred years for all of that to happen, because it's definitely going to happen, because that's who the people, the audience, are diverse in race, color and disability, et cetera, and so their shows are gonna respond to that, it's only natural, it's just - hurry up, let's go, let's get these people. And also, besides the fact that there's an audience out there, at least one out of four adults in America has a disability, most people don't realize that, and an audience, as Deb says, has buying power - there's an enormous talent pool of people who are diverse and especially in this case we're talking about people with disabilities, writers that are really good writers, and so it's ridiculous to not hire a writer who's good, who could help your show, just because he happens to be in a wheelchair and you have to build a ramp - that's a small price to pay for good writing, anyway.

>> Tatiana: Yes, I agree, and there's so many amazing talent and just, to our viewers out there, actually the official number of the disability market is worth over a trillion dollars, so that is just to let you know the buying power that we have and how much it can influence and shape so much of our world and our culture and how we view disability and ability, so.

>> Allen: By the way, one more thing.

>> Tatiana: Go ahead.

>> Allen: The advertising business has figured that out many years ago - they include many more people with disabilities in most major national ads than ever before and more than any television show, because they know that there's a market up there.

>> Tatiana: Oh, I agree.

>> Deb: Yeah, and it's like if you think about, it's not just the person with a disability, it's their immediate family, it's their friends and everybody now they can see life reflected as is in media, so if it's a good product and I see that they understand society as is, I'm much more inclined to be a fan of that product than a product that completely ignores the world and really mostly casts white man as their sort of spokespeople, so, I mean, I think that that's like pretty much over with, I don't think any companies are really staying away from just a male and white route to represent their image, so I think that we really have done a lot of growth in that sector.

>> Tatiana: No, I agree - we're at a point where people are tired of repetitiveness and want something fresh and new. So, we have a question in —

>> Allen: A question?

>> Tatiana: We have a question. Someone says, "assuming you're developing a for-profit production, which strategies would you suggest a producer use to find investors and funding?"

>> Deb: Is it a film project, or TV project?

>> Tatiana: They didn't specify either.

>> Deb: Okay, because if it's a television project, let's say - I don't know if it's scripted or non-scripted, let's say non-scripted, what you're gonna need is a solid concept and you're going to need some funding for sizzle reel, so that funding it's gonna have to be from either friends or family or some crowd-sourcing situation, and then you can go out with your elements and try to sell your non-scripted show. For a scripted show, you need a pilot - I'm thinking this person is not well-established in the industry - so you need a very strong pilot you need -

>> Allen: A treatment?

>> Deb: What?

>> Allen: Maybe a treatment too.

>> Deb: Yes.

>> Allen: A really good concept.

>> Deb: Exactly, and an idea of what happens in the first season, second season, but a solid pilot, very solid ideas, and then you need to go out to buyers, and then the best way to do is go to production companies that have deals with the broadcasters - not go directly to ABC or CBS, but go to a Mark Gordon Productions or Lionsgate, other production companies that have deals with broadcasters. If you're talking about a future film, then that's a whole other situation, and then you need to also have - the more elements you have for a feature film project the better off you are - you're going to need a script, you're going to need at least a director attached, and you have to make sure that all your attachments - which means all the people that are going to be part of your project - are adding something, so it doesn't help to - if I have a three million dollar or five million dollar film, to have - "I just graduated" student from AFI as my director, unless that person is brilliant and all their professors and they're they have a short film and that's brilliant, but you try to go to someone who has already done a feature film, so that would be one attachment, you try to go to an actor that has some meaning for your project and for the market, and you try to attach that person. You need a business plan to go to investors, to try to raise your budget. You need to be very clear in terms of the ROI, which is return on your investment, so -

>> Tatiana: Also, can you step back a little bit, maybe explain really quick to people what a treatment is?

>> Deb: Well, a treatment is the whole idea of what your feature film or what your TV show is going to be about. A treatment can be between four to ten or twelve pages and it's the whole concept - no dialogue, you may have a line of dialogue, but it's not like a script where you have dialogue back and forth, it's really about sort of the world, the characters, but it's done in storytelling format. So that helps the buyer to really understand the world, the characters, the situations that are going to happen in that television show or that feature film before they really -it's even more important for a TV show, because I need to project many seasons - a feature film, if I have a script, it's good to have a treatment so that if a buyer says, "I don't have the time to read a hundred pages, do you have ten? And if I like those ten, then I'll read the hundred." That's the function of the treatment for a feature film project.

>> Tatiana: Thank you, so much. I think those are important and I know this may seem overwhelming but that's where your network comes in - that network that Deb talked about earlier, that's when that comes in so that you can join forces with people to kind of divvy up a lot of that work and make something happen. Go ahead.

>> Allen: Can I say something? That involves television? Remember the name YouTube - many television projects these days began almost as sketch shows on YouTube. You want to do a six-minute thing or something like that, that grows, you do a episode or two of this with these characters, all of a sudden someone sees that or you can show it to them, and that could grow into a longer thing like a pilot, and that can grow into a series. There are many, many outlets now in the field of television - more than ever before in the history of man, and they're looking for good content, but you have to show them something. You can't go in with a dog and pony show, and if you could show them - if it's a documentary it can be a sizzle reel of footage that you already have, if it's a fiction thing, it's something that you probably have to shoot - you know these cameras, Nic Novicki who does the -

>> Tatiana: Easterseals.

>> Allen: - the film challenge, you go out and buy a camera for 200 bucks, the kind of video that you shoot with that doesn't cost that much, if you have a good idea and you have either people who can act or friends of yours who know people who can act, et cetera, to put together something on YouTube, put it out there -

>> Tatiana: I shot mine on my iPhone.

>> Allen: Exactly.

>> Tatiana: You got a good iPhone, you can use the phone.

>> Allen: The point is that people - they want something, a buyer wants to see something. Maybe you have a scintillating personality, you could just walk in the door and sell them anything, good luck. But if they could see a treatment, for instance - but more important if they could see something visual, because believe it or not, people who buy TV shows, they don't read a lot - no, they don't like to read - they have to read enough scripts and they're just not readers - the whole town is full of people who aren't readers, so video, even if you're a one-man act, video can tell people a lot about you and that gets you in the door and that get you talking about the project and either stars you or has something to do with your original story, and you're off and going.

>> Deb: I mean, "This Close" started that way - Shoshanna Stern and - what's his name? What's her partner's name? He's a lovely person.

>> Tatiana: I'm drawing a blank, too.

>> Deb: I have the worst - Johnathan - I have the worst...

>> Tatiana: Josh. Josh.

>> Deb: Josh, Josh Feldman. Thank you. So Shoshanna Stern and Josh Feldman -

>> Allen: I hope he's not watching. [ Laughter ]

>> Tatiana: I know. Sorry Josh, we forgot your name.

>> Deb: No! I forget everyone's name! Sometimes I don't know what's my name! No, Film Society I never forget, but names, it's like - o. So anyway, they've been friends for a long time, they're both actors and writers and they're both deaf, and they wanted to do a show - they started to knock on doors and it wouldn't go anywhere, and they said, "hell with it! We're just going to do it because we want to do it." And they started to shoot their show "This Close" and post on YouTube and someone saw it and said, "this could be a great show," and they went and they sold it to Sundance - and it's great. Sundance, or IFC?

>> Tatiana: Nope, it's Sundance.

>> Deb: Sundance, okay. So, and it is a fantastic show, and it did the round that Allen was talking about - two people that said, "our show is really good, nobody wants to buy it, hell with them we're gonna do it regardless," they did it and once it was done, it was proof of concept and it was just - it got bought, and it's now a fantastic show and we get to enjoy it.

>> Tatiana: Nice.

>> Allen: Because people, buyers out there, all those little streaming channels et cetera which are getting big, they're getting more and more every day, they're desperate for content - content is king, so if you can show them something like Josh and Shoshanna, then that's gonna help you. By the way, what Deb was talking about the very first in this conversation, the perseverance it takes to survive in show business, can't be underscored enough - you could get turned down even if your first show is turned down, you might have an idea for another show, so you go out and get another video camera and do it because a lot of it's random - you've got the random, you have to have a good idea and you randomly hit the buyer that really is looking for that idea and you take off but it's - a lot of the time you have to go - up to bat a lot of times to hit a home run.

>> Tatiana: Yes. We have some more questions so I wanted to get through them before we run out of time. So Nasreen said, "for writers who are unrepresented, how do you recommend we get our pitch decks and scripts into hands of production companies, if it's not directly solicited?"

>> Allen: Well, that's tricky.

>> Deb: It... go ahead.

>> Allen: No, go ahead.

>> Tatiana: No, that was the question. Go ahead.

>> Deb: You gotta be smart about it. First of all, identify the production companies that you think would be a good buyer for your idea - it's not everyone, you can't send a drama series to someone who only produces comedy, you can't send to a production company that does sci-fi and fantasy, a comedy - they're not going to buy it. It's not because your script is good or bad, it's just because they're not in the business of doing comedy. So identify the production companies that do the kind of work that you're trying to sell, then think for a minute, who do you know that might know somebody at that company - maybe a friend of a friend of a friend, just think about it, and if you are helpful to others and you're serious about your craft, then you will have someone that you can call and say, "can I use your name?" and then if you don't find anybody, find the names of the executives in that company and write to them as to why you think that what you have would be good for them - nine out of ten times, they will ignore you, but somebody at some point somewhere is going to say, "send it in," and then you better have a really great project and be submitting to the right company - it really is about tenacity, I mean it's like figuring out, calling and maybe startup - be nice to the assistant, and explain to him or her why you think that the message needs to be given - not because you're desperate, not because you're cute, not because you think you're brilliant, but because you gotta see from the other side why it would benefit them - you know why it would benefit you, but why it would benefit them. So it's again all about networking.

>> Allen: Can I add something to that? I think the question was how do I get an agent - and it's all chicken and the egg - you have an idea let's say, or you bring a little real, and as Deb said, "you got to know someone, you gotta live in LA" - you really do, you have to live in LA so you can make connections and meet people who can maybe help you, so, you have this little project and you get it to someone who runs a - it doesn't have to be a big production company, a little production company, they go, "this is really good - I don't want to buy it, but I can tell you an agent you should talk to," and all of a sudden you get recommendation for an agent, the agent pays attention to you because Mr. So-and-So had recommended him, and that's the way it works. If you have a great script, you can submit it to agents, but it's going to get lost - you have to have someone who says, "you should read this script, Bob, you might want this guy as a client," you have to have those kinds of recommendations, those kinds of connections.

>> Tatiana: Good point.

>> Allen: It's actually - the whole world works like this by the way, not just show business, but show business really works this way - that's why networking, never give up - Kathryn Beatty said, "network, network, network" and she said, "even if you get tired of networking, network some more," because you're not going to - you're gonna move ahead through someone recommending you or recommending your project or talking it up or buying it, if you're lucky, but you're probably not gonna buy it the first - don't think the first phone call you're gonna make is you're gonna buy it -

>> Tatiana: Just keep going.

>> Allen: Yeah, keep going. Thank you. I'm talking too much, I know.

>> Tatiana: No, it's okay. Well, that's the end of our time - thank you so much to both of you, Deb Calla and Allen Rucker -

>> Deb: Oh, it was our pleasure.

>> Tatiana: - of the Media Access Awards and thank you for all your advice, all your suggestions and I know our audience got so much out of this, and thank you so much for joining us - next week we will have Madeline DiNonno from the Geena Davis Institute on Gender and Media where we will be going on how disability representation is at an all-time high, so join us back next week for that and then we will have a lot of information coming up soon on RespectAbility's website on how you can reach Allen Rucker and Deb Calla and all of their information and what they're up to over at Media Access Awards. Thank you so much for you guys for joining us.

>> Deb: Thank you!

>> Allen: Thank you!