>> Franklin Anderson: Hello everyone and welcome! Thank you, thank you for joining us today. Our deepest apologies for technical difficulties delaying our start, but we are so happy you are here with us for this webinar. I am Franklin Anderson, and I am a member of RespectAbility's great team. I'm going to give a few announcements on accessibility to get us started, and then I will turn it over to the real talent to kick us off today. And so with that said, I'd like to share some notes on accessibility for this webinar. Firstly, you can turn on captions by clicking the CC button in the Zoom window. You can also pin the interpreter's video to ensure they are visible throughout the entire presentation. To view the live transcript in a separate window, click on the link that we will put in the chat box. And also, please put any questions for our speakers in the Q&A box. And finally, I'd like to note that this webinar will be recorded. After open captions are added, you will be able to find it at RespectAbility.org/10. So with that said, I would like to now introduce our first speaker, Ben Spangenberg. Ben is the Senior Manager of RespectAbility's National Leadership Program, where he recruits and trains talented young leaders seeking careers in policy, communications, non-profit management, or the entertainment industry. The National Leadership Program enables diverse and talented leaders with disabilities to gain the skills, contacts, and experience needed for successful careers. Ben has also assisted with RespectAbility's democracy work, including spending several weeks in both Iowa and New Hampshire where he interviewed -- presidential candidates on both sides of the aisle. Ben educated their campaigns on the importance of ensuring accessibility of events and materials, as well as creating thoughtful policies for helping people with disabilities achieve employment goals. Prior to working with RespectAbility, Ben worked on Capitol Hill, and spent several years working on disability related projects in employment, education, and community living. So without further ado, I am now going to turn the microphone over to Ben. Take it away!

>> Ben Spangenberg: Thank you so much Frank. I am so honored -- to be a part of this event today, and I want to welcome our two panelists for the first part of our discussion. First of all, Jake Stimell is the Disability Training and Consulting Bureau Associate at RespectAbility. And in his work, Stimell recruits, trains, and places leaders with disabilities as speakers with the Disability Training and Consulting Bureau. He connects talented speakers to organizations, non-profits, corporations, and educational institutions seeking disability training. Stimell initially joined RespectAbility as a Community Outreach and Impact Fellow in RespectAbility's National leadership Program. Stimell graduated from Franklin and Marshall College in May 2020, with a BA in Psychology and a Minor in Sociology. Through a college fellowship, Stimell worked in disability advocacy at the Invisible Disabilities Association, where he played a significant role in the introduction of disability legislation in New York, Pennsylvania, and Alabama. In addition to his work with the IDA, Stimell has experience in partnership and foundation research, as well as leadership experience at the Link20 National Leadership Program. Additionally, Rostom Dadian is our Policy Associate at RespectAbility. And, as Policy Associate, Dadian works to support the policy team by assisting with tracking and responding to state and federal legislation, reaching out to public and private partners as requested by senior Staff, and helping with meetings to advance policy and legislation that enhances the lives of people with disabilities. Prior to joining RespectAbility Staff, Dadian was a Policy Apprentice with the -- and a Fox Fellow. Alongside his cohort, Dadian co-produced the inaugural Fox Family Foundation Vision Fair sponsored by RespectAbility. The Fair provided eye screenings for the community, along with other information and resources for the Blind and visually impaired. Dadian is a straightforward, initiative taking professional who's born legally blind. His interests in politics led him to run for a seat in city council in Glendale, California, and he continues to champion policy that highlight the needs of all people with disabilities. He received his Bachelor's of Science in business finance, and is currently working towards earning his Master's degree. I want to welcome both of them and ask them a first question to the both of you. What was the most memorable -- what was most memorable about the Fellowship? Jake, do you want to start us off?

>> Jake Stimell: Yeah, thank you. Thank you for having me and for this wonderful opportunity, and of course, thank you for selecting me for the Fellowship two and a half years later, right? So what really stuck out to me about the Fellowship was how intelligent and passionate the entire staff was. They imparted a lot of knowledge on me, which helped me throughout all of my time at RespectAbility, from being a Fellow to a full-time Staff member. The varied knowledge that the entire Staff brings and the collaborative attitude that they all bring to this work truly sets us apart and really made for a wonderful learning experience through my time as a Fellow and as a Staff member.

>> Ben Spangenberg: Thank you. Rostom, same question.

>> Rostom Dadian: Thanks Ben. I mean, what was most memorable to me was during my cohort, we had a group of other blind and visually impaired individuals. And I got to have that shared experience of bringing my whole self to the table in the Fellowship and being able to share -- being able to share the experience with other blind people. Because growing up with a visual impairment, I never really had interaction with other blind individuals, so that sense of community was extremely memorable for me. And I continue those relationships, and I continue to do the work that is needed to make space for others so that they can share in that experience.

>> Ben Spangenberg: Thanks so much, both of you. Rostom, next question -- I'll have you answer first the next question. What skills did you learn or develop while you were in the program?

>> Rostom Dadian: To me, what was most important to learn was being able to collaborate with people in order to reach a shared goal. And a lot of -- like, the tangible skills that were learned gave me the power to be able to look and use my lived experience and make space for other people to share their lived experience. And I got to be able to experience what it's like seeing -- seeing how other people deal with situations, and just being able to, like, use that cool knowledge to add to my skill set.

>> Ben Spangenberg: Thank you, thank you so much. Rostom, what led you to apply for the fellowship?

>> Rostom Dadian: So, my road to RespectAbility was kind of a little practical, I guess. I was looking through the job board at my university, and I came across the RespectAbility Fellowship application. And even though a lot --all of the work at RespectAbility was important, I was getting really interested in policy at the time. So I saw it as an opportunity to not only bring, like, my experience as a disabled person into policy, but be able to start to build a foundation where I could see myself making meaningful change for others, and not just others with disabilities, but society in general.

>> Ben Spangenberg: That's wonderful, thanks so much. Jake, how about you?

>> Jake Stimell: What led me to apply for the fellowship -- so I graduated college in May of 2020. The job market was very poor at the time. And I, as Ben had said in my introduction, I had done a public policy Fellowship in college, and knew that advocacy was one of the things that I really enjoyed. And you know, during the Fellowship we were -- I mean, during the pandemic, we were all really looking for meaningful work and something that would be fulfilling in our day-to-day. And I knew that advocacy work would really be fulfilling for me every single day. And that's what led me to the Fellowship.

>> Ben Spangenberg: Thank you. And then -- Jake, how did the fellowship set you up for future success?

>> Jake Stimell: Yeah, so, I really -- throughout the fellowship, I really learned the value of being flexible in my work. There was a lot of change when I was a Fellow and then a lot of change while I've been on Staff, so I feel like that really set me up for future success, was, you know, learning a lot, as I said before, the wealth of knowledge and experience that all of the Staff members bring, and then also learning the value of flexibility and I guess the soft skills that are really important in the workplace.

>> Ben Spangenberg: Thank you for that. Rostom, what about you? How did the Fellowship set you up for future success?

>> Rostom Dadian: I think what Jake said is what I -- have experienced as well, is that we all see transition in life, and transition as a constant. So being able to have a space at RespectAbility to test my skills and build up my confidence and be able to collaborate is -- was important to me. So I understood that this was an opportunity for me to learn, and it was a huge growth opportunity. So that set me up to be able to have confidence in myself as a individual with a disability in the workforce, because it was important to me to be able to take this opportunity and appreciate all the work that was put in prior to me being in the Fellowship. Because this work started, like, decades ago, and I want to be able to be successful myself, but be able to add to it.

>> Ben Spangenberg: Thank you. Thank you. Thanks both for those answers. One last question for the both of you. Why should others apply for the Fellowship?

>> Rostom Dadian: I think that it's important for other people to apply to the Fellowship, because what we're trying to do here is be able to build leaders with disabilities. And -- as we are growing and as we are seeing that we are -- we've been losing leaders like Judy Heumann, it's going to take many many people to fill that void that -- she left to us. And it's a responsibility that -- we should take seriously and it's an opportunity for others to add their voice and be able to continue the work that people started way before we were even around.

>> Jake Stimell: Yeah, I think that at RespectAbility, you -- you'll come away with experience and knowledge that you would not have gained anywhere else. We have -- our Staff has has expertise in all areas surrounding disability inclusion, including entertainment, policy, faith inclusion, and -- all of those different areas brought together really makes for an amazing -- an amazing product at RespectAbility. And I truly believe that -- our Fellows learn more than -- anyone else would learn in any other job and any other Fellowship. And -- I think the learnings that you come away with is truly why you should consider this Fellowship in your career.

>> Ben Spangenberg: Well thank you to both of you. I'm really appreciative of your time today, and I look forward to meeting the next round of Fellows once they start in a few months. I want to now turn over to our next panel, and the panel will be led by our Senior Vice President, Lauren Appelbaum.

>> Lauren Appelbaum: Thank you so much Ben, I always love hearing from our National Leadership Fellows, because you know, ever since RespectAbility was founded, we had our Fellows. And it's one of my favorite parts of my job, working with our Entertainment and News Media Fellows and Communications Fellows to help them advance in their careers. As Ben mentioned, my name is Lauren Appelbaum and my pronouns are she and her. I'm a white woman with long brown hair, wearing a navy blue shirt and black glasses. Behind me is a banner with the RespectAbility logo in white and yellow. At RespectAbility, I have the opportunity to oversee our work to create equitable and accessible opportunities to increase the number of people with lived disability experience throughout the overall storytelling process. Our goal with that is to increase diverse and authentic representation of disabled people on screen, leading to systemic change in how society views and values people with disabilities. I myself am an individual with an acquired non-apparent disability called reflex sympathetic dystrophy. Back in 2019 RespectAbility Board Vice Chair Delbert Whetter and I piloted the RespectAbility Entertainment Lab. Now we're entering our fifth year and currently in the middle of a cohort. And our Lab aims to develop and elevate the talent pipeline of disabled entertainment professionals working behind the scenes in TV, film, streaming, while connecting them with industry professionals and creatives. Since 2019, we've had the dreams of creating a community of disabled entertainment professionals, and creating an ecosystem of disabled entertainment creatives supporting each other to ensure that we as a disability community find success. By doing so, this helps build up disabled leaders throughout the industry. Now I'd like to introduce you to four alumni of the RespectAbility Entertainment Lab. I'm going to ask them to turn on their cameras now. Harold Foxx, Sheridan O'Donnell, Matt Opatrny, and Diane J. Wright. And now I'm going to give each of our alumni an opportunity to share about -- a little bit about themselves and introduce themselves to you. Let's start with Sheridan.

>> Sheridan O'Donnell: Thank you Lauren -- for setting that up, and yeah, it's just -- it's an honor to be speaking to everyone here. So my name is Sheridan O'Donnell. My pronouns are he him and his. I'm a half Caucasian half Korean man. I have short brown hair, I'm wearing dark green glasses and a light green shirt, and behind me is my dining room, because -- I'm in a home office. Just a little bit of background on me -- I'm a writer/director. I did the Lab -- the Summer Lab in 2022, and I recently spoke to the current cohort just a couple weeks ago on a writer/director panel. And yeah, I have a feature film called "Little Brother" that stars J.K. Simmons and Philip Bettinger and Daniel Diemer. And it recently premiered at the Atlanta Film Festival, and actually, I found out last Friday that we won the audience award there. And yeah, that's me.

>> Lauren Appelbaum: Excellent, thank you. Matt.

>> Matt Opatrny: Hey everybody, I'm Matt Opatrny. I use he/him pronouns, and I'm a middle-aged white guy with longish grayish hair. And behind me is some art, most of it done by my daughter at different points in her life. I'm a writer -- primarily a writer of children's television and podcasts, and -- but lots of other stuff too. And I was in, first, the virtual cohort last year in 2022, and then the first Children's Entertainment Lab that was held here in New York in the fall.

>> Lauren Appelbaum: Thank you. Harold.

>> Harold Foxx: Hello, I'm Harold Foxx. I'm a black male using American Sign Language. I’ve got a light blue shirt on with a red, Ralph Lauren Polo logo. I have blue glasses. I also have locks in my hair with some highlights in them. And my pronouns are he/him/his. I really specialize in standup comedy, but I also write. I’m a producer, I'm a director, and I do some acting as well. I was involved in the whole cohort back in 2021, 2020-2021, and since then I’ve been focusing on my standup comedy and my writing. I was recently involved in post-production of a film called “Something From Tiffany’s” and you can find that on Amazon Prime. Again, I did a lot of post-production on that. Since then I've been looking more -- oh, and I was actually recently accepted to an MFA program at CSUN for screenwriting that will start this fall, and I’m just really looking forward to it!

>> Lauren Appelbaum: Thank you. Diane.

>> Diane J. Wright: Hello everybody, I'm Diane J. Wright. I am really happy to be here. Today I am wearing a -- well, I'm a middle-aged or really more now, I don't know, woman. [laughs] I'm black, I'm biracial, afro-caribbean. I have very light hair these days, a dark top, a necklace, and some bright colored glasses. And my background is blurred. So yeah, I was in the -- I was invited to 2021 Lab, and I had no idea what I was -- that was about. All the way up to the first day, I was like, "why am I here?" And then after the Lab, my life has been completely changed. And I think everyone in the program knows I will -- I will show up for anything to support this program, because it is a rare, amazing thing that we get to band together as filmmakers and have the support of each other when the industry is just -- it's all about knowing people, and it's all about connections, and raising each other up, and we have this built in, and we all understand this life that we share in some -- in some fundamental way, right? But that is not about me. What is about me? Since the lab I'm part of -- I'm now part of the Media Consulting team at RespectAbility, which has been super fun. I get to work with studios to bring authentic representation to autistic characters, mostly, to Black characters, to characters who look and live like me, which, you know, don't exist out there very often. So it's pretty great, I'm very honored to do that.

>> Lauren Appelbaum: Thank you. And something that Diane said will kind of lead us into the next topic. So as I mentioned, when we created the Lab we really had this goal of connecting Fellows to, you know, create job opportunities, but we very very quickly realized that a secondary just as important goal was creating a community, that people were craving that. And we often hear from folks that they hadn't had the opportunity to meet others with the same or similar disability or circumstances as themselves who also work in the entertainment industry. And now, with nearing 150 alumni, it's really wonderful where we can make those connections. And what I'd love to kind of bring this -- next topic to -- and we're going to start with Matt and then I'll invite anyone else who would like to add their thoughts as well -- is, how has this lab kind of helped you increase your confidence in talking about your disability and becoming a leader in your community?

>> Matt Opatrny: Oh, it's changed things radically for me. I -- before RespectAbility, I really had a hard time even identifying as disabled. I'm visually impaired, legally blind, and -- but I hide it really well, and I had spent most of the last 20 years hiding it in most circumstances. And being in RespectAbility totally blew my mind, and just helped me become a lot more comfortable being who I am, and self-identifying as being visually impaired. And the amazing thing has been not -- not only what it's done for me, and it really has changed my life in a huge way, made me feel a lot more comfortable in my skin, and in a lot of situations. But it's been amazing what it's done for other people that I've interacted with. And I'll give one quick example is I'm on the executive board of my daughter's PTA. And in our first meeting, which was on Zoom, we were going around introducing ourselves, and I just chose to self-disclose right away, because there's a lot I can't see in a Zoom, and it usually makes me really uncomfortable worrying of what I'm not going to see. So I just disclosed right off, and what happened was the woman who had already gone before me, then when I was done, she came back on and she said "hey, you know, thank you for saying that Matt. I also want to tell everybody I'm hard of hearing. I wear hearing aids, so sometimes I don't hear things." And then the next woman said she was dealing with her mother has Alzheimer's, and she said "so sometimes I get distracted during meetings because my mom has Alzheimer's" and then somebody else had something else to say. And none of them would have said anything if I hadn't first opened the door. And I've seen stuff like that again and again in my life where it's just like, you know, we all have things that we're struggling with, and I'm finding by putting myself out there in ways that I wouldn't have before RespectAbility, I'm making other people feel more comfortable in an awesome way.

>> Lauren Appelbaum: Thank you Matt for that story. Anyone else wanted to add to this topic before we move to the next?

>> Sheridan O'Donnell: I'll jump in quickly, and Matt, yeah, thank you for that. I really -- a lot of that resonates with me. I mean I'm in a little bit of -- so I'm also visually impaired. I didn't describe my disability when I was introducing myself. So in early 2020, I had just moved to Los Angeles and I was diagnosed with retinitis pigmentosis. So I have a degenerative visual condition, and I'm legally blind. And this Lab came at a super critical time in my life, because I was in L.A. and I was struggling, and I was, like, finding it hard to self-identify, as you were saying, Matt, and to have access to a community of people who are in a lot different places in their journey -- with their disability that could mentor me and talk to me about what it meant. I mean, I always knew -- I had this rumbling that -- I, you know, I think I had publicly come out maybe a year earlier, but I hadn't really been around other disabled people. And so to be around them was just such a, like, huge sea change in how proud I was of it. And then to commiserate with people who were maybe also at the same stage that I was. And then I also want to say like to go around and have access to all these major studios, that we're getting to meet with executives and hear that they are interested in stories about disability, and they want to, you know, that -- I really felt from certain ones, like, such a genuine excitement about that. Like, I ended the Lab and what I -- what I shared with when we finished was just that I really feel like I belong in this industry. And I think that's, like, a powerful feeling, because it is tough, and it is scary, and it's big, and there are days when it feels like there's an added pressure on you to say, well there's all the work I have to do, but then I also have to kind of deal with this idea of "I'm disabled, and are my stories wanted and needed?" And throughout this process, that has, like, completely changed. And I feel like everyone who's in the industry, like, it's so important that we band together and have solidarity in community, with RespectAbility and all the other disabled organizations in the country, just that we understand, like, we belong here, and I'm so excited, and yeah.

>> Lauren Appelbaum: Thank you for that. And this cohort is slightly different because of the WGA strike in terms of, you know, not necessarily going to studios and such. But what you're all talking about in creating community and such is still something that we are very much focused on, and we'll revisit additional programming post-strike as well. But kind of getting back to, you know, careers and such. You know, and Sheridan, you mentioned about, you know, being connected to folks and, you know, that is something that we strive to do, and we were very thankful that you and Harold joined our in-person cohorts, kind of talk about your current careers and, you know, and giving advice to them on how to best get out of the Lab, you know, what it would -- and such. And we know that others will join our virtual cohort to talk as well. And so Harold I'd like to jump over to you. You mentioned a film that you had the opportunity to work on that we were able to connect you with, and so I'd love to kind of hear, you know, how has the Lab assisted in helping to advance your career opportunities?

>> Harold Foxx: Sure, absolutely. You know, everything that I have been doing had been on social media, you know, like YouTube, you know, just kind of filming myself. Really been focused on comedy. And I don't know, I just felt like it was time to really bump up my skills, and you know, put it on a bigger screen than just my computer screen. So I really wanted to shift my skills, shift my writing, as a writer, as a producer, or as a director, I felt like I still had time to learn. And as time went on, I'm going through the RespectAbility program, going through the Lab, it was just, you know, really cool, and it really helped me be able to envision myself, you know, as more of an artist, and really kind of broadened the way that I saw myself. I'm deaf, yes, absolutely, and I'm part of the deaf community, but you know, we -- I also recognize the fact that, you know, I kind of live in multiple worlds. And I think it was time to, you know, collaborate and work together, you know, talk about our struggles, make sure that we shared our creative art as well, and the Lab just, you know, really helped connect me with those people, you know, that internship, you know, really kind of put me in that post-production place, or in a place to do some post-production for that film that I've been working on. It really opened my eyes to who I was as an artist, and who was out there as an artist, and really made sure that I took their experiences as well, as far as to I -- you know, what I was doing, the projects that I was working on. I had to make sure that, you know, who I was was getting across as well. You know, I have an interpreter with me, you know, on Zoom and at the meetings, and it really showed me the difference of having that accessibility, you know, at my fingertips when I needed it. You know, when I was working on the movie, you know, we had, you know, all of these, like, hearing people, it was just nice to be able to collaborate with them, and I feel like I had the confidence to share with them what it is that I needed, you know, on set, and just making sure that I expanded their thinking and their knowledge as well as far as other members of the disability community. I just feel like it doesn't -- they don't get the exposure often, and again, that Lab helped me help them. And again, that community and that connection was really the best.

>> Lauren Appelbaum: Thank you. And something I've heard from all of you is kind of using this momentum to kind of help amplify other disabled voices, you know, not only just, you know, your colleagues that you're sitting next to in this Zoom room together, but you know, all folks with disabilities. And so Diane, I'd love to kind of jump over to you. You know, how have you used this momentum from the Lab to kind of further your work?

>> Diane J. Wright: Well I kind of want to wrap in an answer from the last question too, because I don't want to overlook the biggest boost, I think RespectAbility gives, at least me, somebody with an invisible disability I did not know I had, and it's communication based, which in an industry that is about communication, is significantly disabling, right? So the team -- your team, Lauren, and specifically the individuals on the team, like, the personalities and the people we all get to interface with, because we all are disabled, we're able to support each other. I'm getting support just in having conversations, and I get support in knowing how to contact people and not stress about it in different ways that other people get to do that. So I've already forgotten the question, can you ask me again? [laughs]

>> Lauren Appelbaum: Sure. Before I do that, I'm going to mention to anyone in the audience that if you had a question, you can put it in the Q&A box, and I'll get a chance to see that and ask it of our panelists. But the question was, how have you used this momentum to kind of amplify disabled voices, not just your own but, you know, the disability community writ large.

>> Diane J. Wright: Thank you ADHD. [laughs] So, out of the Lab, immediately three other participants and I developed a series project for -- we just wanted -- we wanted to see a show that was about us and featuring us, but not a tragic story. We wanted to see something fun where people were just, you know, being silly and entertaining. So we developed a series, and we wrote a pilot -- I wrote a pitch deck and everything. So that was one thing. And then now I'm developing a documentary with another Lab cohort called "Autistic while Black" and that is to -- we're trying to not only put disabled people on screen, but we're trying to create a disability friendly production in every respect, whatever that takes, in front of the camera, behind the camera, in the schedule, in the post schedule, in the budget. Because -- and this is where the two things I was talking about tie in -- the Lab showed me how that could be done by how the Lab was run. It was so -- the things that you all did with just scheduling, and asking us what we need, and just simple free things that made it so much easier to participate. And the follow-up materials -- just -- anybody can do that in any company for any project anywhere. It doesn't take a lot of work! But it really allows everyone to participate more equally. So I'm using those techniques on the projects that I'm starting for myself, and bringing them when I work with studios, I ensure that I bring those techniques and kind of demand that they run things better for everyone.

>> Lauren Appelbaum: Thank you!

>> Diane J. Wright: Sorry if I went too long --

>> Lauren Appelbaum: Did anyone else want to add to that?

>> Sheridan O'Donnell: Yeah I wanted to say something, because I know the question is about expanding opportunities in leadership. One thing that occurred to me is we're still at a stage of this revolution happening in entertainment -- in the entertainment world in terms of disability that a lot -- I feel like each and every one of us is kind of a leader, especially when it comes to, like, our own specific disabilities. So I'm a visually impaired director, and as far as I know in the contact that I've had, there's not a lot of us. And so we're kind of advocating for these spaces that we want to be in, and we're creating these paths that we want to take. So you know, what we're all doing right now is important, but just even our visibility of just so other people can see, hey, you know -- that's why I, as scary as it can be sometimes to be open about my disability given that I -- in a way, my job requires visual things -- I do it because I hope that it encourages other disabled filmmakers, specifically legally blind filmmakers, to understand that they can do it. And -- what was my other thought -- yeah, I'm working on a documentary right now, and it's about disability, I'm directing it. And the crew -- we're mandating that 50 percent of the crew is disabled. And the thing I love about the disabled community that, like, having identified as non-disabled for part of my career, is everyone is so eager to help each other and elevate each other. And there is so little competition and cut- throatness. And when I came to L.A., I had a meeting with Ashley Eakin, who was a part of the -- was a Lab alumni. And literally, first day I meet her, she's like, "oh, I had this job opportunity that I had to pass on but I'll put your name in." And she was already putting -- and I remember when I got off the Zoom I was like, "that never happened to me anywhere else in the business." That people would be that -- and I think it's because we all relate to that feeling of being marginalized and underrepresented, and knowing that when each of us wins, all of us win, so that's just what I wanted to share.

>> Lauren Appelbaum: Thank you. People often ask me, you know, as one of the founders of the Lab, like, what our goal of the lab is. And truly, like, I want to create an ecosystem. You know, we're five years in and I had said by the time we're 10 years in to create an ecosystem that is almost self-sustaining, that when people kind of come into the Lab, alumni are asking and being like, "I want to meet the new cohort. I just got a show picked up and I need to fill up a writer's room." Or, "I'm directing a film and I need crew." And such -- where it becomes that environment. So -- I'm so glad to kind of hear -- to hear that it's really happening in real life, and that you're all helping each other, because I think that that is a sign of leadership, and recognizing how each of us as individuals can, you know, we're not just trying to climb up this metaphorical ladder ourselves, but kind of help everyone else do so as well. I do have one question that I'm going to ask and then we'll we'll start to wrap up. And it's specifically for Harold, and it's not on leadership, but I know it's something that you've worked on in some of your projects. This is from Stephan Collins-Stepney, and he's asking, you know, do you -- are you in different worlds as a Black Deaf individual? Do you often find yourself having to kind of code switch between ASL and BASL on projects, and you know, how do you represent all of your identities when you're working in this industry?

>> Harold Foxx: You know, there are two worlds. There's the deaf world, there's the hearing world. I didn't become deaf until I was about five or six due to meningitis. And so basically, I already had that hearing world kind of in me. But then after that, of course, I started living my deaf life. Anytime I make any projects, any writing that I'm doing, I just know myself and my language, and I know that ASL is my language. But I also know what and how hearing people might think. You know, for a comedy show, I know how punchlines go, for example. Now as far as this question about deaf and black, when people see me the first thing that they're gonna see is the fact that I'm black, right? They see my exterior. It's not until I lift my hands and I started signing up they'll recognize, you know, that I'm deaf as well. And then at that point, my two identities kind of come together. Something that's super important for me is obviously my language. And I do think that, you know, it's my job to take both of those identities and kind of just make it into one.

>> Lauren Appelbaum: Thank you. Before we wrap up, is there anyone else who wanted to kind of address that, of where many of you represent multiple identities, and you know, how you bring that, because you're not just leaders in the disability world, but leaders in other areas as well.

>> Diane J. Wright: Yeah, just showing up and claiming your space. There's -- what else are we supposed to do, right? We can -- fit in and we can pretend and we can try all the things to be Hollywood, but in the end, we're us, and our stories matter, and we matter, and there's no better way to stake that claim than by, like, walking in the door wherever and however you can, and say, like, this is the story, and this is what I need to tell it, and this is what I'm bringing to you. I have something you don't know about, and that is a gift. It's not a demand, right? So just giving yourself freely and just taking really good care of yourself in the process, because it's not easy.

>> Lauren Appelbaum: I think that's -- sorry, go on Matt.

>> Matt Opatrny: There's an element of persistence too. Like, I was in a situation where they brought me in, you know, I got a job largely because I was visually impaired, and it was writing for a podcast. And -- you know, people are really busy, and there was some -- there was an element that I was insistent upon that was -- it was exclusionary of people of kids who couldn't see or couldn't see well. And -- it took five attempts over the course of a month before they finally heard me. And it wasn't out of any malice. They were -- they're just busy and they had a lot on their plate, and I just kept reminding them -- "yeah, this element is exclusionary. This element is exclusionary." And finally they were like, oh yeah, yeah, you're totally right, we're taking that out, we're altering it. And it was a really simple fix I was offering, too, it was like, adding two words to fix this thing. And they were so thankful on the fifth reminder! [laughs] So sometimes we gotta show up and we gotta keep showing up.

>> Lauren Appelbaum: So I am hearing a theme of persistence from all of you, and I think that is a -- a good note to end on, you know, that, like, you don't just become a leader one day. You have to be constantly working at it, being very persistent in all of the work that we do and kind of showing up on a regular basis. So I really want to thank Harold, Sheridan, Matt, and Diane for joining us today. And it was -- a pleasure seeing you all in this virtual space. And so I welcome you to turn your cameras off, and Lesley's gonna pull up a slide to help share some more information with everyone on. Thank you so much! So I hope that everyone here will join us again next week for more intimate conversation centered on developing leaders. You'll get a chance to be placed into individual networking groups into different rooms. So please note that registration for these networking groups will close on Friday -- this Friday, May 19th. I'm going to right now put links in for people, you know, we need you to do two things: one, sign up, and you can sign up and receive your unique Zoom log on. And then also, pick your networking groups. And it's really important to please mention if you require any accommodations when you're picking your networking groups, so we can ensure we have enough ASL interpreters, captioners, etcetera. Next month I hope you'll return again for our next fireside chat, this time focusing on the topic of changing attitudes, which takes place on Wednesday June 21st, followed by virtual networking groups the following Wednesday, June 28th. All of these events are taking place to celebrate and honor RespectAbility turning 10 years old this summer. And so, if you haven't had a chance to learn about this entire series, that link is in the chat as well. And I also encourage you to support RespectAbility's work, including the National Leadership Program and the Entertainment Lab, two programs that you had the opportunity to learn about today. We've had an incredible decade of success in fighting for and with people with disabilities, and all of these accomplishments and activities have been powered by generous support by the public. And so we have so much more to -- left to accomplish, as you've heard as well, and so to really fully eliminate harmful stigmas and creating more opportunities for people with disabilities. So I am asking for anyone who's able for providing some support to ensure success in the next decade. On the next slide you'll see some more information about this, about being able to donate in honor of our 10-year anniversary. So if you would like to provide a donation to allow us to continue to provide programming like this, please check out the link in the chat. And I'd really like to thank all of my colleagues -- Frank Anderson and Ben Spangenberg, who spoke earlier, and all of our panelists: Rostom, Jake, Harold, Sheridan, Matt, and Diane. And I wish everyone a really great afternoon. And once again, apologies for the delay in starting on time, but I really appreciate you sticking with us. Thank you very much!