>> Lauren: Thank you to the BRIC Summit for having us today! My name is Lauren Appelbaum, RespectAbility's Senior Vice President of Entertainment and News Media. My pronouns are she and her. I am a white woman with shoulder length brown hair wearing a black sheer shirt. Behind me is a gray background with the RespectAbility logo in white. As an individual with an inquired non-apparent disability, reflex sympathetic dystrophy, I work at the intersection of disability employment and the entertainment industry. I oversee our content advisement work and trainings to ensure authentic representation of disability, as well as building the disability Community within the industry -- through our various entertainment Labs. This work helps increase diverse and authentic representation of disabled people on screen, leading to systemic change in how society views and values disabled individuals. So what we're going to be discussing today for the next hour or so, the topic -- of setting boundaries of your storytelling. So when you're applying for various labs and fellowships, some applicants may feel compelled to reveal personal details about their lives. This is especially true for individuals from underrepresented backgrounds who may feel pressured to share more information about themselves in their applications and writing. However, it's important to recognize that not everyone is entitled to your story. In this panel discussion, you'll have the opportunity to learn from a group of individual experts on how to share some personal details about yourself in a way that feels comfortable, without feeling the need to disclose everything about your background. This event is part of the BRIC Summit's Talent and Education Day, which focuses on industry career education, educator resources, and acts as an outreach and recruiting day for companies and studios to connect with up and cominging talent. This RespectAbility hosted panel includes ASL interpreters and live captioning. Going to introduce our panelists now. Lawon Exum is our Entertainment and News Media Director at RespectAbility. He has worked in the industry for more than 30 years from XM radio to Sony Pictures television and 20th Century Fox Studios, working in marketing, legal, and content creation for shows such as Breaking Bad, Empire, and This Is Us. Chanel Keenan is a Communications Fellow in RespectAbility's National Leadership Program for Spring 2024. While finishing up her degree in Communications and a minor in education at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, Chanel became the National Hockey League's first and only intersectionality consultant. Using her lived experience as a disabled woman of color, she was able to help the Seattle Kraken, specifically, prioritize diversity and disability inclusion at the fan and corporate level. Steven McCoy is an award-winning journalist, an inspiring change-maker, and a sought-after writer and speaker. In 2022 he was recognized as the world's first black deaf blind journalist. Steven brought his passion for the arts to the many red carpet events he has covered, and his personality shines through on his lively podcast called Sessions with Steven, which regularly features personal interviews with media and public figures. Steven was recently diagnosed with Usher syndrome, a debilitating disease that impacts his hearing and sight. After making peace with the diagnosis, he decided to advocate for the deaf and blind community and share his message of resilience and hope. So thank you to all of our panelists. We're going to start with Lawon. Lawon, you have had a 30-plus year career. With this topic of setting boundaries of your storytelling and what you share when, how has your perspective changed over this time in regards to how you share your story?

>> Lawon: For me, I mean, having so many years in the industry, I changed with the times. It seems like it's a very safe space now to be able to be yourself in this industry right now. When I started out in the industry -- people heard things about themselves, and I -- we hear them for reasons, I believe -- being judged or just not knowing if you will be able to succeed if you communicate things that may be different from you. So for me, I feel like it's made me be more authentic. I'm more vulnerable to share my story, more than ever now, due to the fact I know for a fact that my story would be able to change or help other people. So I feel like it has been good for me as far as my span of being in the entertainment industry, that being my authentic self -- that's what changed indeed. Very vulnerable to share my story.

>> Lauren: Thank you, I feel like feel like we'll probably hear that a bit today -- people feeling more comfortable to be vulnerable as time goes on. For those of you who might be here where you're looking for your first job, I could understand it might be much more difficult to do so, as Lawon -- we've shared -- has been working in this industry for many years and I think that that is something that also comes with time, and also as the world changes of people being more accepting of others that don't necessarily look like ourselves. Chanel ,most of your career has been navigating marketing yourself within the sports industry. You've mentioned that it can be hard to balance identity and self-worth while doing this work. What advice do you have for others that are battling this as well?

>> Chanel: I think kind of what Lawon was saying is something that I try to do in my daily life, which is to take power in what I have and the differences that I am, because I think for the long time I would try to make other people comfortable in the spaces that I would enter. And so now I kind of look at it as a superpower of sorts. I don't really think of it from like a inspirational perspective of -- trying to make people feel better about themselves because of how I'm living my life as myself, but more so of -- entering a space, making a space for myself, and not being afraid to share who I am, and because at this point in my life and for what I do which is advocating for myself and the disabled community in fan spaces, I think that is my best asset in those places. So a lot of the times I had no idea what I wanted to do with my life, I think now that I know a little bit closer every day what I want to do, it really hinges upon my own self-confidence and self worth as a disabled person. So I kind of take that into the spaces that I enter.

>> Lauren: Excellent. Yes, I'm hearing -- the more that you learn about what it is that you want to do yourself and what your goals are, the more it becomes comfortable of knowing what it is to share about yourself, because -- based on -- your -- career and other goals. Steve, your bio includes that you are the world's first black deaf blind journalist. This clearly identifies you as a member of multiple underrepresented communities. How do you decide when to share details about this versus not?

>> Steven: I think that's a great question. I -- well, I mean just going back to my past, as someone who's always hidden my disability, so now I'm just in the space of I own who I am completely, so I don't -- actually decipher -- that time of okay, should I tell this person this or that? I just go with it -- I naturally -- I come as I am. I don't feel when I walk in a room it's per se that I have to let everyone know like, hey, I'm actually deaf blind here -- I don't feel the need -- only when I'm in a space of, okay, I feel like maybe -- this room is a little bit dark, maybe I should tell someone just so that everyone would just know? So -- that's how -- I own it -- when I'm in a room, and I feel comfortable, that's completely fine. So yeah, I just come as I am, yeah.

>> Lauren: I love that. "I come as I am." That's -- that shows confidence and such, and -- something that I feel like everyone should be able to feel that they can do as well. Chanel, coming back to you. What details about yourself do you typically share in a job or college application? Are there things that you wait to share until an interview or acceptance, for example?

>> Chanel: This has always been something that's been interesting to me, because I felt like I had a bit of an identity crisis when I was applying to colleges -- and this was a little bit ago, so I might have attacked it a little bit different now -- but I like to be pretty forthcoming about my situation. As a wheelchair user, I think I learned over time that the more you can prepare an institution for your arrival in that sense, the better off I am in the long run, so sometimes it's less of a risk versus reward of -- maybe we'll just surprise them and see what happens -- I know I did that a couple of times when I would go to tour schools. My mom and I kind of decided, like, it's a smaller school and -- I'm a little interested in it, but not sure. Let's just see how they would handle accommodating me sort of live without any warning which -- is not the best, isn't practical all the time, but I think it really did show us the difference between -- which schools were more prepared for us at that time. But when it was a school that I really wanted to go to, we gave them a lot of warning. And I kind of take this whole process the same way now when I apply for a job. I'm the most transparent about everything, because I think that -- as much as I need little accommodations, just being really transparent about what I need and what could help me works best, so that's what I do.

>> Lauren: Thank you. In a case of having -- a very visible disability for when you show up and needing to ensure you can physically get into spaces -- learning that over time of -- kind of sharing ahead of time hopefully enables an organization, a college campus, a job site to ensure accessibility. And you definitely will learn a lot when -- even with giving a warning, if no one kind of prepares for your arrival and such. And we'll delve into a little bit more in a bit of like how it really feels to have to like share those details and such. Steven and Chanel: both of you are Fellows with RespectAbility which is a disability- led organization. Did that impact you at all in deciding what to include about your disability in your application with us, in comparison to example, like, non-disability organizations? Who would like to go first --

>> Steven: I think for me, I would say it most certainly made me feel more comfortable. I always express my disability in any form of application. However, I do feel that since this disability led, of course, I'm most certainly very open to expressing what my disability is, what am I doing in the community as far as making those changes in the community -- so for me, it made me a lot more comfortable for sure, because I know this is a place that creates that space of diversity, equity, inclusion, accessibility, and belonging. So I felt 100% comfortable.

>> Chanel: Yes, similarly for me, I think on like the written portion my application, I divulged a little more information about myself and my disability, but when we had the interview, I felt this sense of like comfort knowing that I was in a space and I wasn't the only person with a disability, so I feel like some of the stuff that I usually prepare when it's not in that setting -- kind of being overly cautious or overly educational or something to assume that people might not know or resonate with what I'm saying, so I had this like level of comfort and not having to exhaust myself in a sense of like -- saying the same sort of script and thing that I would say to another organization. And also just feeling the same comfort in accommodations and what that would look like for me -- I didn't feel like I was being a problem or being extra in a way that I might in a -- normal or non disability-led company setting.

>> Steven: I agree with her, because sometimes you just never know if you're gonna -- if your application is going to be denied simply because the other side does not understand what this disability is. But being so that you guys are disability-led, there's a space of understanding, there's a space of patience, and that allows the applicant to come at a comfortable space to be able to apply.

>> Lauren: Yep, glad to hear that, because I know that that is a goal that Lawon and I have, to make sure that we're kind of providing that comfortable safe space and -- some people who are attending this panel may be applying to organizations that may be a safe space for whatever their identity may be, and many may be applying for organizations --jobs with organizations where that doesn't exist and such. And so I want to remind people that they can put questions in the Q&A, and we will get to them throughout, and I'm actually going to go to a question in the Q&A now is -- how do you share your story without it becoming a Q&A on the details of your illness? The person asking the question says that they were diagnosed with a rare disease last year, and the abrupt Q&A that comes from saying its name gets exhausting. This individual doesn't want to hide it, but also isn't here to be a rare disease lecturer, and I'm going to take moderator's prerogative -- and give an answer first -- and then see if any other of our panelists want to add to it as well. I also have a rare disease, so -- I can emphasize with what you're going through. I have the benefit of working for a disability organization and such, but I often have meetings with various studios, production companies -- not disability specific organizations. And people are curious and such. And so if you are in a job interview for example, or having a general meeting and -- someone asks about your disability, my suggestion is to -- well, first of all, legally you don't have to answer it. But -- when it's coming to -- when it's about a disability. But second of all, if you want to talk about it, what I suggest doing is working on a one to two sentence answer. You can work on it with your doctor, with other members of the community. You can reach out to us and we can help you. And so you have something that you feel really confident in answering, and then say "and if you want to learn more, I'd be glad to send you resources." Because that way, if someone -- wants to know more and says, oh, I would love that, you can follow up via email, for example, and say oh, hey, this is an organization that -- covers -- my disability, my rare disease and such. And then it allows that other individual to spend the time to learn, cause you're right -- it's not your job to have to answer every single question about your disability. People will naturally be curious, and hopefully folks asking you questions are just asking it because they want to learn more, and not being overly invasive, but -- and if someone is making you feel uncomfortable, and I know this is really hard especially in a environment where you're hoping to get a job or something -- you can say -- "I'd really love to just talk about my experience for this job." And you can say something like, my disability or my rare disease or whatever -- however you want to classify it -- does not impact my ability to do the job duties. And if it does, for example, let's say you have to go to the hospital once a month for infusions. You can be like the -- my disability means that I will need to take -- once a month I'll need to start work two hours later, but I'm glad to make up the hours -- into the evening or something. So figuring out a way where you can kind of explain -- answer the questions that might be in the back of their head of, like, what is -- oh, if I hire this person, is this person going to be a liability -- kind of answering those questions before they even think about them to be able to prove that no, you're not going to be a liability. And you can also even share, for example if you want, that research has shown that disabled individuals tend to be much more creative. We are forced -- you mentioned that you were diagnosed with this rare disease last year. I'm assuming you're -- at least a young adult so -- or older, so you lived a life one way and now you're living a life another way. I myself was diagnosed as an adult, and so I often will talk about it that I had to relearn how to do things like push a shopping cart, push my daughter's stroller and such. It didn't mean that I couldn't do those things anymore, it just meant I did it differently than I did before. And in this industry -- the entertainment industry, animation, gaming -- how important it is that creative individuals are working in this industry. And so if you are living with something that forces you daily to think of new ways to do everyday tasks, that's going to be an added benefit for you when applying for jobs and being able to talk about it. So figuring out ways that you can talk about your disability in a very -- putting that positive spin -- not the inspirational spin, as Chanel mentioned, but -- the positive spin of how you are an asset to them as a company. I want to pause now and see if any of our panelists want to add to that?

>> Steven: I would love to answer that. I mean Lauren, you definitely covered all aspects of that most certainly, but I would say for me, I like to actually explain my disability. I would encourage whoever that -- I understand sometimes there are times where you don't feel like explaining yourself, and you don't have to, that is your right. But I would just say -- just know that there's no way that we'd be able to elevate or to change the view of things if we do not share the information. And of course we don't -- sometimes you don't want to be that chosen one where you have to share information everywhere you go. But, that moment that someone asks about your disability, that creates your stage. That's your moment to shine, and that's also your moment to teach. So whoever gets to learn of your disability, they can go out into the world and know that, oh, I actually -- I communicated with someone like this. Cause you would be very surprised that some people do not believe that they can communicate with others who have particular disabilities when -- it's not that at all, you actually can. We can -- actually work together. Oh, I know someone who worked at the airline who is mobility challenged -- like, these are conversations that needs to be had in order to break that false stereotype, whatever it is that is in their head, we have to educate them. So -- oh, for the person who asked that question, and I would just most certainly say exercise your right and your privacy, most certainly, but also just keep in mind that if you don't want anyone to have a particular stereotype about you, it's okay to share those stories. It's okay -- because the person is asking out of curiosity, but that -- I think that's a great thing, because then they get to understand you, and they get to understand others who deals with that disability. And also you may actually be saving someone else's life or you maybe they're -- within their curiosity -- their inquisitiveness -- they get to go and -- go and get their own self checked. For me being deaf blind, maybe someone is asking because they know that they're dealing with a hearing disability, so maybe I should get the what Steven said -- I might actually go get tested today -- so -- it's more of a positive aspect in sharing, way more than negative.

>> Lawon: I have to piggyback on all of that. I mean, if someone doesn't know about your disability, they're willing to learn, tust me. I had a situation when I was working, and I would call into my boss and I would tell him that I need a mental health day. And he'll be like, what do you mean a mental health day? Just call out sick. And I said, well I'm not sick. And I said I'm just -- I just need to take some time to get my mind right and -- just step away from work for a minute, just to be able to get able to do my job better and -- give you 100%. And he respected that, to the point where it changed the whole office environment due to the fact that I would call in for a mental health day. And I take that to every career -- job that I've switched to or had to go on -- you have to take care of yourself mentally, and no one knows that unless you tell them. So I say that to piggyback on what Lauren said -- give them two sentences. You don't have to go into explanations of -- how deep -- your disability is. You might have several disabilities and you might name two or three of them, but what I will say is be honest with them and say you know what -- and here's some resources that you can learn about my disabilities. You'll be shocked on how people will respect you even more or also -- you're teaching them something that they can carry on, because you're advocating for yourself. And I'd say that also what Chanel said -- I look at disabilities also as a superpower, I really do. It's a confidence. Because I was diagnosed with ADHD later in my career, and I thought something was wrong with me, and I was kind of afraid to tell -- about my bosses or whatever like -- I have a disability. But I use it as a confidence for me, because I feel like -- I can create more -- I just wanted to share with them that I have this disability, it's not gonna take away from what I can do, as you can see, and they learned so much from me. And I'm telling you: just by sharing the information I have and the resources that I had about my disabilities, it made -- the work environment so more vulnerable for everybody else to be able to do it. So you can be also a leader in that. So, that's my add-on to that.

>> Lauren: Thank you, I hope -- oh, Chanel, did you have something you want to add?

>> Chanel: Yeah I'll just say something pretty quickly. So I was born with my disability, and so it gets to a point where I can say it and do my little blurb in my sleep, and my disability is called Osteogenesis Imperfecta, so the name alone is kind of like, whoa, like, what the heck does that mean? And so I -- like we're all saying, I kind of take pride in explaining that to people. And we're talking about giving resources -- I found that a couple of instances where people have gone on their own and Googled them has done kind of what Steven said in the sense of like setting them up to have specific assumptions. And I think that if maybe you were to create your own resource of like, this is a little PowerPoint slide I made, this is what could be typically found in my diagnosis, but these are the things that I have, these are the superpowers that I have, and sort of get it to more personal and fine-tuned description for you personally, I think that that can help. Because no one wants their employer or their their friends or their people in their lives to WebMD them and kind of -- take a diagnosis and kind of run with it. So I would advise that if you have the energy and the means to do it, to sort of share it in your own words, and use your own descriptions and images and whatever you want to do, because I think that conveying it from your own words is going to do a lot more than -- possibly could do a lot more than just sending them a couple of -- internet articles and things like that, because I think that that would really make it more personal for them to really understand you from that level of your life.

>> Lauren: So we're hearing lots of different things of -- if you want to share, that usually someone asking a question is very open to learning and listening, but -- if you don't want to share -- figuring out a way where you can have a short answer -- and figuring out ways for them to kind of learn more. I want to expand upon this question, because each of us here have intersectional identities. I'm curious if anyone has anything they wanted to add about this where you might get a question that isn't disability related, but about any of your other identities that you have -- do you treat it similarly? Differently? I sprung this on them [laughs].

>> Lawon: I would have to say -- I would have to go back to what Steven said. What you see is what you get -- you can judge me -- you can try. I just feel like, again, what you see is what you get, so when I started -- talking about myself or what have you, it just comes out in conversation of -- me being a black gay man or what have -- I mean, I don't know, it just -- it's just natural. I mean, it's just -- it doesn't even come -- me being me, I guess that's all I can say. I mean, I don't know -- I don't try to -- no -- I just like you -- when you are being your true authentic self, because -- I feel like now this industry is more accepting of who you are, your identity, your gender, what have you. And I feel like it comes with meeting me -- meeting someone, meeting an individual -- so I don't -- no, I don't -- that's just my view on it -- I don't -- who you meet is who you meet.

>> Lauren: Yep. [laughs] Okay, we have another question about -- and Lawon, I think you referenced this a bit too, but this is open to anyone who wants to answer -- if you're having an interview and prompted to talk about your disabilities, what should you do if you have literally a dozen disabilities, but you don't want to scare the interviewer away? Should you only mention two or three of them? Now my advice as someone who is disabled myself, who hires a lot of people, who does a lot of interviews, would -- unless if you know the person you're interviewing with, like, is knowledgeable about disabilities, yes, you can just -- you don't -- giving a laundry list would not be helpful. And so kind of sharing a bit about -- one or two of -- your disabilities -- now granted, if you want to talk about more, you may, like, none of us are going to tell you you can't. But where it will become important is once you get hired. So once you get hired for a position, you still don't have to disclose what all of your disabilities are, but if you need accommodations, you need to disclose what you need in order to do your job better and such. So -- I would think about it like that of you don't have to necessarily list -- all of your different types of disabilities, but think about what accommodations you need -- for your disabilities. I see both Chanel and Lawon nodding a lot. I don't know if either of you would like to add something? [laughs]

>> Lawon: I mean, it goes back again you don't have to disclose all your disabilities -- I mean, yeah like a laundry list, I mean no -- but I would say just be honest, but if you do especially need like accessibility for your job, I would definitely let them know that, because it would hinder you or the employee if you just get job and then you tell them, oh, after you get hired, you need this, you need that, so -- I would definitely disclose that -- if you need accessibility to make sure that you can do the job well, I would definitely let them know that off the top.

>> Steven: And also, safety first, so announcing -- well, not a huge announcement, but just being honest -- and vocalizing what your disability is can prevent the safety of yourself first and then the safety of others, cuz sometimes if you don't -- let's say if I -- know that I cannot see very well at night, then I think I may need to speak with -- a supervisor or anyone that is running the schedule so that it would -- I won't be -- it won't turn into a perilous situation at night, and I'm actually am able to get home safe or -- those are so important, again, safety first. So absolutely.

>> Lauren: And we have -- this may be from the same person, or may be piggybacking off of this question: what if you're being interviewed for a Fellowship, like one of the RespectAbility programs or Inevitable Foundation programs? How do you decide which of your disabilities to talk about? Well, I'm actually in the middle -- Lawon and I are in the middle of doing a bunch of interviews for the RespectAbility Entertainment Lab, and -- I -- as someone doing the interviews -- my answer to you is whichever ones you want to talk about and such. Like, when you're talking with a disability organization like RespectAbility or Inevitable, you're not going to scare us away with a laundry list of disabilities. You don't have to worry about that -- once again going back to the point of -- making sure that we're providing any necessary accommodations that you'll need for -- whether it's an in-person or virtual program, so we're aware. Now, you don't have to disclose everything during the interview process, but you should disclose things before accepting it. So you get offered the fellowship and such, so you should make sure you share that. Legally, people can't take the job away from you at that point, but -- so that way we make sure that we set up what is needed for you in order to succeed. I can tell you that we've had many RespectAbility Lab Fellows come through our program identifying with one or two disabilities. Throughout the program they get more comfortable and they disclose additional disabilities, sometimes publicly and sometimes privately. One thing that we offer here at RespectAbility is -- when folks go through our Fellowship or our Lab program is -- we have a database of -- individuals, some of whom are listed on the BRIC site right now working in the areas of animation and gaming and such. And so folks may choose to publicly identify with a certain set of disabilities, but then privately disclose additional disabilities to -- disability organizations, so they can be aware of, if someone requests -- a writer who has XYZ disability for example and such. So the answer -- simple answer is how do you decide which of your disabilities to talk about is whichever ones you want to. Longer answer is -- thinking about in the job sense of -- sharing more often enables us to be able to connect you to more employment opportunities. Lawon, I know you -- I think -- I believe you've finished the first round interviews, I think -- saying it out there that there possibly could be -- a few out there, in case if someone's like wait I didn't get to here. And so -- our Lab, which -- helps develop the talent pipeline of disabled writers, directors, and others working behind the camera, including animators -- applications for 2024 actually tripled in comparison to 2023. And Lawon, you're currently interviewing the finalists. Have you noticed any trends across the applications and interviews that could be helpful to folks on here, whether they're applying for a program with us, or Inevitable, or -- other disability-led organizations?

>> Lawon: I have really really noticed the vulnerability of people when I interview them. Like you said, when I interview with them, they may have already put -- their disabilities on their application, but then as we're conversating and going further into the interview, they disclose more, and they feel very comfortable to do that. And I think they feel more comfortable doing that because, again, I feel like -- organizations, especially ours, but I mean just in general, I feel like people are open to know who someone really truly is. And especially if you're applying for with disability organizations, I feel like people are more vulnerable to tell you everything about them, I really do. I just feel like the trend I'm noticing is that they're sharing so many stories, or sharing so many ways of how they acquired their disability, or -- they're very open and honest, so I've noticed that especially this year.

>> Lauren: We have a few questions regarding mental health, so I'm gonna kind of read them together and then we can address that. So on some job applications mental health issues are listed as a disability, and this person asking the question says that they were diagnosed with anxiety and depression. Should they be inclined to mention this, especially if going through these illnesses shaped their career path? They are afraid that hiring will see their mental illness as a disadvantage. And another individual asked a similar question: how do you disclose if you have a mental illness like schizophrenia, because the illness is so stigmatized in the media? Anyone like to talk about that?

>> Lawon: Again, I just truly feel -- a lot of people, you'd be surprised, have -- really want to know about people's disabilities, especially now in this day and time that we're living in, especially working in the entertainment industry. They want to know. They really do want to know, like, oh okay, can you -- I mean they want to know more information about that mental health issue. I mean, when I -- again, I have to piggyback on -- I have had a 30-year career in this industry, and when I talked about mental health that was 17 years ago. So I feel it's very open now to talk about mental health now, more than it was when I even attempted to do it. I could have got -- I feel like -- I mean, I could have -- I felt like I could have lost my job when I was like calling in to be -- tell them I had a mental health, like, they could've said, oh he's not capable to do his job anymore, but they didn't do that. I just feel like now, people are -- companies are more willing to listen and hear about your mental health issues. So I would feel -- I would say be open about it, you'll be surprised. I mean -- you'll be surprised of how many people want to know about people's mental health issues.

>> Lauren: And just reiterating that you don't have to disclose what mental health disability you have, because -- as the second questioner -- pointed out, schizophrenia does -- is much more stigmatized, for example, than anxiety or depression. We're getting to a point -- not everywhere -- but getting to a point that many in -- the world -- are seeing anxiety and depression being normalized, but some mental health conditions not as much. And so hopefully we'll get to a point where we're all are kind of considered as -- just part of society. But you don't have to disclose specifics about your disability. You only need to ask about what accommodations you need. So -- it's important to kind of think of it from that sense. If you don't want to actually disclose what your disability is, it is your choice as an individual to disclose or not. And just because you disclosed to your immediate supervisor does not mean you need to disclose to your colleagues at your level for example and such. And so conversations -- HR conversations like that are supposed to be kept -- private and such. So -- I think it's interesting going back to the main topic -- of this panel is disclosing your story, so some of this is -- in an interview and such, but some of this could also be in your application materials. Many folks on here are writers, are animators and such so -- also thinking about it, like, do you include disability, including mental health, in your script samples, in your animation and such? And oftentimes, I can tell you from anecdotal experience that if you're pitching a project, it is helpful when you disclose that you have that disability that you're representing, because -- folks purchasing content want to know that the content being created was being created authentically and such. So there, you have a really great positive and such if -- you created content, it looks great, it sounds great, whatever it might be, whether we're talking about a script or something on video, and then where you can kind of disclose in your cover letter or personal statement that this is based on lived -- authentic lived experience. So that's the other thing to kind of be thinking about. But do you have to say that? No -- Lawon is shaking his head, Chanel's shaking her head -- you don't have to disclose that you have the disability represented. I'm gonna pause here if anyone else would like to add to that.

>> Lawon: Yeah -- just know that you do not have to disclose any of the information of your disability or anything to an employer, just know that. But if you just generally -- I have some mental health issues, and if they might ask, well, what type, you can go into that two sentence or what have you -- but here are some resources of my mental health issues that can explain more in detail. Because you don't want to be the one explaining it to them because that might -- you be like, oh, well, you might feel like you over-telling them. So yeah just give them that one or two sentence, give them the resources, and move on from that, because you're past your disability, you know what I mean? Like, and if they know from your work that -- they can see from your work that -- you're representing this community and what have you, but when you explain to them as well your mental health or your disability, trust me -- they want to know more about you, and that's being your own authentic self.

>> Lauren: Excellent, thank you. So I want to also ask a question we had -- so Chanel previously talked about -- when applying for colleges and such -- when she disclosed -- that she uses a wheelchair and needs something -- physically accessible. Steven, we were speaking earlier -- this past week and you mentioned you've experienced some ableism from PR companies -- while covering events as a working journalists -- I figured that folks on here could really learn from the lessons you learned from your past experiences -- what lessons have you learned that can now help others who might be facing a similar experience?

>> Steven: Yes. I've definitely had my fair share of not only ableism, discrimination, racism, just so many different disparities that happen, especially just being in a career field where we're celebrating nothing but perfection. But interesting enough, I feel like the script has changed in some ways, because these PR firms are now working with their clients to create some sort of horror story -- to make this comeback story or these headlines -- and that brings monetary success or viewership and things of that nature. And it's interesting for me, because I've hidden my disability my whole life. So now coming in authentically, it's just like, whoa, this is so interesting. It's most certainly been [indistinct] in the sense of a test of faith for me, but -- I think it's just so important to stand up and advocate for yourself. When I am on those red carpets -- sometimes I do experience -- a lot of that. I've been turned away from red carpets, and because I've been a person that hid my disability, I got into a mind frame of okay, I'm gonna wait two days before letting them know I need accommodations, and the reason being is because I'm afraid that those opportunities would be taken away, and that happened to me two years ago. There was an award show in my hometown where I felt like I was going to be completely embraced and and celebrated, as that particular year, I made history as the world's first black deaf blind journalist and -- but still learning more about my disability in that time frame, and still carrying those past traumas to that day, and waiting to ask for those accommodations. I had my hotel booked -- the award show, they booked my hotel -- everything was set, I asked for accommodations, and I was informed that my name -- suddenly my name was similar to someone else's, and that -- I got the phone call, and I was told that my credentials would be revoked, and to don't come. I've tried to fight this matter litigiously, and they were deemed too powerful. So instead -- I just said, you know what, I'm going to wash off my hands, I'm gonna put a smile on my face, I'm gonna stand ten times stronger and make sure that this never happen ever again. I've been building a lot of great relationships with my politicians, the senators, the legislators -- I'm actually -- will be packing my bags right after this to head to DC. I think it's so important to learn how to fight. You don't have to -- I don't go on my Instagram and just start -- yapping off because that's not gonna stop -- I mean, in some cases it actually may change, but I find my fight so much stronger in building those relationships with policy makers and people that can -- you can collaborate and partner with to be able to make sure those changes happen. Sometimes the people on the other side truly don't understand what the disability is, and they are always afraid that you may be a liability, which is the reason why I tell some of you today who have asked certain questions, these are the reasons why when we're asked a question about the disability, that person could be that middle person at this award show that could have spoken to the PR firm on my behalf to say, oh, I know someone like that, so -- but because if we push those people away, they just assume whatever it is that is out there, whatever it is that they saw in television. Even when people look at me, I get -- I often get a lot of times, "well you don't look like there's something wrong with you." You don't -- you don't look like -- and I'm -- what is that? We have to get rid of that stigma. We have to get rid of whatever it is that television is telling you to do, which is why we're here essentially working on different projects -- media, consulting projects -- I think this is a beautiful time, because we're essentially changing the game. We're changing the way that children are looking at animation, film, and seeing those signs -- those accessible signs in the background, that they see their grandparent, their younger brother, because it's all ages, it's all color -- we are representation of the world, and I think it's so important to, again, speak out, speak up, and show up, so.

>> Lauren: Thank you. Speak out, show up, yep, all those things very very important. And I think something -- a lesson learned as well -- both hearing from Chanel and Steven that yes, if you don't necessarily -- put it in your application, that's okay and such, because you should -- get into college, you should get -- be able to get your spot on the red carpet -- as a working journalist based on your skills and your application, regardless of your disability or any other identity aspect. But once you get the opportunity to notify them -- for example, we have ASL interpreters here on this on this webinar and -- best practice is to request ASL interpreters at least two weeks beforehand. RespectAbility has a practice of having ASL interpreters on events like this even if -- it's not requested, because folks may watch recording and such, but many organizations -- might -- may choose to only have ASL interpreters if an attendee requests one and such. So requesting things as early as possible is important. Now physical accessibility -- if something is in a location that is just not accessible, it doesn't matter how early you request it. But I've definitely seen people change events where they were on like a two story -- they were going to be upstairs, and there was no elevator, and they moved things downstairs. I was at a -- I've kind of had a few different experiences at Sundance this year, and one was attending an event where it was exactly that -- on two stories, there was no elevator and such, so they made sure that there was food and bar on both levels. They moved the speaking engagement to the main level, it was accessible to get into the main level, so they moved all the important things to the first level, so everyone would have access to it and such. And then another example was covering the red carpet of Out Of My Mind, a Disney+ upcoming film, and I remember walking in and -- having a brace on my leg, using a cane and the -- one of the producers said, oh yeah -- we got -- we have a spot reserved for you, and they said, our film is all about accessibility and inclusion. We want to make sure our red carpet's the same. And so I think in some cases -- folks are really working to make the changes and need the help and support in doing so, and then other times -- we're still showing up and doing the fight to make it happen and, as Steven mentioned, sometimes going through the political routes -- working with our representation to try and get laws changed and such, but -- firmly believing that -- working both -- getting the legal aspect, the laws changed, and changing the hearts and minds. Wanted to share more from the Q&A. An anonymous attendee says -- this is going back to the mental health, and this individual is sharing a suggestion for others -- says, "just wanted to mention that I have found it helpful to say that my stigmatized mental health disability is in the past when I discussed my scripts, even though I currently experience it, mostly because it makes producers more comfortable." So this individual will self-identify -- say that they have the lived experience, but imply that it was something that they lived with when they were younger, and not currently, because making producers feel more comfortable and such. That is something that some of our viewers here might be interested in doing, others may not want to, but it is a -- it is one tactic that you definitely could consider and use in your wheelhouse, especially when you're pitching projects that include aspects of your disability that you don't feel comfortable yet publicly disclosing that you currently are experiencing. So let's see -- we have more questions, they keep coming in. We have about 5 minutes left and such, so I'm looking through the questions here. We have another person -- let's see -- who mentions that they have two physical disabilities and are saying, thanks a million for the strategic info. We're glad that we're providing information that is helpful to you. Thank you for joining us, and I hope that our information will continue to be useful to you in your career. So we have -- this is a quite specific question. A friend is a disabled veteran who suffers from PTSD after sexual assault in the military. She desperately wants a job, and is exceptionally talented, but has a genuine fear of men. What can be done to accommodate this? I mean, men are half the population, and when she describes it she's re-traumatized and shuts down. This is a really, really tough one, and I'm hoping that your friend has been -- has access to resources and therapists to kind of talk through it and such, because the fear is very real, and -- but in terms of figuring out how your friends can -- exist and such, I'm not sure if anyone else has any other advice for this person. My advice would be trying to look for a virtual position, but of course, that still also involves having to hop on Zoom where there might be people -- who identify as male on the Zoom and such -- I'm not sure if anyone -- this may be a question that might be outside of the scope of our panelists, but going to pause here to see if anyone has anything that they'd want to add here.

>> Lawon: First I hope that your friend is getting the necessary resources and needs to help her with this situation, cuz that is a very hard -- I really -- I just -- my suggestion would be to -- I would want them -- hopefully they starting to get -- help from reliable resources to -- work through this issue, and then -- can maybe go from there, but that's the only advice I really have at this time for that situation, cause that's hard.

>> Lauren: And another specific question is what does one do if one needs frequent breaks on sets? This is an individual who's working on a physical set. "People don't seem to want to hire me and my peers with brain injuries for reality TV, because they don't think that as someone with a brain injury can handle long days." This individual says that they could handle long days but with breaks, especially having the opportunity for quiet breaks, like in a quiet room and such. So yes, this industry requires a lot of folks. Lawon, I don't know if you want to take this first, or Steven or Chanel, if you have anything? Or I can -- I'm glad to kind of go first, but --

>> Lawon: You go first -- yeah, go first.

>> Lauren: So -- this industry is unforgiving in way too many ways, and so I think -- trying to find a showrunner or an immediate supervisor who understands that giving you a break means that they're going to get so much more out of you, and I know this is now putting more on you than others without disabilities, and that's unfair, but it's where I've seen some success occur and such of trying to identify -- folks who -- have an understanding of when they hire others that they're willing to do so. So back before COVID, when -- this was an office job, but I would notice that when we would have -- at one point I had about five Fellows in my department, and if I would expect someone to work from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. without a break, they would do -- they would do really really great for one or two hours, and then their productivity would really just dip. And this is a different -- disability than brain injury but -- could be ADHD or something like that. And if I were to mandate -- so at one point I started -- saying we needed to have breaks, and if -- and if one person needed it, that meant all the Fellows had access to it, because tried to be as equitable as possible of saying all right, instead of working for three hours and then taking an hour for lunch, why don't you work from 9 to 9:50, take a 10 minute break, 10 to 10:50, take a 10 minute break, 11 to 11:50, take a 10 minute break. Yes, did I technically lose 30 minutes of work time from them? Yes. But their productivity in the other amount of time was so much greater that it -- it made up for it. So obviously on set, it's a little bit different because you're kind of -- you may not be able to take a break at a certain time, but being able to have an open communication with your supervisor, I think would be really helpful.

>> Lawon: I will chime in to say the open communication of having the accessibility of what you need to have to be successful at that job -- be open about that with them. They will respect you more. You don't have to hide that. I -- that's one thing I would -- tell anyone. Be open about the accessibility that you need to be successful on that show, because you -- you're going to be 100% with them in the long haul, because they give you accessibility to make sure that you can do the job -- and setting you up for success. So be open about that with the people on the show that you're working with. That's the advice I would give you.

>> Lauren: We are unfortunately at time. I know more questions keep coming in. If you wanted to reach out to any of our panelists, you can send a note to info@RespectAbility.org, and we'd be glad to connect you if you want to learn more. I really want to just thank Lawon, Chanel, and Steven for a really enlightening conversation. I can't wait to see -- especially with our Fellows Chanel and Steven, like, all the successes that you continue to do and such, but we just want to thank everyone for spending a little bit of their afternoon with us.

>> Lawon: Thank you everyone! [Steven laughs]