

Burnout, Bullsh*t, and Broken Systems:

Surviving Digital Accessibility in the Trenches

Presented by
Kevin Andrews



Content Warning

*This presentation contains material that may be triggering or upsetting. It includes references to potentially sensitive topics such as ableism, workplace bullying, harassment, and discrimination.



Introduction

Kevin Andrews



- Blind, screen reader user, lived experience
- Challenges as a student in inaccessible STEM programs
- Internship: Worked with a company to make their app more accessible for resellers of assistive technology
- Certified Web Accessibility Specialist (IAAP)
- Electronic IT Accessibility Coordinator at Georgetown University (8 years in higher education)

Disability in the Workplace

- 2023: 22.5% of people with disabilities employed (highest since 2008) – U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics
- Unemployment rate for people with disabilities: 7.2%, vs 3.5% for those without disabilities
- Employment-population ratio for people without disabilities: 65.8%
- Importance of representation, inclusion, and accessible resources

"But digital accessibility still faces many barriers."

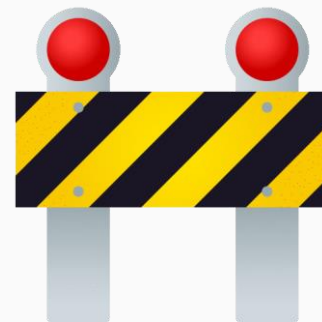
What is Digital Accessibility?

- Digital Accessibility: Ensuring digital content and platforms are usable by all, including those with disabilities
- Web Accessibility: Making websites, apps, and content accessible to screen readers, keyboards, etc.
- Assistive Technology: Tools like screen readers, magnifiers, voice recognition software
- Importance for inclusivity in digital spaces



Systemic Barriers to Digital Accessibility

- Large organizations often focus on bottom-line or risk mitigation, not access
- Resistance to change due to lack of awareness or urgency
- Decentralized institutions make consistent accessibility hard to achieve
- Personal experience: Struggles within large, decentralized institutions



Burnout and Accessibility Work

Constant uphill battle:

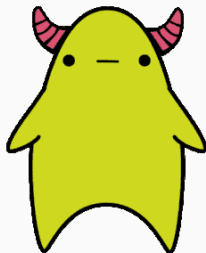
Lack of resources for meaningful accessibility improvements

- Emotional and mental toll of advocating without adequate support
- Overwork and burnout as accessibility professionals
- The invisible labor in driving systemic change



The Impossible Workload

- Accessibility work often adds to already heavy workloads
- High expectations, minimal resources, and burnout risk
- Juggling multiple tasks with no clear support structure
- Personal experience with the overwhelming demands of the role



Advocating for Change

- How to push for more resources and systemic change
- Using data and user feedback to advocate for accessibility
- Difficult conversations with leadership: pushing for inclusivity
- Personal advocacy efforts within a large institution (employee resource group, committees)

Coping with Burnout

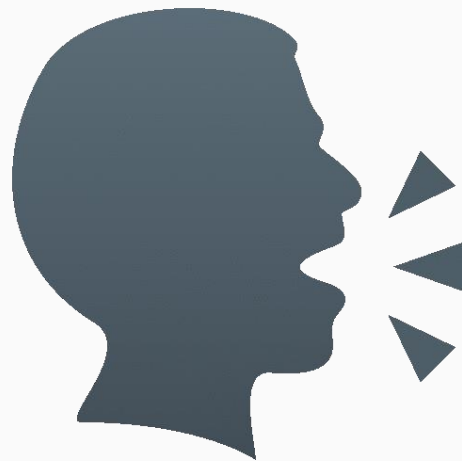
Finding balance in high-pressure environments

Practical strategies for managing stress:

- Set clear boundaries
- Practice self-care (physical and mental health)
- Build a strong support network
- Celebrate small wins and progress

Vulnerability in Advocacy

- The importance of vulnerability in advocating for change
- Recognizing the impact of burnout on well-being
- Sharing struggles to build a supportive environment
- Encouraging others to speak up about their experiences



Moving Toward a Sustainable Future

Building a more inclusive,
sustainable digital space

Solutions for reducing burnout and improving accessibility

efforts:

- More investment in accessibility initiatives
- Integration of accessibility into company culture
- Addressing mental health and workload issues

Building a Community of Support

- The value of mentorship, peer support, and professional networks
- Creating spaces where accessibility professionals can share experiences and resources
- Reducing burnout through community engagement

The word "SHARE" is written in a bold, blocky, sans-serif font. The letters are colored in a gradient: the 'S' is yellow, the 'H' is red, the 'A' is red, the 'R' is red, and the 'E' is yellow. The letters have a thick black outline and a slight 3D effect with a drop shadow.

Thriving Despite Challenges

- Personal reflections: Surviving and thriving in the digital accessibility field
- Emphasize the importance of perseverance, self-care, and community



Closing Thoughts:
Moving forward with
purpose and balance

keep
GOING

Q & A

Open floor for questions
and discussion



Thanks!

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