>> Lauren Appelbaum: Well we want to thank everyone for joining us for this next segment of the BRIC Summit. My name is Lauren Appelbaum, and I am Disability Belongs™' Senior Vice President of Entertainment and Media. My pronouns are she and her. I am a white woman with shoulder length brown hair, wearing a navy blue top. I have a virtual background behind me – it is the Disability Belongs™ logo in light blue and yellow. All of us – all speakers have the same background. At Disability Belongs™, I oversee our work to create equitable and accessible opportunities to increase the number of people with lived disability experience throughout the overall storytelling process. These initiatives increase diverse and authentic representation of disabled people on screen, leading to systemic change in how society views and values people with disabilities. As an individual with an acquired non-apparent disability called reflex sympathetic dystrophy, I have the privilege of supervising our Entertainment and Media team, including our Entertainment and Media Fellows, who you will get to meet today. Today we're going to talk about neurodivergence in media. Neurodiversity and neurodivergence are terms that we may hear often, but what do they mean and why does it matter? In this session, you'll hear from neurodivergent experts from Disability Belongs™ who will share their own perspectives on what it means to be neurodivergent, why authentic representation of neurodivergence is necessary, and how employers, educators, and allies can foster and cultivate an inclusive environment where big brain energy can thrive. Of note, neurodivergent creatives represent one in seven adults in the US – so one in seven adults in the US identify as being neurodivergent. Together, we hope to create an environment that is both inclusive and supportive of neurodiversity. Joining me today we have several folks, and – as I mention their name, they are welcome to turn their camera on, please. We have Lawon Exum, who is our Director of Entertainment and Media, Eric Ascher, who is our Senior Associate of Marketing and Communications, and three of our Entertainment and Media Fellows: Gina DeRyke, Aaron Potter, and Olivia Hall. I am now going to give them each an opportunity to introduce themselves starting with Lawon.

>> Lawon Exum: Hello everyone, my name is Lawon Exum. My pronouns are he/him. I have on a black shiny shirt with orange glasses, and I have cornrows going back, and I'm a black male. I have been in the business for 33 years, through all aspects of different -- from studios to radio stations, to being a paralegal, to being an executive, and I've navigated through my journey with my disability, having ADHD, which I'll go into more once we start the meeting. But that's me, and I'm going to pass it along to Eric.

>> Eric Ascher: Hi, I'm Eric Ascher. I am a white man with gradually thinning black hair, wearing glasses and a gray polo shirt. My pronouns are he and him. I am the Senior Associate of Marketing and Communications at Disability Belongs™. I identify as autistic. I have been working here for a little more than eight years now, if you include my time as a Fellow. Some of the things I do here include – running tech for virtual events like this one, managing our social media presence, website, and blast emails, and working with our amazing Fellows, who I will turn it back over to Lauren to introduce.

>> Lauren: Thank you Eric, let's start with Gina.

>> Gina DeRyke: Hi, my name is Gina DeRyke. I am a white woman with shoulder length brown hair, rainbow glasses, I'm wearing a colorful shirt, and I use she/they pronouns. For decades, I've been a passionate advocate for disability representation, inclusive media, and accessible design. My background spans arts, administration, and advocacy, with experience in higher education, nonprofit leadership, and financial counseling. I have a degree in voice performance, and during my time at the University of Michigan – go Blue – I was part of a Grammy award-winning album. Beyond my professional work, I'm a community organizer, a mentor for students in creative problem solving competitions, and a disability justice advocate. I use my lived experience as a neurodivergent individual to drive inclusion and push for more accessible, equitable spaces in media and beyond.

>> Lauren: Thank you Gina. Aaron?

>> Aaron Potter: Hello my name is Aaron Potter. I am a white man with dark red hair, which I have tied back, and gold rimmed glasses, and I'm wearing a brown and maroon jumper. I'm an actor, writer, and filmmaker from the UK, but I'm now – based in Los Angeles. Over the years, I've created multiple films covering a range of social issues that are very close to my heart. I'm passionate about authentic representation and accessibility in entertainment media, and I'm thrilled that I'm able to keep advocating for that as an Entertainment Media Fellow at Disability Belongs™. Thank you.

>> Lauren: Thank you Aaron. Olivia?

>> Olivia Hall: Hi, so my name is Olivia. I use she and they pronouns. I am an East Asian woman. I'm wearing a yellow sweater. I have straight chest length dark hair, large clear frame glasses, and brown headphones. I have autism and – ADHD. I am a community engagement specialist, advocate, and creator. I focus on empowering marginalized populations, including BIPOC, AANHPI, disabled, and neurodivergent communities through outdoor initiatives and creative storytelling. I have worked in the performing arts, outdoor education, social media and communications, and disability advocacy. In addition to that work, I'm also passionate about design, all types of media, and fostering community connections, both in general and with a lens towards accessibility, inclusivity, and representation.

>> Lauren: Thank you Olivia. So you can see we have a wide variety of expertise here on the panel today, and I'm excited to learn from them as well. So neurodivergence is an umbrella term that is inclusive of many disabilities, including ADHD, autism, dyslexia, dyspraxia, dyscalculia, and many more. In fact, the list is actually too long to really include everything. Some people who are neurodivergent identify as disabled, while others do not, may just call themselves neurodivergent. Either way is totally fine, and that is a personal choice. For most individuals who do identify as neurodivergent, it's not readily apparent that they are. So often folks are forced to disclose in order to advocate for themselves. Gina, I'd love to start with you. If you could share a little bit about how you have advocated for yourself while attending events and just being active in life.

>> Gina: Yeah, thanks for that question. I've found I've gotten a lot better at advocating for myself at events, especially when it comes to accessibility. I -- for example I always ask for a chair. On the surface, that might seem like a physical accommodation and we're here talking about neurodivergence. But although it is a physical accommodation, I have a connective tissue disorder that makes standing for long periods painful. It's also a neurodivergent accommodation, because if I'm in pain, I can't focus as well. I get overwhelmed faster, and it's harder to engage. And so for me, I've realized that accommodations often overlap. You can't really separate physical and neurodivergent needs. And it's important to recognize that accommodations aren't one size fits all. And so making spaces accessible really benefits everyone. So when we remove barriers, we can create a better experience for everyone.

>> Lauren: Thank you so much Gina. We're now going to head over to Lawon. Lawon, you mentioned that you've had an extensive kind of career with different radio stations, studios, and such, and when you were working at Sony Pictures, you asked for accommodations and, you know, it was a very favorable experience. How did you go about seeking accommodations, and what advice do you have for others working in a studio setting who may need an accommodation as well?

>> Lawon: To be quite honest, I took it upon myself to have a meeting with my manager. I got diagnosed, and I was – want to always give my best at wherever I was working at. And so I asked for a meeting, and I just basically communicated with them that – I just wanted to let you know that I am – have been diagnosed with ADHD. And they were very – I have to be honest, I was fearful, because I didn't know if they would be like, oh, you know, "maybe you can't do this job correctly due to your disability" or what have you. But my boss was – basically he told me, "what can we do to accommodate you to make your life better at the studio?" And that, to me, was very rewarding. And so when he asked me that – I told him, you know, what I needed to make sure that I can do the job the best to my ability. And he was very amazed that I even came to him to even share that with him, that it got around to the studio, and they started having seminars and started giving us resources for people who may have any type of disability or what have you. And I was the start of that conversation, and it was because I came to my boss and communicated to him what my needs may be to be able to make – be successful in the job that I was doing, that's what happened. And so I would say communicate that – just communicate that to your management, or to any level of person that you – may be doing a job for, because I mean, they have to accommodate you, but I just feel like you can be that person to lead by example and ask for accommodations, to the fact that so you can do your job better. So I would just say, communicate that to whoever is superior to you, so you can be able to have access to make your job successful.

>> Lauren: Thank you Lawon, and – I hope – I recognize that not every conversation may go as smooth and great as Lawon's was, but I hope that, as we have more of these type of conversations, more and more of accommodation request and conversations will be handled in a way that is beneficial for all parties involved. So kind of on that similar topic, Olivia, how have you determined what accommodations you may need and how to ask for them?

>> Olivia: So I was late-diagnosed. And for a while, I just didn't ask for accommodations, because I didn't know I needed those. And so for me it's been a real learning process, and for instance, sometimes I'll just be – yeah, starting at a job, and then initially not ask for accommodations, but then maybe the way that some sort process is happening or the way a coworker or a manager is interacting, I realize, oh, this isn't quite working, and so then it's kind of experientially – things happen that either do or don't work, and then going on to communicate – hey, this went really well – let's keep doing this, or, oh, this didn't quite work well for me, let's see if we can shift those things in a way that would be more beneficial for both of us. So I think – yeah, the experiential learning is definitely one way to do it. I think also just learning from other people, whether it's – you have neurodivergent people in your life that you can chat to about what kind of accommodations they have or have asked for in the past, or going online and looking, finding influencers or stuff like that, because that can be a great way to find out about – oh, I asked for this accommodation or blah blah blah, that you might not have thought of or even known was an option.

>> Lauren: Thank you Olivia, and I think that brings up a important point that – you may not know what you need at all times, or you could be diagnosed later, or disabilities change as you grow older and – exploring that, and also from a personal point of view of – being comfortable with recognizing that what you may need will change over time, and – asking for what is necessary for you to be able to thrive. Along those lines, Eric, when working with neurotypical colleagues, what do you want them to know?

>> Eric: Lots of things, but I have a couple of minutes so I'll keep it quick. So I think it is critically important for neurotypical colleagues to not assume that neurodiverse people are incapable of doing a task in their jobs. We are more than capable of doing basically anything, we just might do things in a different way. For example, I'm not great at speaking off the cuff, but when I have notes, like, transparently, I do today, I think I do fine. So assume that we are capable and do not treat us with kid gloves. Treat us with respect, like you would treat anyone else. And one other thing, as I wrote in a personal reflection for this organization a few years back, do not try to quote unquote "fix us." Accept us for who we are. I could go on about this for a lot longer, but those are the high level points.

>> Lauren: Thanks Eric. And if any folks watching are curious to have any more details about any of those things we will have time for Q&A towards the end of this hour. So feel free to ask – for any additional things based off of what Eric just said, or any answers that any of our panelists are giving. Aaron, I know when we – and then also being fully transparent with members of who are attending this – we did a prep session where we went through all these questions, because that is an accommodation that some folks would appreciate, so – thinking through different – things that can be done to ensure that everyone feels comfortable. So Aaron, I'm going to turn to you and ask you the same question I asked Eric. When working with neurotypical colleagues, what do you want them to know?

>> Aaron: I think it's – I was like Olivia, I was diagnosed late in life. And so for most of my working life so far, I didn't know that I could ask for accommodations, and I didn't know what they would be exactly. But if I was to, now that I'm on the other side of that, the advice I would give to someone who's thinking about asking for accommodations and stuff is just to remember that the individual who has requested accommodations is not responsible for ensuring that those accommodations are enforced. If you are in charge, it's up to you to maintain those accommodations, to make sure everyone who is need to know is well versed, especially those at the top, like management and executives. When providing accommodations, it's very important to remember that you are actively practicing what you preach.

>> Lauren: Thank you Aaron, and I'm going to give Olivia a chance to add to this conversation as well.

>> Olivia: Yeah, it's something that I feel like at least for me personally, it might not be the case for every neurodivergent person, but I really do well with direct communications. I know sometimes, different people have different communication styles and so try to maybe couch things in more subtle ways in order to try and like make things come off less intensely. But at least for me, sometimes things being said subtly, I may just take very literally, and so not pick up on whatever subtle thing is trying to be said. So at least for me – doesn't need to be rude, but just being clear, like hey – this is what you're doing, do this instead. Or, this is doing well, whatever – that's really helpful for me. And then kind of similar to what Eric said is I feel like, yeah, don't make assumptions. Like he said, don't make – assume that neurodivergent people can't do certain things and just more broadly – don't assume, like oh, if someone's forgetting something, don't assume it's out of malice or them being bad at their job. Maybe they just need different structures or systems to remember things, or they just maybe work – their brain just operates in a different way. And so if you're having anything come up, you can definitely – thinking back to the first thing – be direct and, like, hey, this is happening, and then you can maybe get more clear information – oh, they can explain, this is happening because of this thing – let's try and find a way to walk together to solve this, rather than just secretly thinking that they're maybe doing this thing on purpose or being bad at their job, when it's maybe just – yeah, a variance of how things go for them.

>> Lauren: Thank you Olivia, and Eric has something he'd like to add.

>> Eric: I would just like to emphasize to anyone who's an employer who's might be watching this that it is in your best interest to provide accommodations when they're asked for, because accommodations, what they do is they will give you – the best possible performance you can get out of the employee. It's basically to – you hired someone, you want them to do their best possible work, so the way to do that is to provide them accommodations that will help them get their – do their best possible work. So I think that's just something very important to stress that I wanted to bring up.

>> Lauren: Thank you Eric. And as someone – so I have the benefit of either currently supervising or previously supervising every person speaking here today, and so, as someone in that kind of position – really underscoring what Eric is sharing in the sense that, when someone comes to me and asks for an accommodation, I'm going to look at that as, all right, this is how what I can do to enable this individual to be able to bring their best self to work. And so now we're a fully remote organization, but when we were in-person, I would notice that I would – with some of our staff and Fellows, that if I were to expect them to work from like 9:00 a.m. to 12, and then take an hour for lunch, and then work from 1 to 5, that there was – really great spurts of work at the beginning, and then it kind of, as time went on, it was harder for some individuals to maybe concentrate or keep up the same level of work. But when, in some cohorts, would then say, all right, at the end of every hour, I want you to take a 10-minute break. Get up, move away from the computer, get some movement – go outside for a walk or just go – to the lunchroom and just – chat for a few minutes, yes, technically, were we losing 10 minutes of every hour, so a half an hour in the morning and a little bit more than a half an hour in the afternoon? Technically, yes. But the productivity of the individuals involved went up to be way more than if they were asked to just kind of sit there and work nonstop. And so I think we need to be looking at this not as like a loss, but how can we work with folks to help them be able to bring them – their best selves to work? And ultimately it does benefit the employer, it benefits everyone involved. And so kind of having that kind of mindset when thinking about accommodations, not of, "oh, I'm going to do this for someone." No. I'm going to do this for us to have the best working relationship possible. And so, I'm going to shift topics a little bit. Aaron mentioned that he is an actor, and so – as an actor, you've been able to use storytelling to reduce stigmas around having a disability. And I know that many people who are watching this right now may be an actor, may be an animator, may be a writer, may teach individuals in those areas. So what advice do you have for storytellers when including a disabled or neurodivergent character?

>> Aaron: I would say when you have a character that is disabled, their disability is not their character. So when you build a narrative around a character, it needs to be about who that individual is as a person. If you build a narrative only around a character's disability, you end up with broad tropes, and the authenticity is sort of lost. So for example, I've been – I've had peers who, when playing characters who are neurodivergent, are encouraged to play them to be unemotional or robotic, which can be damaging, as this is a trope that, when presented over and over again to an audience, it creates assumptions and stereotypes on neurodivergence that isn't really reflected to real life. So there is a way to – a really good way – so that this kind of highlights the importance of having a production accessibility coordinator on every film and TV set. And this person is there to advocate and consult for authentic representation, accommodation endorsement, and to bridge language and conversations between creatives and executives to ensure everyone in front of and behind the camera are treated fairly and represented properly. Having a production accessibility coordinator, and preferably a consulting producer, results in authentic representation, accommodation management, and compliance to ADA guidelines. Not having one results in a loss of advocacy and accuracy.

>> Lauren: Thank you Aaron. Really touched on a lot of different points depending on what area someone might be in the industry. So you know, over the past five years or so – we have been lucky to see an increase of representation, and also – more authentic and better representation of neurodivergent characters in television, film, and books. You know, in the kids space, for example, where I think we've seen some of the largest kind of improvement, we have autistic characters, Carl and Lotta in PBS Kids' "Carl The Collector." We have Axl, who's an ambulance with dyscalculia in Disney Junior's "Firebuds." We have June Chen – who's an autistic character in Disney's "The Ghost and Molly McGee," and we have Percy Jackson, who has both ADHD and dyslexia, in the Percy Jackson and Olympian series. I know that there probably a lot more out there and – and – everyone may have different opinions on what is good representation and what is not, and – but I do invite anyone who's in the audience who would like to share an example in the chat – please feel free to share your favorites – and I'm glad to kind of then read them out loud for folks where the chat may or may not be accessible for them. But then I'd also like to turn to our panelists to see – what thoughts you might have in terms of, if people are looking to find good representation out there of neurodivergent characters, what can they see? Olivia, would you like to share first?

>> Olivia: Sure. So yeah, just echoing kind of what you just said is that – yeah, it does seem like in recent years, there's been both – increased amounts and – better representation of – neurodivergent characters. But I think at least for me growing up, and then part of this is, like, I didn't know that I was – neurodivergent, but even without that, there weren't that many neurodivergent characters in general. And so something that – I've come to realize – after – being diagnosed – oh yeah – there weren't that many neurodivergent characters, but there are a lot of characters that are – neurodivergent coded, I think largely – unintentionally, but if you go into – I don't know – plenty of different fandom spaces, there'll be people being like, oh – I read this character as – autistic, or this person as ADHD, so that's a really interesting thing that – I've noticed. And then for – yeah, characters that – I personally really like, Abed Nadir from Community. I think he's – yeah, personally just – love that show, I think it's a great sitcom. He is an autistic character. And I think part of the reason why I like him is that he – kind of like Aaron said – it's not just about him being – autistic. And originally he wasn't – directly written as autistic, which is another interesting facet. Like, the creator was – writing him and then, through writing that character, kind of realized – "oh wait, I guess I have autism." And so that's kind of – a little – side benefit of – oh yes – representation is important, even – for writers and they can – find these things out about themselves. But yeah, the character of Abed – does, yeah, have – autism, but it's not – the main thing about him. He's also – really into – movies and TV shows and – he's not really – that's something that's – kind of embraced by – the people in his life and it's not just – a one-off one note – weird kind of – quirky guy. He's – a pretty – fully fledged character with all these – different elements and not – in spite of his – autism or his – kind of – singular interests.

>> Lauren: Thank you. And I'm going to read some from the chat, and then we're going to go to Gina. So we have Entrapta from She-Ra as a suggestion. We also have Donnie from the Rise of TMNT – is that Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles? Okay. Saying, "he's not canonically autistic but I see so much of myself in him." We also have Norma Khan in Dead End: Paranormal Park, is also considered canonically autistic. So those are some that we're hearing from folks in the audience. Gina, I'm going to go to you.

>> Gina: Thanks. Yeah, I appreciate that there's so many more neurodivergent characters, not only coded, like Olivia mentioned, but, you know, some characters, either through the process of the show, realizing that they are neurodivergent or, you know, it being apparent. One example that really has stood out to me recently is the film "Out of My Mind." It's a story that follows Melody. She's a young girl who has cerebral palsy who's incredibly smart and insightful, but she's often underestimated because she's non-speaking, and she uses a communication device. What I really appreciated about the film is how well it captures the kind of microaggressions that disabled people can face, those moments where people assume things or talk over you, and how frustrating and isolating that can be. And this resonated with me personally, because my best friend growing up has cerebral palsy, and I saw so many moments in the film that reflected what I witnessed her experience, both like the challenges and the strength that it takes to navigate them. And something that really struck me when watching the film was how often I found myself reacting out loud to those frustrating moments – I'm watching with my kids and I'm, you know, reacting in the moment, and then seconds later a character in the film would say exactly what I had just said. It was like somehow I knew the script ahead of time, which to me is a huge sign of good representation, because those moments felt so real and familiar because they captured experiences I've seen and reacted to in real life. And something else as a little, you know shout out that makes "Out of My Mind" stand out is that Disability Belongs™ consulted on the film, which I think is huge. Authentic representation comes from involving disabled people in the storytelling process, not just characters on screen, but behind the screens. And that kind of collaboration can make a real difference in getting details right, and ensuring that disabled voices are heard.

>> Lauren: Thank you Gina. And from some of the examples that I shared prior, including "Firebuds" and "Ghost and Molly McGee," we also were pulled in for them as well. And I think it's such an important thing that – when writing neurodivergent characters, for example, neurodivergent writers are hired. And not just writers and actors, but also looking at the entirety of the production. You know, if it's animation, are there animators – are there production designers, you know, really looking through of how we can ensure that the community is fully represented, both in front of and behind the camera. We have a few more things in the chat I'm going to share. Sandy sharing that "as a 76 year old woman, I was diagnosed at the age of 55 with ADHD." So getting diagnosed later in age is common, especially for female identifying individuals, when it comes to a lot of different things that fall under the neurodivergent umbrella. And then Brandon is recommending the character of Dory in Finding Nemo as another character to be looking at for representation. So I would now like to invite all members of the audience to share some questions. You can do so by opening up the Q&A box at the bottom of your Zoom window. You can ask it with your name, or ask it anonymously. And I'll be sharing those questions with our panelists. While we're waiting for those questions to come in, I have another question to ask all of our panelists. What advice would you want to give your younger self? Aaron, let's start with you.

>> Aaron: I would say don't try to accommodate others by taking yours away. It's okay to ask for them, and the reason why you're asking – for them is because they're a necessity for you to have the same tools as everybody else to get the job done. And that's fair, that's equity, and it's important to keep that in mind when you're advocating for yourself. You're doing it so you can do the same job.

>> Lauren: Thank you Aaron. Gina?

>> Gina: Yeah, I think as someone also who, like Aaron and Olivia have shared, found out – diagnosis later in life, I'd tell my younger self you don't have to work the way that other people do to be valuable. Your brain works differently, and it's not a flaw, it's just a fact. In fact, it can be a strength to leverage. Instead of fighting against it, take the time to figure out what actually works for you. I'm really lucky at Disability Belongs™ that we have an accommodation, like, we have multiple people that are encouraging us to investigate what accommodations we need. And I wish I had let myself earlier lean into tools, workflows, accommodations, that could make things easier, instead of trying to prove things I could do like the normal way, and you don't – yeah, you don't have to earn the right to exist just as you are. And so the sooner that you stop trying to fit yourself into systems that weren't built for you and start building your own way of working, the more energy that you're have for things that actually matter.

>> Lauren: Thank you Gina. Olivia?

>> Olivia: Yeah, so kind of a couple things. One of them is that you're being way too hard on yourself – chill out a little bit, relax. And the other one – and this is maybe very – late-diagnosed wishful thinking – it's – maybe look into this neurodivergence, because there's a reason why all these memes you're seeing resonate a lot, and it's not just like a funny coincidence that they all seem to be very relevant.

>> Lauren: Thank you Olivia. Eric?

>> Eric: I'll just echo what some of the other people have said here and basically say, don't be hard on yourself, don't try to fix yourself. There's a lot of internalized ableism that can be pushed on certain people who are neurodiverse. And so don't – accept who you are, don't be afraid of embracing who you are.

>> Lauren: Thank you, important lessons. Lawon?

>> Lawon: Oh – I struggled with that question when you asked that, but I would actually look myself in the face – my younger self – and say believe in yourself. Despite you having a disability or what have you – believe in yourself. Because you can celebrate the wins, celebrate the small wins that happen in your life – even though, you know, despite of what you're diagnosed with. So I would definitely say believe in yourself.

>> Lauren: Thank you. Alright, so I'm going to be going to some questions from the audience, and we will do our best to get to all of them. Thank you, we have a very involved audience, which is wonderful. And so this first one is from an individual who also is autistic and says that they struggle with sudden changes. What are your coping strategies for working in an industry that can pivot without warning? Who would like to take that one? Aaron and then Lawon.

>> Aaron: Funny, we were kind of talking about this not too long ago. [laughs] But yes, as being in an industry that is constantly changing every couple of years, for me, I turn the focus from the industry back to myself, and just make sure that I'm doing my thing, and that I'm focused on making sure that I'm hitting everything on more of a day-to-day basis than trying to think long-term. Because in an industry like entertainment, you can't really think long-term, because it's going to look completely different in 10 years, in five years. So I'd say just – both a little bit of self-focus, self-love, and making sure that you're keeping up at a pace that is comfortable to you. Because you don't have to be in – you don't need to have a hand in every single pot that's going on, you don't need to understand everything all of the time. You can sort of minimize to just what is relevant to you, and what it is that you want to achieve, the direction you want to go in. And you can kind of keep it to that, and I find that helpful for me, because I wouldn't even be – even now, I would – would not be able to fully explain to you my own industry that I am in on a complete scale. [laughs] Thank you.

>> Lauren: Lawon.

>> Lawon: I have to [audio glitch] – self-care – I tell that to my team all the time. Self-care is the best care, and I really feel that just taking care of yourself and, yeah, it changes every day – I really do, I feel like it changes every day, but I would say self-care and take your time – take your time to make sure that what you're doing is – it's good for you and what you want to do, because you'll put your 100% into it if it's something that you really really are want – this is something that you want to do. So self-care. Meditate. I mean, just get away from whatever is really you're focusing on to just take some time to take care of yourself. So self-care, self-care is the best care.

>> Lauren: Thank you. I could also suggest – connecting with peers, whether they're also neurodivergent or neurotypical, to be able to feel comfortable kind of asking a question. So if something does kind of pivot and maybe like if you're caught off guard, for example, or having a trusted colleague that you can go to, and I'm definitely have been that colleague that people have come to and be like, "I don't understand, like, what am I supposed to do now?" And so finding someone who's – willing to be like, okay, here, wait, let's break it down into steps, or whatever it might be that you need. And then also having that same conversation with your immediate supervisor of saying that change is difficult. It doesn't mean you can't do something, it just means that giving a heads up, a warning is helpful. Now granted, that's not always going to be able to be the case, and Aaron shared a – real life example – before of having to kind of pivot on a – with me – about a scene of like being given a direction and then another direction, and – sometimes that happens, and it's going to – you're just going to do the best you can. And I think based off of the advice that everyone was given before of advice for your younger self, afterwards, don't beat yourself up over it. You know, you did the best that you could do in the circumstances that you were given. Do it and then move on. Because especially in this industry, everything is constantly changing. We have another question about asking about strategies that have helped you when interviewing for a job. We'll go Gina and then Eric and then Olivia.

>> Gina: Yeah, I am a little unique on the panel that I had a career break to raise children, and this is my first job kind of back in the workforce. And I found it very different interviewing now. And I think some of that has been the confidence that I've earned in understanding myself better, and knowing that I want to be myself in an interview, and that's going to come across. I think if there's – if I stumble over some words or if I – don't have the best answer for something, the thing that I think is really going to last is the impression that people got of you, and I know that I've found – and I think it's true for me, I know if I'm – if I was looking to hire someone, I love to hear what people are passionate about, and especially when that has alignment in the work that you're looking to do, that's contagious. And so I think being able to kind of show what drives you, especially if it – hopefully aligns with what you're looking to interview for, I think that that's something that – can benefit you no matter what industry you're looking in.

>> Eric: Okay, so I have a couple of tips that I like to give every single Fellow that enters this program – our Fellowship program – and there are a couple of them, but to boil them down. The first one is, have an answer for – "tell me about yourself." And because – the thing is, every interview you get, you'll probably be asked that question or something like it, so basically for interviews, you can prepare for things that you know are going to happen. So you can have stories prepared, you can have anecdotes prepared, you can have examples prepared that you can share to fit into the questions that you're asked. But you always will be asked "tell me about yourself" or "walk me through your resume" or something like that, so you can spend some time, have a two-minute answer down pat for that. And practice as much as you can. And the other advice I give everyone is do as much research as you can into the position that you're applying for, the company you're applying for. If you're applying for a social media job, check their social media. If you're applying for an entertainment job, check – know about what they've produced, and because the more knowledge you have, the more prepared you will be – in the process. So yes.

>> Lauren: Thank you Eric. Olivia?

>> Olivia: Yeah, so a couple things. One of them is that you can usually ask for the accommodation to have questions to be sent beforehand. You don't necessarily have to fame it as an accommodation if you don't want, and there's no guarantee that they will, but that is always an option of something that you can do, and plenty of places are happy to accommodate. And that's what I did for this position. I was like, hey – interview is coming up, could I recieve the questions beforehand? And that was super helpful for me. Another thing kind of similar to Eric's point of preparing beforehand, yeah you can always find someone in your life to practice your answers. So it's not just like, oh I've practiced by talking to myself. And get that practice with someone else, whether it's someone directly in your real life, or a friend over Zoom or whatever. There's also, I think particularly for virtual or remote interviews which are more common these days is, you could have little notes for yourself pulled up, so that way it's not just you and your brain and, oh, am I going to forget all these things? But just the little – if they provide the questions to you, bullet points of the things you want – make sure that you hit on for each question, or even if it's just like Eric mentioned – the more generic questions that you know for sure are going to be asked, even if you don't get the entire question list, just things bullet pointed out there for those things, and – the job description pulled up so you can – remember just – little things like that to help jog your memory and reference stuff.

>> Lauren: Thank you. And some advice I give folks it which kind of really builds on something Olivia was saying is – if you pick out kind of three or four points you want to make sure that you are – delivering during your interview, if you get a question that kind of stumps you, you can kind of maybe go back to those points and be like, all right, does one of them kind of fit into it? I honestly like putting post-it notes – if it's a virtual interview – putting post-it notes up around of kind of different things that I want to – as Aaron is showing them on screen – of things that I want to make sure I talk about. And then after I've shared that point, I take it and I – crumple it up, throw it into the trash can – tactile feeling very good. And then – as the time goes on, there were fewer and fewer post-its, which then help me kind of focus as well. So all right, so lots of good questions coming in as well, as potentially some comments. And so I'm going to go to – this is a longer question. So this is from a creative technologist with EDS and autism, noticing that it's not uncommon for neurodivergence and collagen disorders to be found together, also left-handedness, and have a personal passion with creating interactive experiences that are disability friendly. So this individual notices that while applying for different jobs, most of the big players in the field are not interested in creating accessible experiences, kind of just figuring out ADA compliance, and then not much doing any further than that. So the question is how do I balance my passion for making sure that the things I create are something that as many people as possible can experience, with the understanding that some companies privately see full inclusivity as something that's unimportant. Kind of boils down to how do you balance passion for accessibility and inclusion, while also – the way I'm interpreting the question is while also – being able to sell a product, knowing that not everyone you're selling to is caring about accessibility?

>> Eric: Well, I would make the argument that even if people don't think they care about accessibility, there so many benefits to making products or services or anything accessible, beyond the obvious ones. I would say the disability community is large, and it's growing constantly. People who are not disabled now may or may not become disabled as time goes on, due to accident, aging, or illness. I would say that except – there have been studies that companies that try to be more accessible and inclusive do better. So I would say that, even if they're not doing it just to –to meet the bare minimum requirements, I think you can go above and beyond that, because you'll do better as a result, I think basically is what it blows down to. But I don't know if anyone else had anything else add on that one.

>> Lauren: Aaron? Oh sorry, I saw that was for something else. Apologies. So you know, in terms of this, it's also doing research and finding what companies actually do care. And you know, there is research out there of companies that are going the extra mile. And so – spending your effort on kind of pitching to those companies is what I would suggest. We're now going to go to another question – trying to get through as many as possible. It is asking "how would you recommend getting your foot in the door of the entertainment industry?" This individual often feels like neurotypical peers have an easier time getting the edge. Aaron?

>> Aaron: So it's a little different to how it used to be. So I completely understand the feeling, 'cause that's what I grew up with. It felt like it was almost like there was this really cool party, and I didn't have an invite, and I didn't know how to get the invite to even get in. But one thing I've learned over the last 5 to 10 years of making films that are for social causes or meeting up with people who are like me, is that these spaces are all around in the industry now. Like for example, last month I got to go to Slamdance Film Festival, which had a bunch of short films which were all made by people and about different disabilities. And that was an entire space just for films about that, and there are – and that goes into different film festivals as well. I've been to Flicks for Change, which is another film festival which is specifically for films that are trying to fight for different social causes. So there are a lot of different communities within the entertainment industry, and if you're looking to get your foot in the door, what I – I can never, it's always very different for everyone, but for me, what I did was I made my own short films, and now – 'cause I was quite lucky at my age, we had a lot of the tools were available to do so from home. So I was able to download some editing software. I was able to – I've got a good camera on my phone, that kind of thing. And we were able to make some films to submit to these festivals, and that was my way of kind of getting in to meet people who are like me that wanted to make films, and the kind of films that I made. And you can take your – after you've done this, you can take your work and what you've learned and kind of create a portfolio, and you can use that to apply to agencies to show what you can do and what you can bring. So I like – I never went to drama school, it wasn't available for me. I didn't go to film school, that was not available for me also. But being able to put together my own portfolio is what actually got me signed by an agency, where now I'm able to audition for different projects. But if I have any advice for someone who's navigating all of that, it's just to treat yourself really well in all of it. Remember that this is your interest, so let yourself shine, and let yourself get excited about all of that, because this is your moment, that's where you are, this is where you're meant to belong. So don't hide, just come out and get it going. It's – there's the space for everyone in the entertainment industry.

>> Lauren: Thank you Aaron. And I want to note that because we have so many questions, that Eric is answering some of them via text. So if you click on the Q&A box and you can click on answered, you can kind of see some of those answers as well. We're now going to go to another question of someone who has recently begun to identify as neurodivergent. One consistent pattern over the years is that they need information to be well organized or they'll get overwhelmed and lose motivation, or take the information and start organizing it themselves so they can process the information, which is time consuming. They've tried providing systems and structure for team members to follow to keep everything organized, but getting them to use the system is a whole other challenge. Does this resonate with any of our panelists, and if so, have you figured out how to overcome this challenge? Eric?

>> Eric: It's not a great answer, first – the ultimate preference, obviously, is for people to figure out how to use the systems that you want them to do, and – but worst case scenario, what I figured out how to do is whenever I'm in a meeting and I'm getting a data dump on me basically, which happens from time to time in any workplace environment, what you have – you want to do is take notes yourself. And what I do is I just take as many notes as I can, and – it shouldn't – it shouldn't fall on you to be organizing necessarily yourself, but you – but that's always an option, is what I'll say. So yeah, I take tons of notes. I remember – and folder them, keep them, and I have to-do lists and things like that, or ways to keep – basically – if you're – someone's giving you a ton of information in a meeting, you pause –pause the meeting, tell them I need to take notes so I can't – so I don't forget any of this, and so that we don't have to have this – same meeting again later, basically. So – and hopefully they'll understand that and, because, again, it's to make you do better work, so.

>> Lauren: And as a supervisor of many individuals who are neurodivergent, a request I often receive is, if I give something a direction verbally, to follow up with it in written, to follow up in an email. And so that's something that – allows us to stay on the same page. And then for the individual to be able to – be able to refer back to the email and make sure that it does – very much identify with what they interpreted as such. Gina?

>> Gina: Yeah I wanted to echo something that I found helpful in the day and age of Zoom meetings is that organizations can have transcriptions enabled. And it's not just live captioning. And so I found there are times that if there's a meeting that I'm like, there is a lot going on here, am I going to go back and watch the recording, because we do record things? Maybe not. But can I grab the transcript, and then I can you know, CTRL-F to find the thing that I'm looking for? That's an option. And so there are some tools that are kind of built in, but also, as someone who can very very much relate with this, I like having systems and helping people to use them. I think that being able to show value of what you've produced does help. But I also think something I'm realizing recently is, if I'm struggling this much, then that's probably a place where I should think about an accommodation. Because if I'm struggling this much, there are probably others. So it's not that my needs aren't the only – my needs are important, but there are probably also others who are in similar boats, and it can be helpful to navigate that, especially if you bring in your direct supervisor. Then at that point, it's something, like Aaron had said early on in the conversation, that the manager or whoever is in charge of accommodations would be in charge of maintaining, rather than it falling to you.

>> Lauren: Yeah, we're going to do one more question to the panelists, and then I'll try and answer some common themes from the rest. This is from someone saying that they have ADHD and they've learned to mask it well, but because of this, when they mention it, people often dismiss it, saying, "oh, everyone has it." This makes this person feel like their experience isn't valid or that they're using it as an excuse, especially when they know others struggle more visibly. How can they validate their own identity and experiences with ADHD, without feeling like they are taking advantage of their diagnosis or that it doesn't truly belong to them? I feel like a lot of people have felt this. Would anyone like to address it? Olivia?

>> Olivia: Yes, I found amongst myself, other neurodivergent friends, folks I've seen online, that the neurodivergent impostor syndrome is super common, of, oh am I really Autistic, or, oh, do I have ADHD – so I do just want to validate, very real. As ways to – how to validate that, I think at least for me, learning more about it and connecting with other folks who also have ADHD has been super helpful as a way of – I don't know, kind of validating these traits of, oh, I have this trait and then this person also has this trait, and obviously I'm not going to question their ADHD, so – why would – as a way to kind of – help verify it in yourself, other people can be kind of helpful. And I think yeah – directly with people in your real life, different influencers and content creators, or even just reading different books about ADHD can also be helpful as – extrapolate – that might share data or other personal stories of other people, it's like, okay, yes – this is a real thing, and even though it sometimes feels like it's fake for me, I wouldn't feel that way about these other people. And so should yeah – can be like a way of – slowly helping yourself to also feel that way about yourself.

>> Lauren: Thank you. And Aaron's going to get the last word as a panelist.

>> Aaron: [laughs] Well just to echo some of what Olivia said there – said most of it for me. But yes, I completely agree – if there's anything to add on to what Olivia said there, is just about masking, that it's up to you if you wish to mask, and if it's something that is exhausting for you to do, which it is for a lot of us on the spectrum, you don't have to mask if that's something that you feel is making you feel like you're coming across as maybe disingenuine, or maybe it's many many reasons. So I personally, I just try my best not to mask anymore. But I would say, yeah, just to be patient with yourself, and to know that these opinions that are coming from other people are not facts, and you can find those facts, and the community, and to listen to where what those people are saying, rather than what comments you're getting, because we I think we – I could probably say for all of us, we've all heard these comments throughout our lives. So yeah, thank you very much for having us.

>> Lauren: Thank you Aaron, and really, thank you to all of our panelists, to Lawon, Eric, Gina, Olivia, and Aaron. I really hope that folks in the audience, whether you also identify as neurodivergent or work with neurodivergent individuals, peers, employees, etcetera, that everyone's learned from you. In the chat, I'm putting a link in. We have a twice monthly newsletter. You can keep up to date with what's going on in the world of entertainment from a disability perspective. Many of the folks that you see on the screen today write pieces that are in the newsletter. And I am also sharing a link to our website if you just wanted to learn more. I know one of the questions was asking about chapters and doing more work with in the areas that you live. One location was mentioned was Los Angeles. We do have quite a few members of the team who live in Los Angeles, but as an organization, we are national, so we're all over the country. But if you check out our website, there are places to sign up for for additional things beyond just entertainment as desired. And you can also reach out to us if you have a specific question and would like to learn more. So thank you all. I know – we took you over by a few minutes, so thank you for staying with us, and I hope you enjoy the rest of your day. And if you're attending other sessions with the BRIC Summit, I hope you enjoy them as well. Thank you!