

One Knight in Product - E117 - Holly Schroeder

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SPEAKERS

Holly Schroeder, Jason Knight



Jason Knight 00:00

Hello, and welcome to the show. I'm your host, Jason Knight, and on each episode of this podcast, I'll be having inspiring conversations with passionate product people. If you're not bored of my voice after this episode, why not come across and join me and some of the finest product thought leaders and practitioners in the world at OneKnightInProduct.com, where you can sign up the mailing list, subscribe on your favourite podcast app or follow the podcast on social media and guarantee you never miss another episode again. On tonight's episode, we talk about accessibility or a11y to its friends. We talk about the importance of designing our products to be accessible to all regardless of disability or impairment and wonder why, in the year 2022, we're still having to persuade people that this is an important thing to think about. We talk about some of the biggest accessibility problems, why it's not just about screen readers, why some tech solutions are just well meaning attempts to gloss over product development failures and ask whether it's really fair to place the burden of thinking about accessibility on the people that were affected by it the most. For all this and much more please join us on One Knight in Product.



Jason Knight 01:09

So my guest tonight is Holly Schroeder. Holly's a UX researcher and passionate accessibility advocate who wants everyone involved in product development to use their powers for good. Holly says she recently had brain surgery with no drugs and lived to tell the tale, proving that she is completely unstoppable and you absolutely do not want to mess with her, not least because he's also a semi professional arm wrestler. She's now going over the top to push good UX practices as a senior UX researcher, mentor and recent contributor to the new book 97 Things Every UX Practitioner Should Know. Hi, Holly, how are you tonight?



Holly Schroeder 01:39

I'm doing great. That may be my new favourite intro.



Jason Knight 01:44

I should have got the wrestling music going as well. I'm hoping that one day we can have an arm wrestle in person.



Holly Schroeder 01:50

Absolutely.



Jason Knight 01:53

But first things first, you are a senior UX researcher working in health tech. So what sort of problems are you solving? And what sort of things are you researching?



Holly Schroeder 02:01

Oh, sure. So the company that I work for has a product and an app that goes with the product. And the focus is helping people in the cardiovascular health care space. So people who have cardiovascular conditions.



Jason Knight 02:20

So is that sounds like it's not just software? I mean, it sounds like there's probably some hardware involved.. what are you doing research across all these different types of products? Are you sticking very specifically say with digital products? Or very specifically with hardware? Or ... how does that work?



Holly Schroeder 02:34

It's a little bit of a mix of both. A different team does all the hardware testing and that sort of thing before it even gets to me, because it's a medical device. There's, you know, regulations around those sorts of things. It's a different kind of rigour for that type of research. Whereas I'm focused on the user experience, but I am asking them about their experiences, primarily with the software. But it's not exclusive of the hardware.



Jason Knight 03:09

And you're a UX researcher. I understand from our previous discussions that you've got, like, a separate design team as well. So I guess one interesting question is how you interface with a the design team and be with the product team in general, because it's not always an easy relationship between UX and product, if you listen to some people talking about it at least. So is

that something that you feel like you've worked out a really good relationship? Like, how do you see the handoffs and how do you manage those handoffs between different parts of the organisation?

H

Holly Schroeder 03:39

Maybe I'm really lucky, but I haven't found that to be the case. I think that there is always a bit of tension between user needs and business needs and making sure that you're meeting both. I mean, as a user researcher, my mind is always kind of on the people. And I want to make sure that we are doing our absolute best and due diligence. And sometimes we don't get to go as far as I would like to, because the business needs dictate that we need to move along now. But, you know, I'm pragmatic. So I get it. And I also think that relationships with the various stakeholders on a project are, it's important to have good rapport, good relationships, and I spend a lot of time building those relationships and investing in them because the team dynamic does matter. And it does impact how quickly how efficiently things get done.



Jason Knight 04:46

No, absolutely. But let's think about that relationship building for a second, because I know that you're also an active mentor. You're involved in mentoring. And I was wondering if that was something that was kind of pretty local and focused on UX, UX Research in your local area? Or is that something that's kind of a bit more international when you're talking to people around the world? Like, how does that mentoring work? And also, given that mentoring is quite a hot topic, and we're like, how's that? How's it going? Like, how's that working out for you?

H

Holly Schroeder 05:14

I absolutely love it. I do it both ways. So I'm a co president of a local organisation for experienced design professionals. So not just UX, but service design, and really anybody who's interested in the experience, design space customer experience. So I'm co president of that organisation. And we definitely encourage mentorships. So mentees will sometimes come to me through that channel. I also was mentor teacher at a programme called Codergirl, which I also went through, it's a boot camp, a UX Boot camp run by a nonprofit here in town. I don't mentor for them anymore. I'm no longer working with them. So I wanted to continue mentoring. They don't have a UX programme anymore. I wanted to continue mentoring. So I signed up for ADP list. It's Alpha, David Paul list. Awesome design people, I think. And I'm able to mentor people all over the world.



Jason Knight 06:28

Oh, well, I guess if you're opening it up to the entire world, you must get some really interesting nuggets of insight from the state of UX in all these other places as well, like, is it something which is fairly universal? Like, are there kind of universal problems and concerns that the mentees are bringing up around the world? Or is that something that way? You've been kind of surprised that some of the feedback that you've got from some of these other places that maybe you haven't been to visit or don't have so much experience with?

H

Holly Schroeder 06:57

I think much like many things were more the same than we are different. And, you know, you think about basic human wants and needs and Maslow's hierarchy, and it rings true whether you live here, or you live in Iraq. So I wouldn't say that the things that people bring to me, are really, outside of what I might experience, one of the most common things that people will come to me and ask about is transitioning from an academic background to a corporate setting, because I did that.



Jason Knight 07:41

Well, that's an interesting move, actually, I mean, going from academia, and I've certainly worked with academics in the past, from maybe more from a data science perspective, or user research, actually, yeah, user research, like I worked with one guy once, who was very... had a lot of history and background in, you know, a PhD in interaction design and stuff like that. He was really good at trying to work out the best way to ask people questions, it was a market research company. But one of the things that you sometimes see when you're looking at people who have come from academia is you get this. It's kind of a cliché, but it also does happen, this idea that they can kind of struggle to make that move into corporate life and the different expectations and the different kind of benchmarks and all of the things that come with actually working for a big, power hungry, money hungry company, like how was that then as a transition for you? Was it a pretty straightforward one? Or did you have a lot to learn as you transition?

H

Holly Schroeder 08:37

I think because I started in corporate, I had an advantage in knowing the language of business before I got there. Well, because the language of education, higher ed in particular is all its own. There are words that you'll hear at a university that you will never hear anywhere else. And it has its own kind of unique power structure that, again, really doesn't exist anywhere else. And so if that's the only bubble you've ever existed in, it could feel you could really feel like a fish out of water. But I had spent 10 years working for a promotional marketing company before I transitioned to higher ed.



Jason Knight 09:27

So you bounced out and back in again?

H

Holly Schroeder 09:30

Exactly. And I also my master's is in nonprofit management, which is really just an MBA for the charitable sector. So I also had that background. I think the biggest challenge for anyone transitioning from academia to corporate is just the biggest task for anyone is taking your CV

making it a rest In May, and then translating what you do into UX speak, or product speak, because I mean, let's be real UX stole most of its stuff from some ology. So we got from third world, right? We got up from third world and then we named it something else.



Jason Knight 10:21

A very controversial take, but I'm here for it!



Holly Schroeder 10:25

Well, I mean my undergraduate degrees in psychology and often you will see job postings for people and UX and they want you to have a background in psychology, anthropology, sociology. So I don't think I'm imagining it.



Jason Knight 10:43

But you also ,recently, as I found when I looked on your LinkedIn, contributed to a book 97 Things Every UX Practitioner Should Know: Collective Wisdom From the Experts. Now, I'm assuming that that means that you're one of the experts. So what's the story behind the book? And also, more importantly, what was your contribution to it?



Holly Schroeder 11:01

So my chapter is on why accessibility is everyone's responsibility.



Jason Knight 11:07

Yep. Well, that's a good segue then. But before we talk about that, like so the book then has, I guess, 97 things. So is that like, 97 different contributors on design?



Holly Schroeder 11:18


Exactly.




Jason Knight 11:19

So there's literally 97 contributors all talking about different stuff. Your stuff was on accessibility. But how did you get involved in that book in the first place? Like did you know the person was putting it together? Or was it like a community project by how did that all come together?



 Holly Schroeder 11:33

No, I did not know that editor that was putting the project together. It came to me through a series of referrals, they were looking for someone to write a chapter on accessibility, a friend was writing a chapter on diversity and recommended me.

 Jason Knight 11:53

Excellent. Well, let's talk about accessibility, then. And then hopefully, someone can pick up the book afterwards, as well. And deep dive into it, because I know and obviously, we first met on Twitter, talk about diversity in product design, you're very active on Twitter, talking about issues around that as a general concept. And you're really passionate about advocating for accessible design, and making sure our products are usable by everyone. Now, I'm gonna say, probably naively, that that doesn't sound like a controversial goal these days, it's like, we've all been building digital products for quite a while now. And I'd like to assume that everyone should at least be aware that some people might be for example, or know visually impaired or have motor issues or any other things that could affect how they use, say, a website. So why do you think we're still in a situation in 2022, where people aren't paying attention to even the most basic principles of accessible design?

 Holly Schroeder 12:46

Ooh, that, you know, that's the million dollar question. Right. I think that I wish I could give you a really concise answer to that question. I think that we're still in the phase. And I know this to be true, where, you know, to me, accessibility is a topic that I hear discuss frequently. But I know that my experience is very biased, because of the channels I choose to tune into. I know because I'm a researcher. And I test user interfaces, that most people have no idea what an accessibility icon is, or what might be behind something labelled accessibility. So there's still quite a lot of work to do... WebAIM, which is a nonprofit, that kind of keeps an eye on these things. In their most recent audit of a million homepages found that something like only around 3% of them were accessible.

 Jason Knight 14:02

I mean that's a bad number!

 Holly Schroeder 14:04

That's not a good number. If you think about if we took the example in physical space, and you thought, Okay, we're gonna remove all the things that are accessibility considerations for people with disabilities, from public buildings. So no more curb cuts, no ramps, no elevators, and tall buildings, sorry, have to use the stairs, all of those things, all the Braille on the elevator buttons, we removed all of that, except for 3% of the buildings. I think people will be pretty upset.

 Jason Knight 14:38



Jason Knight 14:50

Yeah, I think that'd be pretty upset too. But if we then extrapolate them from the example in the physical space that you just mentioned, so for example, removing all of the curb cuts and moving the Braille from the buttons and all of the things that that you could remove from the physical space, and then try to translate that to the digital space. So let's imagine things sample when we're talking about a website or some kind of online application that you log into via browser, what are some of the top offenders that you see out there when it comes to accessible design failures these days? And let's call them failures. It's not that they're just an accident, you know, they've someone's failed to do them. So what are they mainly failing to do a what are some of the top contenders for things that they're failing to do?



Holly Schroeder 15:22

Yes, I will tell you, but I want to... can we bounce back just for two seconds?



Jason Knight 15:28

We can.



Holly Schroeder 15:29

What I want to follow up with is that I think one of the reasons that persistent digital space, the unintended benefits for abled people don't have the same kind of visibility that they do in physical space. Like someone who's pushing a stroller, benefits from ramps, curb cuts, elevators, those sorts of things. And it's very clear that it's helpful to people, abled and disabled. The things that are done in for accessibility on the web, even if they are beneficial to an abled user, they may not be aware that that was really intended to help a disabled user. So I think that's where part of the problem lies. As far as the big offenders go. When WebAIM did their report... I'm trying to remember exactly, but I feel like it was alt text on images. I mean, they were really simple things to fix. It was like, all text on images. Oh, like links instead of saying, having it not having meaningful links. So, you know, if you have a hot link that says here, that's not super helpful for someone who uses a screen reader, it should be the name of what it is. So they know what they're about to open. You know, so would say, podcast transcript instead of here. So you know, it's in semantic headings. So just the order that a screen reader is going to navigate through the page, just truly just sloppy code, that, you know, it's like, if you thought about it, in terms of, it's essentially the same thing as doing an outline in a Word document, and somebody just haphazardly using the heading features, like, Oh, I'm gonna use heading three here, heading two here, heading one there, and skip a heading number. It just doesn't have a logical order. So then, you know, an assistive tech tool, like a screen reader doesn't know where it's supposed to go.



Jason Knight 17:51

Yeah, I mean, I've, I've had to do stuff for very specifically to test stuff on screen readers before perfer previous jobs where we were very hot on that stuff. And I will say that I'm not visually impaired. So I've got the luxury of being able to just see when these things are working, or not

working and what might be throwing them out. But I will also say that every single time I tried to run a screen reader on basically anything, it was a horrible experience for me. So I can't even begin to imagine what it'd be like for someone who doesn't have that luxury of being able to go a different route. Is it primarily then screen readers that we're talking about, though, when we're talking about accessibility? I mean, things like alt texts and meaningful names for links and semantic markup so that the computer can navigate it. They all sound very screen reader specific. But are there any other things that maybe people aren't thinking about? Like, aside from screen readers that could still come under the banner of accessibility, and things that they should really think about when they're looking at this stuff?

H

Holly Schroeder 18:51

Oh, absolutely. Those were just among the top offenders. So for instance, prior to my brain surgery, the reason I had my brain surgeries... I have a degenerative disease that causes tremors. And so my hand tremor would get my right hand tremor will become so extreme sometimes that I would have to be keyboard only I couldn't use a mouse. Password masking is the bane of my existence. If you have tremors trying to accurately type when you can't see is a really nasty challenge. It's a game nobody wants to play. I'm like, can I just have the eyeball? Like just give me the choice? I just want the option. Right? And so in even still post surgery, I still get locked out of my accounts like once a week some account somewhere locks me out because I've missed typed a password because I can't see it.. And so things like that, that has nothing to do with screen readers touch targets being too small, particularly on mobile devices. I mean, for somebody who's got a tremor disorder like I do, that is maddening. And that's something that affects, you know, I'm very young for someone who has that my tremors look very similar to what someone would expect, you would expect to see who has Parkinson's disease, like, that's just what's most familiar that I can think to compare it to. It's not the same disease, but it looks like it at a glance. You know, people as they age often acquire tremors. And so, you know, we are very dependent on our digital devices. Even in the senior population. My mom is 75, she has a tablet, she has a laptop, and she has a smartphone. And she uses all of those things. And you're, it's not just your vision, but your dexterity. And your fine motor skills diminish over time. So that and some people, like me just have those conditions anyway.



Jason Knight 21:09

Yeah, for sure.

H

Holly Schroeder 21:11

There's all kinds of different ways. Like for me password masking, touch targets, mobile keyboards, I just like Thursdays where I just want to throw my phone, talk to text as, like laughable at times, you know, I ended up having to do more corrections. And then I accidentally hit something else instead of the Back button, which makes me have to do more corrections. And you can see how this can be a very frustrating loop.



Jason Knight 21:43

Yeah. I can't imagine this much fun. I also remember recently seeing some commentary on the

Yeah, I can't imagine this much fun. I also remember recently, seeing some commentary on the word or stuff that everyone was putting on Twitter and to how screen readers are basically reading out like, green square, green square, grey square, green square, like basically 40/50 times or whatever, whenever someone was getting to that part of their Twitter. So I can imagine, as you've put it, that it could be a maddening experience.

H

Holly Schroeder 22:08

Yeah, I would definitely say filter out Wordle. If you're a screen reader user, and the same thing, every time I see a tweet, where someone's got 20 emojis in a row, I think of geez, the poor person who's using a screen reader is probably screaming right now. Because most of the emojis are not what they we think they are, like, the one that everyone uses for, you know, thoughts and prayers is folded hands, who decided that I have no idea. It looks like praying hands to me too. But if you put three of them in a row, they're gonna get folded hands folded hands folded hands.



Jason Knight 22:53

Yep. Again, very frustrating. For some people out there might be tempted to use an accessibility solution, known as an overlay where they can just dump some JavaScript on their site, fire and forget, check the box and move on. Now, I'm aware that the use of these overlays isn't universally popular in the accessibility design community. But what's the problem with using overlays? Or what can the problems be with using overlays?

H


Holly Schroeder 23:18

I think like anything that is meant to not truly solve the problem, but be a workaround is the root issue... root cause is not being addressed. And so if you back up a step, and you think about, like, what's the issue here? The issue is that the code is not written in such a way that it's accessible that can be it would be nice, if it was possible to be 100% accessible, it's not, you know, we hope people meet the minimum standards WCAG as a place to start, you know, the standards asserted by various government bodies and are a place to begin, ultimately, you should be testing with users, including disabled users, so that you can really find out what do our people say? Because ultimately, that's what matters most right? Like, yay, we can check a box. But what did the people say? So if you go back another step, why do people not know how to code excessively? There's a gap in the education of people who are learning to do development work, and we need to address that. That's where the true problem lies, is. I did a web development boot camp, not a word was spoken about accessibility and the entire thing. And that's very common. Very few people are taught anything about accessibility when they're learning how to do development.



Jason Knight 25:01

Right, so it's kind of like an afterthought they get slapped on at the end if we get slapped on at all.

 Holly Schroeder 25:06


Right. So it doesn't matter, you know, it's... if you are any patch and repair job is only ever going to be that good. If you don't get to the root cause it's a temporary fix at best. I mean, I think for some people, the features may meet their needs, to a certain extent, some are better than others. Like, you know, I, I understand the attractiveness of those kinds of products, obviously, it seems like it's, wow, this is gonna solve everything. But I guess my personal philosophy is, let's dig deeper. Why are we even here? Why do we have this problem we need to evangelise. We need to make space for people to learn how to do it correctly to begin with?

 Jason Knight 26:04


No, absolutely. But some people in this lean startup world will be sitting there saying, well, we've got to move fast and break things, build MVPs, fail fast all that stuff. And they'll just sit there and say, "Well, you know this stuff too hard, or they don't have the time or the money". Or maybe they'll just fix it later when they've got product market fit and all that jazz. Now, I'm pretty sure you won't agree with that. And I definitely don't agree with it, either. But what would you say to someone if they tried to make that argument or excuse to you?

 Holly Schroeder 26:32

I mean, it's a choice, you can certainly do that. I think that, and I say the same thing about research, go fast and break things. It's, it's a choice, it's a decision that you can make. But if we maybe slow down just a little bit, now, I'm not saying that we have to slow down to stop. But if we slow down, and we dig a little bit deeper, the return on the investment is going to be far greater. So instead of failing fast, five times, how about we just slow down a little bit one time.

 Jason Knight 27:15


But how much of this is down to a typical cliché of a bunch of white non disabled tech bros starting up a startup? Thinking everyone's exactly like them? Not even considering alternative viewpoints, and basically just skimping on things like accessibility, because they didn't even think about it. But is that a fair cliché?

 Holly Schroeder 27:33

I wouldn't say it's unfair.

 Jason Knight 27:36

That's very diplomatic.

 Holly Schroeder 27:37

Mm hmm. I mean, I think that, you know, disability is still very othered. In most cultures... in all of them that I'm aware of... I'm not gonna say all because I don't know every culture. But, you know, in all the cultures that I've been exposed to, now, I have a pretty hefty background in cultural anthropology as well, being disabled as others, and it's something that people are not comfortable talking about. And they talk about it in the same way that they talk about other things that they perceive to be taboo in some way. So even if they know someone has a disability, or is disabled, they'll add on some sort of qualifier like, oh, well, they have X, but they're not like most people with it. And so that stigma, and that bias, makes it seem like disabled people are somewhere else. And we're not, we're right here. We're literally 20% of the world population. And there's a whole bunch of different ways you can be disabled. And a lot of them are not visible. So but that doesn't mean that they don't exist. That's like saying, gravity doesn't exist, because I can't see it.



Jason Knight 29:06

All the world's flat because... oh, no, let's not go there.



Holly Schroeder 29:09

I don't... yeah, I was gonna say, let's not go down the flat earth path. I'm pretty confident it's not though, just in case anyone's wondering where I stand on that topic. I feel very confident about that.



Jason Knight 29:23

Yeah, I think I am, too. So sometimes when people are confronted with that fact, they'll come out of a statement like, "hey, well, maybe we just need to get more diverse people into the room when the decisions are made, like let's get more visually impaired people in let's get more people have conditions in because that's the way that we can ensure that people fully represented and that we can cover those issues up front because people will be thinking about them now". I'm always gonna be in favour of increasing the diversity and the mix of a team because I think that that's one of the most important things you can do just in general product or otherwise... to get underrepresented people more opportunities. But isn't it just a massive cop out to put all the responsibility of fixing accessibility issues on the people that are suffering from the most?



Holly Schroeder 30:10

Yes. And thank you for noticing. Yeah, I mean, I absolutely think the most powerful teams are diverse teams, because you have the benefit of the multitude of experiences. And, you know, one brain can think of all the things right, so, I do believe that, but just as much as I think as a white person, it's not black people's job to educate me on black history. Like I can do my white people work. I don't think that it's disabled people's job to educate abled people on disability necessarily. I think that abled people can do or able to work to, that doesn't mean that I think it's not okay to ask questions or any of that. That's, I don't mean, to imply that at all. I'm super open to conversation. But I think it's fair to ask people to do their due diligence, instead of

saying, oh, "Holly's disabled, just ask her." You know, like, well, so why do I get pushed to the front of the line, every time the topic of anything remotely, disability is in the room, like, other people could benefit from knowing about it as well. So I'll give you an example of advocacy in the workplace that I really appreciated. When I started at the company that I work for, they didn't use live transcript, and there's zoom meetings. So I asked that, you know, folks could turn it on. So, because I'm also hard of hearing, and even with hearing aids, you know, with Zoom, forget it. I just need I need the captions, period, end of story. So, my boss said, I'll submit that request for you. I'll make sure it gets taken care of. And someone else made a comment to her about like, oh, well, couldn't Holly do that? She's like, yeah, she could, but no, I'll do it. No, like, she recognises that it takes a lot of emotional, mental physical energy, to show up and be openly disabled. And as an ally, that's, uh, you know, to me, I was so grateful. And she's like, Are you kidding? That's such a small thing. Not a big deal. But it meant a tremendous amount to me, that she made the time and made sure happen. Like, so to lighten that load for me was huge.



Jason Knight 33:08

Yeah, no, I think it's absolutely important for allies, as you say, and advocates to come from everywhere, and to make sure that people aren't just kind of left on a whim. Because I think your point earlier was really interesting as well, this idea, of course, and it's not controversial opinion. It's definitely true that disability is still very, other than seen as a defect in many ways by many people. Like, it sometimes feels that it's difficult for certain types of people to empathise with that in the slightest.



Holly Schroeder 33:37

Mm hmm.



Jason Knight 33:37

Which is obviously not a good thing at all, and something that we should always challenge. But as are many cases of advocacy or ally ship, it feels like sometimes having the kind of backup of people that aren't in that situation. It kind of emphasise the message rather than it being Oh, well, that's just what Holly would say. Which obviously, would be a ridiculous thing to say, but I'm not sure that no people would say that. Does that make sense?



Holly Schroeder 34:02

Yeah, no. And I think you brought up a really good point, too, and one that I find extremely frustrating. And it's the notion that disabled is less than somehow, that if you are a person who is disabled or has a disability, the by default, you are going to perform in a way that is less than your peers who are abled. Yeah. And that is patently false... it just is not true. And I can give you an example. I've had multiple traumatic brain injuries, and I have some working memory problems as a result. And I went and did some follow up testing a few years ago. And the person who did the testing said, Holly, I just want to let you know that yes. You have a disability, but you actually test higher than average in your peer group. For people without a

disability. That doesn't mean you don't have a disability. That just means you have really great coping strategies. So I outperform my peers in a category where I have a disability, so can be exactly the opposite of what people assume.



Jason Knight 35:28

Yeah, no, absolutely. And hopefully, we can change people's attitudes one step at a time. But based on your experience, and what you see online, and maybe from some of the mentoring that you're doing, and the discussions that you're having, in general, do you think that accessibility efforts are getting better or worse, or kind of just staying the same?

H

Holly Schroeder 35:48

I think that it's slow forward progress. There was a time when I heard practically no one talking about it. Yeah. And when I felt like, as a person with multiple disabilities, that I had to hide in a closet, revealing that would put my livelihood at risk. And that became so psychologically painful for me, that I got to a point where I decided, whatever that risk was, I had to take it, because that kind of mental prison was not an option for me anymore. And so I had, like, the equivalent of coming out for being disabled. You know, that's the most similar thing I can kind of equate it to coming out in a very public way about being disabled. And I'm not saying it's the right choice for everyone, I think people have to do what's right for them. But that was the right choice for me. And I have zero regrets. And I think not everyone who is disabled, or who has a disability is in a position where they can be outspoken, for whatever reason, that's none of my business. But I'm in a position where I can. So I do.



Jason Knight 37:19

Makes a lot of sense. And like you say, not everyone, but obviously, if they can, then maybe that could work for them as well. Now, I'm sure there are many ways to answer this question and many things people could fix. But if you had one piece of advice for a product designer looking to improve or take steps to improve the accessibility of their product in general, what would you advise them to do as a first step? And I'm assuming it's not using an overlay?

H

Holly Schroeder 37:43

I think the most important thing is to make sure that you're testing with real users who are not also stakeholders. I mean, by default, if 20% of you humans have a disability, even if you're not purposely trying to screen in people with disabilities, they're gonna pop up in your studies, it would be preferable if you purposely screened the men, obviously. But even if you don't be looking for signals that this may be because of low vision, you know, I'll give you an example. I had a product I was working on. And when I tested it, we were using font that met WCAG requirements. But consistently, users were saying the font wasn't large enough. So hooray for checking the box... but it didn't meet the needs of our users. And largely because of their age. They were middle aged and older. Well, between 40 and 42, if you're not there yet, pick out your bifocals now, because you're going to need almost everyone gets a pair of readers sometime between 42. So even without purposely screening in people with low vision, they

turned up. So you can still be looking, you know, being aware and sensitive to those things. Even if you have the constraints where you're not able to be intentional. You know, you have business constraints where you're not able to be intentional about recruiting people from the disabled community, I get that people's hands get tied at work and it stinks. And you don't get to always do the research the way that you would like to, or you don't have the money to do the way that you would like to, but the disabled folks are there. Just make sure you're listening.



Jason Knight 40:02

Excellent advice. And where can people find out more in general about general accessibility issues? I mean, you've mentioned a few organisations already, but like, is there like a place that you would recommend that people go to, to try to start to immerse themselves and do some of that learning that we were talking about earlier?



Holly Schroeder 40:19

Yeah, I think one that's like, pretty friendly for new users is to Deque University, they have some accessibility stuff. Web ai m, is very, like, new user friendly on the topic. And honestly, just pick one thing and learn about it and start doing it. Yeah, if every person was like, Okay, this is gonna be my accessibility initiative, my personal contribution. If everybody just picked one thing, and we all picked away at it collectively, the ripple effect would be a tsunami.



Jason Knight 41:05

Yes, kind of iterating towards success, which is something that all these lean advocates should be all about that, shouldn't they?



Holly Schroeder 41:13

Yeah, I mean, like I said, I'm pretty pragmatic by nature. And, of course, ideally, I would love for things to just like, magically be perfect for disabled users. I'm one of them. I would love to never be locked out of an account because of password masking. Yeah, or, I would like to kill all the captures dead in their tracks for the rest of my life. I never want to solve another CAPTCHA puzzle, again, for the same reasons, you know, but I'm realistic, it will be an iterative, gradual process, we will learn more, no more, do better, learn more, no more do better. It's literally that simple. And it doesn't have to be like, Oh, I have to go learn how to be an accessibility expert. No, I mean, there is a mountain of stuff to learn, I still have volumes of things to learn. I'm never gonna run out of stuff to learn on the topic. Pick one thing that seems kind of interesting to you, and go deep.



Jason Knight 42:23

Excellent advice. And where can people find you after this? If they want to chat to you about any of this stuff? And of the issues that we've talked about today? Or just catch up? Or maybe even find a little bit out about the book?



Holly Schroeder 42:34

Oh, sure. So the easiest place to find me. And the place where I'm responsive, most quickly is Twitter. It's @314UXHolly. And I also have a... I call it my little free library in the spirit of little free libraries, like one in front of my house. And I have one is my pinned tweet on Twitter. That has, I guess it's about 1000 resources now for UX and accessibility. That's my pinned tweet.



Jason Knight 43:09

Well, it says 100 olus, and I guess 1000, there's more than 100. So you've obviously been adding to that quite a lot over the last six months or so.



Holly Schroeder 43:17

Yeah, I after I had brain surgery, it was like my pet project. And I really leaned into my ADHD flow on that one.



Jason Knight 43:29

There you go. Well, that's fantastic. And obviously, I'll make sure to link that in. And hopefully people can come across connect with you have a chat or get a bit inspired by some of your resources, which has been a fantastic chat. So obviously, really glad you took the time to talk about some really important issues. And hopefully we can help people at least think a little bit about some of them. Obviously, we'll stay in touch but yeah, it's for now. Thanks for taking the time.



Holly Schroeder 43:52

Thanks so much for having me. This was fantastic.



Jason Knight 43:57

As always, thanks for listening. I hope you found the episode inspiring and insightful. If you did again, I can only encourage you to hop over to OneKnightInProduct.com, check out some of my other fantastic guests, sign up to the mailing list or subscribe on your favourite podcast app and make sure you share with your friends so you and they can never miss another episode again. I'll be back soon with another inspiring guests but, as for now, thanks and good night.