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BEYOND OUR DISABILITIES

CELEBRATING BLACK DISABLED ENTREPRENEURS

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>> LEXI JONES: I will give everybody a minute to join. Welcome, everybody! Welcome to Beyond Our Disabilities – Celebrating Black Disabled Entrepreneurs! We are happy to see everybody here today.

We will start with a little housekeeping. So, for Zoom settings, the audit crow for today's meeting can be accessed by using a computer audio or by calling in by phone.

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Please note, this Webinar is being recorded.

I would like to give a little background about Ruby Sunshine Taylor before turning it over to our host today. Ruby Sunshine Taylor is the CEO and Founder of Financial Joy School, a virtual educational platform and gaming company that empowers black and brown youth and their families through financial education and investment tools. She is an alumni of Howard University. She is the survivor of a Traumatic Brain Injury and identifies as a disabled, black, queer woman. She is a motivational speaker, wife, mother, daughter, aunt, sister and friend, determined to make the world more equal, joyful and just.

Ruby has partnered with renowned financial brands, including Wells Fargo, Trust & Will, and the NASDAQ Entrepreneurial Center and leading publications such as the motleyfool.com, black company, foreclosures, Black Enterprise and matchable.com. She resides in Baltimore, Maryland with her wife, Dr. Sheila Graham and their two children. I am happy to introduce Ruby Sunshine Taylor and turn it over to you.

>> RUBY TAYLOR: Welcome, welcome, welcome, everyone, to Beyond Our Disabilities – Celebrating Black Disabled Entrepreneurs.

I have my wonderful dog here that wants to play at this moment, but I will ignore him and stay focused. I am the Founder of Financial Joy School, and we are on a mission to close the Racial Wealth Gap by helping black and brown youth and families build generational wealth no matter our income.

I am so happy and so excited to celebrate Black History Month with you all, and these dynamic founders!

We have the amazing Mariah Barber. She is the Founder of invincible strength.

And then we have the dynamic Dr. Stephanie Thomas from JuneBrain ‑‑ Dr. Samantha from JuneBrain, and then we have the extraordinary Dr. Stephanie from Cur8able. Yes, yes, yes!

I am a Traumatic Brain Injury survivor, and I am a stutterer. I have two disabilities, and I never allow that to stop me. Actually, it is my superpower, because it has taught me resilience!

So, we are going to lead with this first question, right? And we are going to start off with Mariah, then we will have Stephanie, and then we will have Samantha answer the following question, which is:  How did you start your company? All right?

So, Mariah, you are up! How did you start your company?

>> MARIAH BARBER: Thank you for the fabulous introductions, Ruby! I actually started Invisible Strengths because it was a resource I needed. I was diagnosed with Torticollis, a vision disorder, and I had to go through the accommodations process on my job at the time. I worked in Global Health, and it was a really cumbersome process where I had to disclose medical information to several different layers.

There weren't really answers, so I a lot of timing I turned to YouTube, building community with other black disabled folks, hearing what they were going through with their process, and I decided I wanted it to be different for the people coming behind me.

I had gone through helping with recruitment at the time. I was doing Diversity, Equity and Inclusion on the side, and I said, a lot of the findings these organizations are saying is they don't have access to a diverse pipeline, they don't have the institutional knowledge about accommodations, so I said, what if there is a platform where people like me could look for jobs through their accommodations and their skills, and be matched with inclusive work environments.

From there, I started Googling things like how do you build an app? I learned about Wireframes and fast forward today we have a fully functional app, we have our users helping to find employment, and workplaces that we are training and building the capacity for. It was really my own lived experience that brought me into the space of hiring and wanting to, you know, be asynchronous ways for people to keep learning and growing, especially for those that are multi‑marginalized.

Later when I looked into the research, I saw we have a lot of disparities in employment for those with disabilities, especially as an LGBT member like yourself, or you are a woman in the Black community. Or maybe you are lucky and you are in all those Venn Diagrams, so that was me and how I got started.

>> RUBY TAYLOR: Thank you. Before we go onto the next founder, can you educate us about a Wireframe? What is that?

>> MARIAH BARBER: Sure. A Wireframe ‑‑ if you are a STEM person like myself, and other people on the panel, you are used to seeing graph paper. When you are not drawing a graph on that, you can also draw a Wireframe. It is basically a frame of what a screen in your application might look like.

So, I am sure it was horrendous now, but I drew out my first version to then pay someone else to do it in different platforms such as Figma.

But it is an outline, if you think of an application like LinkedIn or other applications you use frequently, there was a black and white sketch on a grid paper to draw out how the buttons would look or the flow would go when users are interacting with the platform, and that first version is called a Wireframe.

>> RUBY TAYLOR: Thank you so much. Up next, Stephanie, let us know about your business, how did it get started?

>> STEHPANIE THOMAS: Thank you, Ruby and Mariah. I am also now working in tech, and I just learned Wireframe. That is how uneducated I am in that, which probably makes me good at what I am doing from my perspective, because I will bring that expertise, but, thank you for that.

For anyone that is Low Vision or blind, I am Stephanie, a mid to dark skin woman, a head wrap that is brown and black multi‑colored, glasses that are similar to the headwrap in color, gold earrings, and I am wearing a black blazer and a Cami.

So, my business started after reaching out to the fashion industry, just asking simple questions about them equitably providing options for people that dress with disabilities, chronic illnesses and injuries.

I did not get a response. I wound up working with different People with Disabilities at the beginning. As someone born with a disability, it is ironic. I grew up at a time where being born with disabilities wasn't referred to as having a disability, especially growing up in a home with parents that were very spiritual.

It is just, like, you are healed, you don't have this. So, since my disabilities were physical, I am like, yeah, I am kind of still the same. So (Waving arms). I was like, I really don't think God walked away from designing me and left me to go do something, and me end up this way. So, I am obviously this way for a reason, according to my belief.

>> RUBY TAYLOR: Yes.

>> STEHPANIE THOMAS: So, I started that process but I never wanted to start a business.

I want to be very clear, in case someone is out there and they are like, oh, these are founders. Let me be very transparent. I worked in media. I was in television and radio, and I was happy ‑‑ oh, and I did voiceovers. I was doing things that I liked. I was happy. But there was a problem that never went away, and the problem was, it shouldn't take people three hours to get stressed. People shouldn't have to go into the store, spend their money, then spend hundreds of dollars to be tailored. These are really simple problems to solve.

The issue is, society lives in an illusion of inclusion. With this illusion of inclusion comes this idea we are really equitable, but what it is, we are equitable in a way that makes us female well if we are non‑disabled. So, that ableism doesn't fly for me.

So, I dedicated the last 20 years of my life making sure People with Disabilities can dress with as much dignity and independence as possible. And adjust recently I made the turn to technology. Because I was talking to male founders I knew. They were being pessimistic, as always. But that is familiar to me, this will never scale, you are putting people on carpets in Hollywood because I dress actors with disabilities, but they told me, it is never going to scale.

I was, like, I am going to pour my brain basically into an algorithm and I will create a widget that will allow B2B clients to make sure their eCom is equitable. So, since AI ignores disability, I am not going to.

We are a fashion and Health Tech company making it smarter and more inclusive with People with Disabilities, and that is where we are right now. I have never been more excited about anything, or humbled, about how much I am learning, but I know this is what I am made to do and I am excited to do it.

>> RUBY TAYLOR: Amazing! We have dynamic women founders! I am so happy to be spending this afternoon with them!

Up, up next is the amazing Dr. Sam. Let's go, Dr. Sam! How did your company get started?

>> SAMANTHA SCOTT: Hello, hi, Ruby. It is great to be here, especially with Stephanie and Mariah. You guys are awesome! I am happy to get started.

I guess with my background O I was really a total nerd. My PhD is in Biomedical Engineering, but I always focused in optical and neuroscience, understanding when someone has vision loss, how does that affect their brain, and vice versa.

That has always been my happy place, understanding this eye‑brain connection, and how we can use it to better care for people. But half way through grad school I started getting very sick. I went from having enough energy to go about my day, to enjoy myself, to being stationed at the corner of my futon for days at a time.

It took me about five years to finally be diagnosed with the neuromuscular disorder called Myasthenia gravis. Six years later, as of the end of last year, I am now being reevaluated for a new diagnosis. They think I was misdiagnosed the first time around. So, it has been a journey.

I think the greatest challenge around all that has been monitoring what is going on with me. So, throughout, over the past decade or so, my doctors have really relied heavily on me self‑reporting what is going on with my body.

So, you know, when I have an annual visit with my neurologist or ophthalmologist, letting them know, hey, I had this weird symptom happening or calling the office saying this strange thing is happening, and they use that information to understand what is going on and make treatment conditions.

That is very flawed. It is something that is prevalent across many diseases. The idea that doctors are relying on me to tell you essentially what is going on with my body, instead of using subjective data, is not the best way to do things, and the doctors I have are equally frustrated.

On the one hand, a lot of disease happens within symptoms. So, waiting until someone has symptoms can often be too late. Understand, especially as a woman, and a black woman, when I am sharing symptoms, I am not always believed, and that has been a reoccurring theme throughout my own health journey.

So, I started JuneBrain in response to all of that. So, finding a way to build an accessible device ‑‑ we have a retinal imaging device that can be used in any setting, not just a clinic, so everyone can access it, and it sends objective information about your disease to a doctor.

So, it both supplement what is you are telling the doctor, and it gives them kind of an objective look at what is going on with your body. So, it is kind of a combination of my own health stuff, and my eye‑brain nerdiness background, which I love.

>> RUBY TAYLOR: Thank you, thank you, thank you, Dr. Sam. I am telling you, these are some super dope black history‑makers in the future! Somebody will be celebrating them in, like, 25 years, right? They are going to have a poster, a 5th grader, talking about Mariah. Another one is going to be talking about Dr. Sam, and then somebody else will be talking about Stephanie. And they will be talking about me, too!

, amazing, amazing, amazing businesses Dr.

Some extraordinary women!

So, my next question, because having a disability, being here, being a black woman, that is a whole lot of oppression, for lack of a better word. That is a great word, oppression. A whole lot of oppression.

So, how did you grow through those difficult obstacles building your company?

I hope you understood the question, but if you didn't, make up something! So, here we go! We will go with Stephanie first, and then Samantha, and then Mariah. Let's go, Stephanie!

>> STEHPANIE THOMAS: I think I have been given a lot of opportunity ‑‑ oh, I did understand your question! I have been given a lot of opportunities to grow through situations. I would have to say the most painful have been recent challenges. 2023 was just unrelenting for me. It was just lesson after lesson after lesson today. At 54, I am a caregiver for my dad who has onset dementia.

>> RUBY SUNSHINE TAYLOR: Did you say you was 54?

>> STEHPANIE THOMAS: I will be 55 in April, so ‑‑

>> RUBY TAYLOR: Stephanie! You look ‑‑ oh, my god! But, go ahead. That just threw me off! That threw me off. Go ahead! I want to focus!

>> STEHPANIE THOMAS: Okay. And you are very sweet, thank you! I only mention the age because at this age you are often caring for children or parents at this time. I am honored to do it, but for me, I had this vision of myself having more finances to be able to be there for my parents in a way that if they needed anything, it makes me a little emotional to think about it.

Then I got sick myself, in addition to the disability, so the lessons I learned through this was exactly what you shared with us prior to coming on camera, is, cry through it, work through it, show up. Do whatever you have to do.

And something that my life coach taught me was to celebrate my wins. I don't know how the other panelists are, but when you are purpose‑driven, or focused, you don't really celebrate yourself, or at least I don't. I don't like, oh, I did this thing.

The only reason I have these trophies up, I needed something for my shelf. I never celebrate anything. You feel like you are not accomplishing anything because you don't ever stop and see what you are doing, is what she said. So, the way she helped me process this is I have to write down every single win.

Even if it appears to be a small win to me, it could be a meeting. She wants me to celebrate no’s so we can go back and look at how the no’s have led me to other places that I would have never been.

Because of the way my brain works, I have to write it down, and then she reminds me to go back and look at it when I am feeling like I am not doing anything.

Because, I think for me, the last couple years, opening vogue, seeing my words attributed to women that don't look like me, I don't mind people sharing if they site my work, but that has really hurt my business, because then they have taken my words and built their businesses on it. But I am grateful for that because I never would have wound up in tech, or wound up where I am, had that not happened.

So, it is disappointing, but I let my no’s be my guide. Long answer to a short question, but I am so glad you asked it, because it is something that I am still learning.

>> RUBY SUNSHINE TAYLOR: Thank you, thank you, Dr. Sam.

>> SAMANTHA SCOTT: That was really good. I agree with you, Stephanie, when it comes to celebrating your wins. I wholeheartedly agree. That is even something on my team I really try to do with everyone, just acknowledging, when someone does something, even if they think it is small, in the grand scheme of things, that is, like, pat yourself, pat each other, on the shoulder. I agree with that!

I would say, for me, how am I getting through things? For me, one of my struggles is thinking I am not enough. I don't have enough energy. My body doesn't have enough to sustain a start‑up company. What I have learned, especially over the past couple of years, is that we are all enough. I know, Ruby, you talk a lot about your faith. It is the same for me.

I have a very strong faith in God, so knowing that I am enough, and that He handles the rest of it, which He has done, I see God as my Co‑Founder.

If I just do my best ‑‑ and sometimes it is a no ‑‑ it sucks at the time, but it works out in the end, and eventually there is a yes that takes me on the path and the company on a path that is much, much better.

So, I think that is the main thing. Also, just being kind to myself ‑‑ (Chuckles). You know, I think a lot of times our self‑talk is so bad. I don't know about you guys, but we just have to talk to ourselves like we love ourselves. We are talking about start‑ups and being founders, but it is especially in that kind of environment, because having a start‑up company, it takes ‑‑ it expends everything from you, so you have to we will be right back. kind to yourself.

>> RUBY SUNSHINE TAYLOR: Yes, yes! Mariah?

>> MARIAH BARBER: I have been going wild for those that might be visually impaired like myself, I have been snapping, clapping, all the emojis are going up because I am resonating so much with what you two are sharing.

Also, the God is my Co‑Founder, you have to brand that, put that on a t‑shirt, because that is a word right there.

But I would say, for me, talking about being multi‑marginalized, a big part of strength is intersectionality and educating on it.

I like to say I am a Venn baby in the middle of a lot of Venn Diagrams, essentially.

The Venn Diagrams can be hoops we are jumping through, right? So, that experience actually led me to being a founder, quite literally, because I was looking for a workplace that would affirm my gender, that would be committed to being pro‑black, that would have pay equity and offer accommodations. That is a lot of different requirements or supports that I needed. I also realized you can look at it as a deficit, or an advantage or a strength. That is really wherein visible strengths has come from. I think there can ‑‑ Invisible Strengths can come from. I think sitting at the margins of society, you have a lot of things you do.

So, the way you are doing things is actually ushering folks in behind you and actually being supportive to everyone in the space. I love the term being used a lot more, Universal Design. We are designing for the whole universe, rather than a select group of folks.

So, I have seen that as an asset. Even when it comes to folks we have hires to work on the team, we focus on hiring those that are multi‑marginalized, those that do have different conditions and backgrounds, that are not of my own. And sometimes are shared.

And we can actually bring to the table things that I don't consider. So, that has been a beautiful piece to be able to learn and grow, and cultivate community in that way at the same time.

It is really difficult work to be a founder. We can't gloss over that. I think the other two ladies that are honored to be on the call with have also kind of highlighted that, but the negative self‑talk, the continuing to go when you come up against a brick wall, a lot of times, again, I will say, it has been our birth right, as being black Women with Disabilities, to have to go up against a society that wasn't built for us.

So, we are, like, okay, that is not a no. That is a not yet. Let's figure another work‑around. I think a thing that fortified me is having community, like Ruby and other folks, to be able to go to and talk about how the world is kind of putting up a lot of barriers for me in that moment or season, and keeping each other affirmed and encouraged. I know the ladies including myself would not be on this journey without believing in manifestation, and being able to call things to yourself.

Also, being able to have a life coach, and being able to go through different Accelerator Programs, and having mentors that share identities with me and sometimes don't, and can be an ally, have helped me along the way. Stay positive and know if things don't work out, it is just redirection.

>> RUBY TAYLOR: Awesome, awesome. Thank you so much. Amazing.

My next question is somewhat connected, right? But before I go on, let me say this, because I will forget, right?

Our websites have to be accessible, right? So, whether or not you can ‑‑ no matter what your disability is, we have to make our sites accessible. There are many, many companies out there that can basically help you with that.

One of them that I have partnered with is called Accesibee. I am not promoting them, but they are one of the companies you can use to make your website accessible.

So, so that everyone can enjoy it.

So, my next question is, what types of programs ‑‑ okay, Laura wanted me to repeat the name. I am a stutterer, so I do repeat a lot. Laura, you are making it rough! (Chuckles) But anyway, I like to laugh, too, right?

It is called A‑C‑C‑E‑S‑S‑I‑B‑E. Accessibe. That is the name of the amazing company. A‑C‑C‑E‑S‑S‑I‑B‑E. Thank you, Lexi. Appreciate you!

And, so, my next question, we cannot do this work without support, right? Whether or not it is investors, programs, accelerates or friends. Can you name me three helpers that is helping you on this journey? Okay? Three, whether or not it is a program, whether or not it is a friend, whether or not it is an advisor, a coach, an investor ‑‑ three major ones that is helping you get over the hump?

I will go with myself first. I have to give a big, big shout out to the NASDAQ Entrepreneurial Center. They have a great entrepreneurial program for women.

The next one is Halcyon House. Second to none, the support the Halcyon House gave me is still ongoing.

The next one is ‑‑ I said the NASDAQ Entrepreneurial Center, the Halcyon House, and 2gether International, a program for people who have disabilities. It is an amazing accelerate. And last but not least ‑‑ I know I said three, but I will give you four. Please be patient with me. Got is not through with me yet. An amazing guy and sounding-board.

And the National Disability Institute. They will connect you to so many amazing people, and their follow‑through game is second to none. They follow‑through. So, those are the programs that have helped me over the hump, and we will go with Dr. Sam first. Mariah second, then Stephanie third. All right. Let's go, Dr. Sam.

>> SAMANTHA SCOTT: 2gether International, they are just phenomenal. I agree. All the events they turn on, and they offer a ton of programming for entrepreneurs with disabilities, access to funding. They have made introductions to investors who have invested in us, which is just ‑‑ so, is thumbs up for them.

And the other is the National Science Foundation, if you are a techy start‑up. They are also ‑‑ they have been the Greenhouse from day one, whether it came to funding, or even just talking to my Program Officer for advice. But really, they provided all the funding that has got us to where we are today, the majority of it. Including customer discovery, which is really important.

Then the last one, the biggest help for myself and team has been our advisors and current investors.

They are, our investors are also advisors. They are there at the drop of a hat if we need to ask questions, or go take a phone call, or do weekly meetings with us. Whatever it is to support our mission, they are awesome!

>> RUBY TAYLOR: Thank you. Stephanie?

>> STEHPANIE THOMAS: Could you see me exhale, or inhale?

>> RUBY TAYLOR: I did!

>> STEHPANIE THOMAS: I don't have financial backers, but I have incredible advisors that help me so much with just understanding technology, understanding where I am going, they are just so free with their knowledge. They all happen to be women from what is deemed marginalized populations.

So, they are not gatekeeping. They are like, do this, do this. I was like, can I call myself a tech company. They are, like, don't let people gatekeep. This is who you are. Do this.

To me, although cash flow is really important, their support has been just ‑‑ I wouldn't even know half the things that I know about this process without them. 2GI is great, as well. 2gether International. That is how I met Ruby, by the way. I was part of their accelerator last fall. That was the thing that gave me, as the focus ‑‑ this may sound so bad, but I will say it anyway, it gave me the focus as a founder to focus on fundraising.

Because I am a social entrepreneur at heart, I am in the community. I am helping people. Then you look up and say, oh, I can't keep spending my money for my company, so I guess I have to raise money to do this.

Unlike my colleagues on the panel, passion is considered something that is not important for disability. It is often dismissed as, oh, we have medication to get, we have that to get, so people overlook that it is literally an activity of daily living. It determines, in my mind, if someone is independent or not, being able to take care of themselves.

Getting dressed is a big deal. Clothing for getting dressed is a big deal. It acts as an assistive device for people, to have that independence.

So, now that I am focused ‑‑ and I am not getting, thanks to 2GI, you guys were very helpful in getting me focused on that, that is what I am focused on now. Finding really strong partners that are willing to put their money where their mouth is in order to help us move forward, and really just disrupt what is happening right now in e‑Commerce.

>> RUBY TAYLOR: I would recommend contacting Dr. Sam, and Mariah, because they both, they have fundraising. They will know all the applications, what you will have to do to be able to raise money.

So, I would reach out soon, because you have to do that as EC stuff, and that can be a pain. So, I will shut up now and go to Mariah. Let's go, Mariah!

>> MARIAH BARBER: Yes. And we will get that caveat that I fundraise. I do a family and friends round, still doing my precede round, and going through the process, but I am happy to share any information. I am really passionate about applying for Grants.

But I would say some of the things have been said, such as Halcyon and 2gether International. You can tell where we all met. I have some new resources, and some new things out there. And NDI is also great. Shout out to the National Disability Institute!

But I am located in DC, so, there are DC‑specific Grants. I would advise anybody, whatever locality you are in, look at local grants, because that can be a great place to start.

One program that supported me is entrepreneurship development network of DC. It is also a collaboration between Howard University, George Washington University, and American University. They are not specific to any industry, so it was very agnostic there. are people in the fashion space, the non‑profit and for‑profit. They help you with customer discovery, and also just doing introductions into your local area and providing you with a mentor.

So, that was really helpful for me.

I would also say my second resource, or person I am really appreciative is the organization, General Assembly. They are a design school. And we partnered with them with building out some of our prototypes, and also doing market research, as well as customer discovery. It was exciting, that our first few employees ended up being students that were fellows through that program, and we ended up being able to hire them on afterward.

Then the last one, I would share would be the Inglis Foundation, that is I‑N‑G‑L‑I‑S Foundation. We were introduced to them through 2gether International. They have a $10,000 Grant they give out to disability‑focused companies. They have a pitch competition. Last year we were able to receive that funding from them, and go to their conference, and really meet a lot of organizations that were interested in posting jobs on our platform, and also meet other founders who have been awarded the Grant.

Those are the three I would say that have been really helpful for me. I think people say it a lot, but your network is your net worth. Networking has definitely helped, even if it is not someone directly providing funds, they may be an introduction to the next resource you need, so that has been amazing, too. A shout out to universities for providing fellows and interns and getting us started.

>> RUBY TAYLOR: Yes! Thank you, thank you, thank you! So, my next question:  What has been your biggest accomplishment yet? And we will go with Mariah, Dr. Sam, and then Stephanie. Your biggest ‑‑ it could be anything, all right? So, you ready? Let's go.

>> MARIAH BARBER: I am like, Ruby put me in the hot seat, girl!

I would say, it is difficult to narrow it down but I would say is a big accomplishment for me, last year we were listed in the Washington business journal as one of the top 10 start‑ups to watch. That same year, just two months after the article came out, we came out with our product, and we had paying customers and were really being able to just get real feedback from our users, whether it is the free side, which is job‑seekers, or the B2B side of the businesses. That was something I was really proud of. Also last year we received an award from the Developmental Disabilities Council for doing innovation and technology for People with Disabilities. So, I would say that last year, those were things I was really proud of.

Just to see how far we had come.

>> RUBY TAYLOR: Congratulations, yes, yes and yes! All right, Dr. Sam, you are up next.

>> SAMANTHA SCOTT: Congratulations! That is really cool! I guess everything around funding. So, I would say our biggest accomplishment is, we officially surpassed raising a million dollars from investors ‑‑

>> RUBY TAYLOR: Let's go! Let's go!

>> SAMANTHA SCOTT: And we raised over $2 million from Grants. I think the combination is like diversifying your capital streams. Having a little bit of both has helped us to survive some pretty rough fundraising moments, years. Last year was really tough fundraising for start‑ups, but having a combination, I think, is one of my biggest accomplishments.

Hour team has been able to keep making progress and doing good work, even during rough times.

>> RUBY TAYLOR: That is massive, because black women usually do not raise a million. It really is a small club, which is really unfortunate. It shouldn't be, but it is. And, so, congratulations! That is massive. Super dope! $3 million raised! Can I borrow $20? We will talk after this! (Chuckles)

All right, Stephanie, what is your biggest accomplishment thus far? (Chuckles)

>> STEHPANIE THOMAS: Well, I want to congratulate Mariah and Dr. Sam. That is really great! That is really great. Or nickname June. I heard that conversation before we got started! (Chuckles)

So, my accomplishment, just for someone born with a disability that has been in this space so long was being added to the Business of Fashion, BOF 500, moving the fashion try forward. That is a huge accomplishment for someone in general, in my opinion, but it is a real honor, and it really helped me connect a lot of the fashion dots, per se, meeting so many different people, being added to that list as someone with a disability helping this sector of the industry, or how people see me helping a certain sector.

In my mind, like Mariah said earlier, I think human‑centric, or human‑centered design, being added to that list has really helped me open doors and articles.

But that is not my greatest accomplishment. My greatest accomplishment is when I go into a store with someone with a disability, and they don't think they can wear a certain shoe, they don't think they can put something on. Then we just try. I have to take tissue, water ‑‑ we have to get through the process, but the moment when they realize, oh, my god, I can do this. I have choices. I don't have to wait until the fashion sorry catches up. That, for me, doesn't have a specific name to it, except watching my work directly impact someone's life so quickly, such a quick concern‑around as a stylist, there is nothing like that. There is nothing I can compare to that.

>> RUBY TAYLOR: Thank you, thank you, thank you. I am going to give the audience just a couple of minutes to think of questions they may have for our next question.

So, here goes this question. This is Black History Month, right? So, tell me three black people you will be celebrating this year, and why?

So, Mariah is shaking her head. We are going to go with her first.

Stephanie gave a little smile, so we will go with her second. Dr. Sam said maybe go with me last, so that is how we are going to do that. Mariah is first, Stephanie is second, and Dr. Sam is last. So, three amazing black people you will be celebrating this year.

Because we go beyond a month, right? We celebrate Black Excellence 366 days, because this is a Leap Year, baby! But ordinarily it is 365 days. So, Mariah, let's go. Three black people you will be celebrating this year?

>> MARIAH BARBER: Yes. And I also love what you were saying. I thought of the Whitney Houston‑Bobby Brown video, where they say we need a longer month! I am a big proponent of that! (Chuckles)

But I would say, number one, Arlan Hamilton. Arlan Hamilton created her own venture capital studio called Backstage Capital. More than that, she wrote the book It's About Damn Time, Demystifying the Start‑Up World. I read that book for free on the public audio book, and that made me realize I could start a tech company. So I want to tip my hat to Arlan Hamilton, and also black women that identify as LGBTQ+, and it opens up a lot of space to put funding into a lot of other black‑owned businesses. I think that is a mantra or vision I have for myself, lifting as we climb.

As we learn this journey, I don't want to gatekeep, but I want to share that information with the people coming behind me. Number two, I would say Harriet Tubman. I know that is a name we hear about a lot, but I don't know if people think about the fact that Harriet Tubman was a black disabled woman. I think these days we would identify it as epilepsy or a traumatic brain issue.

She helped people quite literally with the underground railroad, and was a natural path and knew a lot about the herbs in the forest, and I am passionate about her gardening and liberating others healing on the land.

And my third person. That is so tough. I think I would have to say ‑‑ I was going to say another name probably well known, but I would say my grandmother. My grandmother's name is Natalie Lindsey. She was probably could have been a doctor, but because of the times she grew up in, was a black nurse that trained other nurses in Virginia, and was always telling me, when she was alive, about keeping my head held high.

She was big ‑‑ she helped to desegregate schools in Virginia.

I think it is important we also think about our family lineage when we talk about black history, that we uplift a lot of the same names sometimes.

She is one of my ancestors, I am like, stay with me, girl! Dr. Sam said she saw on my table the Board of Directors. I know she guided my journey. That is another person who didn't let other people's limitations that they put on her stop her from moving forward, and making a name for herself and her family.

>> RUBY SUNSHINE TAYLOR: Thank you so much. Super dope! All right!

Stephanie, you are up!

>> STEHPANIE THOMAS: Arlan was on my list, so, thank you. I read It's About Damn Time, too. That was ‑‑ I just love how she made me question how I normally do things. And my other is Zora Neale Hurston. For me, I am a huger fan of the Harlem Renaissance, so I am always reading, you know, from different creators, but Zora, for me, stood out.

Zora, at the beginning of the month as we start thinking about it and highlighting different people, her refusal to just be what people wanted her to be. Her refusal to not been innovated. She just did it and came up against obstacles like most of us do. But for her, she did is unexpected, and she created in a way that, for me, was profound, just because even in her own community there were people that didn't appreciate what she was writing, and how she was writing it. They had a problem with it not being elevated enough at times.

So, I really appreciate that. Then Judith Jamison, for me always, always, always, choreographer, dancer, Alvin Ailey, that for me, stands out because even though I was born and told I would not ambulate independently and was born without all my digits on my feet, I love dance.

When I think about Cry, and other pieces from Ailey, that she used to perform that are still beautifully performed today, it reminds me of doing something that I love that is outside of my work.

Dance is the one thing that I can do that I don't think about anything else. It is my ‑‑ between prayer, dance, words with friends ‑‑ those are my ways to still live during this founder's journey, if that makes sense. We have to have that balance of things that bring us joy. So, those are my people.

>> RUBY TAYLOR: Yes. Thank you, thank you. Dr. Sam, last but never least! Let's go!

>> SAMANTHA SCOTT: I think my first one is Patricia Bath. She was an ophthalmologist, and she really was a first in so many different ways in that field, but what I really love about her, I think this is a theme in our community, she translated all that inventorship and knowledge to humanitarianism. She did a ton of work when it came to providing eye care access to communities that didn't have very good access to healthcare. I think she founded one of the foundations for preventing blindness in Ailey. She did a ton of awesome work.

And the other one is Mae Jemison. We know of her as the first black woman to go to space, which is already epic enough, but she also had her whole life around that that has been really awesome.

She is a Stanford alumni, my home base, so I love that. She also went to medical school first. That is something I didn't know about her for a long time. She worked with the Peace Corps for a while, to help caring for a lot of the volunteers.

Then even after she finished her career as an astronaut, she wrote children books. I love that whole‑roundedness around her. I would love to do that. After JuneBrain, I don't think I will do another start‑up. I think I want to go and join a pop orchestra. A black woman who had so many different aspects to her.

Then the last one, I would say, is Julius Williams. He is a friend of my family, but he is a conductor, a really awesome conductor in Boston right now.

He does classical music. I am a classical pianist, so I love seeing a brown person doing his thing in jazz and classical music and all of that. So, I think he should be celebrated.

>> RUBY TAYLOR: Thank you, thank you, thank you. You all mentioned some super, super dope people, and I greatly appreciate each and every one of you.

Are there any questions from the audience? Stephanie, thank you so much we greatly appreciate your work, stories, and your love for our community. Peace and blessings.

>> STEHPANIE THOMAS: Thank you, bye.

>> RUBY TAYLOR: If there are questions, go ahead and shoot it in the Chat Box, and Lexi will tell us what the question is.

But, let me say this, these dynamic women, not over yet! We have five more minutes. I see people are jumping off. Give us five more minutes, and then you can leave! Being a founder is very difficult. And then to be a founder with a disability is even more difficult. People will not say whether or not they have a disability.

These amazing founders do.

So, like, I want to say, congratulations because people like judge us and underestimate us always. But we still show up as ourself, being proud of our disabilities.

We did have a question. Lexi, did you see it so that we can ask the panelists?

>> LEXI JONES: I did. I see two questions in the Chat. Where did it ‑‑ so, the first one was ‑‑ I am here with four young adults with disabilities who are ability to join the Workforce. What advice would you give them?

>> RUBY SUNSHINE TAYLOR: Dr. Sam, and then Mariah?

>> SAMANTHA SCOTT: That is exciting, first of all. Oh, wow, the world is their oyster, it is a big oyster. I would say, it is really important ‑‑ one thing I have learned over the years is, understanding my strengths and weaknesses. Weaknesses not in a negative way, but understanding, these are my strengths, so I look for opportunities for myself where my strengths are a great fit, and my interests, too.

When it comes to any limitations I have, making sure it is a good environment that is supportive for those things, or I can surround myself with people who fill in where I have limitations.

So, going into the Workforce, kind of a good way to figure out where those places are, definitely internships is a great start. I think that is the most obvious one, but also, informational interviews. I used to find that very helpful. Calling someone who is in a place where you would like to be, whether it is in a year, or five years from now. Someone that has the career you are thinking of something, and just ask for 15 or 30 minutes of their time, and ask them a ton load of questions about, you know, what is their day‑to‑day like?

Especially if you can find someone who has a disability, a similar disability to yourself, to understand how they navigate that career space, that is very valuable information and a great place to start.

>> MARIAH BARBER: I am echoing everything that Dr. Sam said.

I would also say, make sure you have a mentor. It can be someone from school. It can be someone from your program. But throughout my career, whether it was in the beginning, the middle, or wherever I find myself now ‑‑ I don't really quite know. I guess it is still in the middle ‑‑ (Chuckles) ‑‑ it is always great to be able to talk to those trusted mentors that are either in your field, further along, share identities with you, or maybe even don't share identities with you and can give you insights and encouragement. In some cases, my mentors have given me employment, and they have been a source of jobs and let me tap into their network.

Another thing I would say, part two, I guess, kind of what Dr. Sam was saying. You have to be thinking about the culture of an organization. It is okay for you to be interviewing and asking questions during your own interview for the job.

What I mean by that, really ask about, hey, have you ever had someone with Low Vision to work here? Or, is there a mentorship program that you provide for up-and-coming employees? Is there opportunities for growth here? Really, when they ask you, do you have any questions, make sure you have already thought about what is important to you, because there can be traumatization and things that happen in the Workforce.

I don't want to scare you, but I also want to make sure you are going into an affirming environment.

Definitely check out Invisible Strengths to get posted on our Job Board, but there are also other Job Boards out there where you can look for women‑led businesses or whatever kind of organization you are looking for.

The third Tim I would give is JAN, or the Job Accommodations Network. It is what is behind our algorithm on Invisible Strengths. It is a free website that shows accommodations being utilized right now in the Workforce.

I know just because I am diagnosed with something, that doesn't necessarily mean you are familiar with the accommodations that go along with it.

For example, for someone that might be Hard of Hearing, they have on the Job Accommodations Network, you type in your condition, and it will show you accommodations that may be helpful to you, and has helped other people with a similar condition.

It might say Sign Language Interpreter, or Closed Captioning on meetings, and that will give you an idea of what you might want to request going into your role.

Because, a lot of times the workplace may not be completely aware of what supports you need, and you may not be aware of the supports you need. It can give you a place to start, thinking through, okay, I think that would be helpful for me.

But, good luck! You are going to be great!

>> RUBY TAYLOR: Do not forget about OVR. They can help you. They can also help give you a coach with disability income limits. You really need to look into ‑‑ especially with starting a business, a Trust Fund. You can have a disability Trust Fund, where the money goes into that. So, which would not impact your disability income. So, there are ways ‑‑ and I am just being really quick with that, but there are ways around it that are legal. It is not illegal. These are legal ways, so, that is it.

Thank you so much, Nikki, Alexis, Caroline, for saying yes to this amazing event!

>> LEXI JONES: Thank you, Ruby, and our speakers so much. I wanted to answer one question I saw in the Chat. We will be sending out all the contact information for the speakers, and all of the links that were shared in the Chat by email to everyone who registered for the Webinar. So please don't worry if you missed any that zoomed by. Don't worry, we will collect them up and send them out to everybody in the next few days.

Now, Nikki, you can take us home.

>> NIKKI POWIS: Great. Ladies, thank you so much. I am blown away by the stories, the insights, all of the sharing that you have done. Thank you so much for being so transparent, and sharing with our audience your journeys.

The energy is amazing. I mean, Ruby, every time I talk to you, you make me jump up and down with energy, because you are always so positive and upbeat and collectively. That has just been fantastic.

Can we go to the next slide, then, Lexi. I just want to share, National Disability Institute ‑‑ oh, here you go. You have Mariah's information. And we have slides with information for everybody that has been speaking.

You will get all this in an email. It will go out to all the registrants. Lots of information coming out soon, so be on the lookout for that.

We have other upcoming Webinars. One of the things is there XM, the export ‑‑ Import‑Export Division of The Federal Government, where they have an amazing amount of support if you want to take your business globally, and talk to you about how to really go about exporting goods and services. So, that is coming up, a series starting in March.

Some of the stuff we offer as the small business hundred with the National Disability Institute, definitely go check out our website. Again, you don't have to try to keep these. All these links will come to you, where you can send our navigator, Ruth, an email, if you want some one‑on‑one consultation or want some support.

We also have a streaming television channel available on Roku, Apple, Fire TV, on the App Stores and on the web. It is full of fantastic content, and a lot of other Storytelling, as well, from some amazing entrepreneurs, so feel free to go visit that.

And then, if you want to get any other sort of training and mentorship, we also partner with Verizon, with their new platform, that is for entrepreneurs. So, you can go check that out. And if you are not on our mailing list and you don't get our newsletter, then sign up for our mailing list because there are so many great things coming that you can tap into.

So, with that, that is kind of it from us. Here is our small business team. We are a small but mighty team of myself, Ruth, Caroline and Lexi. We are really here to support those navigating the journey for the first time in entrepreneurship, or if you have an established business and you really want to try and grow.

As you have seen, we have partners and networks with amazing other small businesses, so, we are just here to help. With that, I think we are about done, right, Lexi?

>> LEXI JONES: I think that wraps it up. Thank you so much for joining us and helping to celebrate these amazing founders and entrepreneurs. Ruby, any final words before we close out?

>> RUBY TAYLOR: Yes. You deserve joy and wealth. I deserve joy and wealth. We all deserve joy and wealth. Peace and blessings to you all!

 (Session was concluded at 3:11 p.m. ET)

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