

00:00:00:17 - 00:00:21:09

Eileen Lamb

Welcome to *Adulting on the Spectrum*. In this podcast, we want to highlight the real voices of autistic adults, not just inspirational stories, but people like us talking about their day to day life. Basically, we want to give a voice to a variety of autistic people. I'm Eileen Lamb, an autistic photographer from France, and I co-host this podcast with Andrew Komarow. Hey Andrew.

00:00:21:18 - 00:00:41:01

Andrew Komarow

Hey Eileen. I am Andrew Komarow. an autistic software engineer. I am not from France and I am the better looking co-host of this podcast. Today our guest is Armando. So we like this. If you listen to our podcast before.

00:00:41:10 - 00:00:44:00

Armando Bernal

Yeah, no, it's it's fun. It's a good time for you guys.

00:00:44:04 - 00:01:00:09

Andrew Komarow

Awesome. So, so that you know, that we like to ask each guests how they prefer to identify whether that person with autism on the spectrum, etc.. Do you have a preference? If so, what is it? And if you could give us a short bio because we neglected to get that from you.

00:01:00:21 - 00:01:32:04

Armando Bernal

That's no problem at all. Yeah. So I, I guess I go back and forth on a C, but typically autistic individual is just fine with me. So I have been a board certified behavior analyst now for about four years. Previously, before that, I was a special education teacher within Houston, Texas, and currently I am the owner of the only autistic own ABA company in Houston, where we work with really children and adults anywhere between 18 months onwards.

So we've had 15 year olds, 20 year olds. We had a recommendation once for a 39 year old. Um, I've also been a podcast host myself, so this is rather familiar to me. I had a podcast in 2020 called *A Different Path*, where I would interview individuals with autism as well to really try and promote this idea that self advocacy is everywhere.

00:01:55:13 - 00:02:17:22

Armando Bernal

And much like you guys, that regardless of the diagnosis, there are many things to be accomplished by individuals with autism. And since then I've taken it upon myself. I created this company along with my sister, where we provide support and really try to push the idea that self advocacy can be achieved by many individuals with autism, as well as general for each person that we work with.

00:02:18:01 - 00:02:22:00

Eileen Lamb

Can you tell us about your own diagnosis journey? When were you diagnosed with autism?

00:02:22:10 - 00:02:45:07

Armando Bernal

Yeah, absolutely. So I was diagnosed at three. So some of this history was given by my mother and my sister, who's 11 years older than me. But my I was diagnosed at three where my mother was told by her doctor that I might as well learn sign language because I was never going to be able to speak. And in Texas in the nineties, early 2000 where I was born, that was pretty much the end of that conversation for her and the doctor.

They the doctor had many other patients to see and basically center on her way. And so my mother stood up to this doctor and said, No, that's not going to be the case. So we didn't have a lot of money. We couldn't afford applied behavior analysis therapy back then. It wasn't medically given by insurances, but we did have access to the free public library.

So she was able to go to the library, find out more information about autism, more information about how to support my language development, and through her support, along with my sister, my father, generally, my family, I was able to get to a point where I am today and I go into this later, always, usually in my presentations, but I always 100% believe that if it was not for the support and the care of my family that I would not be anywhere where I am today.

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Armando Bernal

It's because they believe that I could accomplish these kind of things, that I was able to do what I can currently today.

00:03:40:00 - 00:04:00:21

Andrew Komarow

I mean, you are pretty well supported. And then what made you decide to get into the business of torture? No. I mean, what made you decide to go into, you know, the field of ABA? Why why did you choose this as a career for all the other careers you could add? You know.

00:04:01:02 - 00:04:20:01

Armando Bernal

I love the fact that you had that little side side comment there, Right. Because that's what I typically get in my career is I get two sides of things. I get one side that says, you're such an inspiration and great job. I can't believe you reached this level. And then on the other side, I get comments such as that earlier where it's how could you ever, ever be a part of something so terrible?

Right. And so partially to go back a little bit. Right. I was a special education teacher just trying to work with other individuals with autism because I didn't want other families to have to go through what my mother did and really help others understand that you can accomplish many different goals for yourself or independence through a lot of support.

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Armando Bernal

But as I was with these families, I realized that there had to be more that I could do. And I found applied behavior analysis. And I give this analogy typically in these presentations, and I'm always welcome to these kind of conversations where it's if you had a bad experience with a medical doctor that would typically not turn a person off from Western medicine, but instead you would go about it and try and find a doctor that fit your beliefs, your ideologies, your mentality.

00:05:08:24 - 00:05:36:11

Armando Bernal

And so I say the same thing for applied behavior analysis is that immediately that ABA does have quite a bit of a dark history, but most often it is because of the bad practitioner that provided poor support and poor treatment to those individuals, as well as the fact that behavioral science, which applied behavior analysis is based off of, is truly around everybody, no matter how you take a look at it.

00:05:36:11 - 00:05:55:17

Armando Bernal

Right. It's behavioral science is simply the study of actions that people do and the reasons behind them. And so in every meeting like this as well, I also mentioned that everyone's voice should be honored and respected. And if an individual had a terrible time in ABA, that's not my place to say whether or not they did or not.

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Armando Bernal

Right. But it is my place in my current position to try to make a difference and show that ABA can have a positive approach. Much like many of the kids that I've served, I give an example of one who ain't nothing but veggie chips and a multivitamin drink, and he was seven years old and through our own workings, right, working with the family, working with this child, focusing on self advocacy, again, he was able to get to a point where you had a diet that could sustain him, whether that was pizza, pancakes, sandwiches, things of that nature.

00:06:29:05 - 00:06:57:21

Armando Bernal

Right. And again, it's I, I could talk all day. I love his honesty. I love that we started off with this because of the fact that in addition to this, it's this idea that nothing good can come of this right. Of applied behavior analysis. But it's so significant to understand that in order to change this dark history that ABA has or in order to change the wrongs that it has done in the past, it's

important for neurodiverse individuals such as myself, such and others, because by no means I'm the only one.

00:06:58:06 - 00:07:17:10

Armando Bernal

It's significant to have an autistic voice present and these kind of therapies to really have people understand that individualism and differentiation as well as self advocacy needs to be the main cornerstone of this entire science. So great long winded, but I hope that helps.

00:07:17:16 - 00:07:49:03

Andrew Komarow

No, no, that was great. I completely agree with you on a lot of levels. And you know, two things that come to mind is, one, there there's a great advocate. I know who is. I think, again, maybe a therapist, autistic, but I know she listens to every podcast episode. So I know she'll listen to this one. And, you know, I said to her, like, you know, with all the she cares so much to like if she was looking to get into ABA two day and Googled ABA on the Internet, she would not have gone into ABA.

00:07:50:01 - 00:08:12:05

Andrew Komarow

So and I'm like, That's a problem that should be solved because that means the best people that the the people who mean the best, who want to get in everything for the right reasons, you know, are potentially being turned away. And, you know, she agreed. Right. So it's like, okay, we should change that discussion. So you know the younger you.

00:08:12:06 - 00:08:35:03

Andrew Komarow

Right. Didn't call you all, you know, you know would you know would still help people. And I mean, the other one, too is when it comes to nonprofits. Right. You know, like if when we'll talk about that in a little bit. But that's I think that's a part of why doing this podcast or why have the conversation with people.

00:08:35:03 - 00:08:53:11

Andrew Komarow

Right. Because if you know, if you're not involved at all, people are going to make decisions without you and, you know, just canceling. And I mean, ABA isn't going to go away tomorrow, right? So what are you doing? Let's let's make something better. Right?

00:08:53:15 - 00:09:15:01

Armando Bernal

So, I mean, and that's exactly right. Like if for my company, I have my company's name, I don't know if I mentioned is Autism International Consulting. And for my company, we believe that if anyone is going to take the brunt of the comments, the concerns that conflict, let it be me. Right.

And I said earlier, I am the only autistic on ABA company in Houston.

00:09:15:09 - 00:09:29:01

Armando Bernal

For those that may know or may not know, Houston is a rather large city. And the fact that I am the only one in that city that is autistic and owns an ABA company is I get I met again that response of, Wow, that's so cool. But is it.

00:09:29:01 - 00:09:29:10

Armando Bernal

Though.

00:09:29:19 - 00:09:55:17

Armando Bernal

Because it should be so many other autistic individuals that are owning these ABA companies and really trying to shape what ABA should be or what ABA can be? And so what I try to do is currently become a model for other people to look at and to say, if he can do it, I can do it too. And I would love the opportunity to try and help out other autistic individuals to do more of this kind of work.

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Armando Bernal

And again, not because it's 100% right all of the time, Right? It's not. It's a science. And I also say that as science remains a science, so long as it grows, and as soon as you start saying you've learned all you can and it plateaus and it's no longer a science, but being able to listen to these voices that say, Hey, ABA was wrong for me because of X, Y, Z, that gives us an opportunity then to work on ourselves.

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Armando Bernal

And by ourselves I mean both as a practitioner as well as a science to do better by people. And you said it best, Andrew, as well, where it's not going away, right? It's been here since the fifties, the sixties, so why not make it better instead of allowing it to dwindle and get worse and worse? Why not do what we can to try and better promote a better form of ABA rather than focusing on any kind of money that can be made or any kind of quantitative data or risk toward it, and more so, focus on how can we make a child's life or an adult's life different and better, where they can become independent and rely on themselves instead of other people?

00:11:04:05 - 00:11:31:23

Eileen Lamb

Yeah, you guys are. I love this conversation. I mean, I'm a big, big, big fan of ABA therapy because it's helped my son so much. He's been in ABA for eight years now, but I love what you

said about the comparison to Western medicine, and I always use that example of the dentist for me because I had a horrible experience with a dentist in France, like he was like shaming me for the issues I was having.

Some of them were my fault. Some of them were not my fault. But anyway, I didn't go to the dentist for five years after that experience because of how traumatizing that was, that guy was. I mean, I can't even begin to explain to you how bad the dentist was, but I never said all the field of dentistry is abusive, right?

00:11:48:22 - 00:12:08:24

Eileen Lamb

I knew it was like that one guy. And so then I found a dentist who was like caring and was able to like, you know, make my anxiety go down and reassure me. And that's when I was able to finally go back to the dentist. So I think it's very important for people to realize what you said, that it's not the field of ABA that's abusive.

00:12:08:24 - 00:12:32:09

Eileen Lamb

It's like maybe certain people are abusive. And I would go as far as to say that most people are not going to be abusive on purpose. They can be like thoughts, you know, like, for instance, maybe some therapists think that for forcing eye contact is good, like we don't like that, but maybe you can tell the therapist, I don't want my child to be forced to make eye contact.

Right? So I think there are a lot of nuances here that people are not necessarily like understanding. So what would you say to a person who says that you're abusing kids for anything that ABA is abusive? What would you answer me?

00:12:48:17 - 00:13:16:08

Armando Bernal

Yeah, no, it's a really good question. Right? And before I get back into that, it is very much your point where you're saying people are not intent really trying to abuse these children and rather it is misinformation, misguided, this misunderstanding of what can possibly occur with these children to to be successful. Right. And it's why we had individuals in the nineties 2000 where this this growth and traumatization did occur.

00:13:17:03 - 00:13:35:13

Armando Bernal

Right in my viewpoint, where it's this idea that, oh, a child has to make eye contact or a child can't stem or the hand flapping for anyone that may not do that or I can't and can't repeat their words and silence. This is absolutely wrong. And you fast forward ten, 15, 20 years later and we have individuals are saying no, that was incorrect.

00:13:35:22 - 00:14:00:15

Armando Bernal

This was poor ABA, this was poor information that was being travel. And let's resolve this. It's very similar to the idea that and this is another hot topic that vaccines cause autism. That was a very misguided and misconstrued medical journal that was eventually redacted, that that person lost their license. Bless you. And being able to promote this idea that there can be good from this.

00:14:00:15 - 00:14:16:02

Armando Bernal

Right. It's going to come at challenges. You're going to have a lot of naysayers. So you're going to have a lot of individuals that say that, well, that's that's not possible that they can do that because it didn't happen for me. Right. And that is, again, you have to honor you have to respect those opinions. And you can't say, well, that did and you're wrong.

00:14:16:02 - 00:14:37:04

Armando Bernal

That's not true. Right. It happened for them and you can't tell someone how they feel. But what you can do is provide observation and you can provide transparency. And I think that is how we change this field is. And my sister says this is that you get in trouble most of the time when you try and hide something, you don't get in trouble as much when you admit that you were wrong and that you want to fix something right.

00:14:37:08 - 00:14:58:20

Armando Bernal

And the more individuals that say, no, no, no, you can't see art therapy because that's going to mess up everything we worked on. This is wrong. That's an awful way, again, in my opinion, as you put it, and instead having that transparency to say, if you have concerns, please observe. If you are concerned, you're welcome. So in my area and this is, you know this invitations to you guys, but I think you guys are probably a bit too far from my from my company.

You're welcome to observe and you're welcome to to take a gander at it and see what we do. Right. And again, for those people that say, you know, it is, you know, you're abusing that child, all I can really say to to change their mind is come and see for yourself. I'm not in the business to argue. I'm in the business to discuss and debate and have a well-rounded conversation where we can have open ears.

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Armando Bernal

Right. But for those that are stonewalled, nothing can change their mind. It's it's rather difficult. Right. And there's a big conversation that happens currently where it's you have to look at this rise in social media and the rise in negativity toward ABA and see that correlation that it's a lot of the times it has been those who are loudest on social media, do you get their voice put across?

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Armando Bernal

And you have a lot of people being on social media say, Wow, I had no idea that person's right because they have the million followers or the 10 million followers, and so they're more inclined to listen. But what is necessary to really make this realistic change for people is to be willing to talk about these things as well as to be willing to show what you have to present.

00:16:11:08 - 00:16:40:23

Armando Bernal

Right. And this is why, you know, again, Andrew, I know you jokingly said it, but I get that comment more often than you would think. Or maybe you do think. I don't know. But it's it's up to me to not shy away from it. And as an autistic individual, but also as a professional in the field to say, let's talk about it, let's let's have a conversation that can really open up some doors where maybe we can meet in the middle and see how we can better support everyone that we are.

00:16:40:23 - 00:16:54:21

Eileen Lamb

Well said. And thirdly, on the social media aspect, I mean, I have a pretty big social media following, but it really drives me crazy. I just reached out to 100,000 followers on Instagram. Just want to say congratulations.

00:16:54:21 - 00:16:55:09

Armando Bernal

That's awesome.

00:16:56:01 - 00:17:09:08

Eileen Lamb

As of last night. And you know what I did? I made a post in my stories and I was like, Oh, before you make an official announcement, let me tell you that I'm pro-vaccine. Provided that I guess service catch up. You know, I just wanted people.

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Eileen Lamb

You do CrossFit and you're a libertarian.

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Armando Bernal

Yeah. Pineapple on pizza. Not just all the hot topics.

00:17:15:24 - 00:17:21:07

Eileen Lamb

There you go. I just wanted them to unfollow before I made. Yeah. Announcement because it's back. And, you know.

00:17:21:14 - 00:17:22:22

Andrew Komarow

How many followers did you get?

00:17:23:19 - 00:17:57:09

Eileen Lamb

Not that many, actually. I guess people took first. I was SketchUp. So now that's for real. It's so annoying because one thing I'm very careful about doing or not doing is to make sure that I'm not speaking on behalf of the entire community. Right. And I feel like a lot of people on social media with big platforms and the one who I honestly like, very extreme opinions, you know, like I feel like even though we are pro-labor, we can listen to the other side and understand some of their perspectives right?

They make it sound like, well, the autistic community's against ADA, you know, is a very big generic generalization. And that's something that really bugs me because that's that's not fair. You know, it should be clear that someone's opinion is just their opinion and that they're not speaking on behalf of your community because nobody can speak on behalf of the autistic community because we're all different, you know.

So I think that was a very good point you made there. And I don't know where I was going, but I needed to say that.

Armando Bernal

00:18:29:11 - 00:18:48:08

But thank you. I appreciate that. And that's why I do many of these answers I've given you so far. I try to make sure I say this is my opinion, only this. It's not in representation of others that may be listening, but it's just significant to to point out that people it's okay to have different opinions as well.

It's okay to have these open conversations. But I think so often these days we're very quick to shut people down if we don't think the same way. But again, that's not how we grow. We have to listen to each other too, to really make a difference.

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Andrew Komarow

Yeah, I lean here anyway, so I see that you're involved with the Doug Flutie Foundation. Yeah. What made you want to get involved? And how did you get involved?

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Armando Bernal

Yeah, it's. It's pretty cool. It's just. It's rather easier to. So I'm actually, like, I'm so very excited

about it that they wanted me to be a part of a I got involved because of the amazing work that they are doing for, again, autism awareness, autism acceptance. And it's such a significant and incredible organization. And for them to even consider me to be a part of something like that, that was a real honor for me.

I got involved after learning more about them from some friends of mine that are also Flutie fellows. As well. And and because of their excitement for the program, as well as their motivation, I really wanted to be a part of this. And so this is, again, rather recent. But since being a part of them, my goal really is just to try and support as much information as they can to show people that there are exceptionally good people out there trying to do amazing things for autistic individuals, much like you and Eileen here are trying to bring awareness.

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Armando Bernal

And it's the same thing for the Doug Flutie Foundation is that through their efforts, there has been a significant change, again, in my opinion, of how autism is viewed. And again, you look back 20 years ago and there was a greater idea of victimization, I call it, for autistic individuals in the sense that they can't do anything for themselves, so they can't feed themselves or they can't do other aspects that general individuals can do.

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Armando Bernal

But now there's a increasing change toward now they are able to do anything that they put their mind to that they that, yes, the autism diagnosis can possibly become an obstacle for some, but do support from their families, their guardians. They're professionals. They're able to accomplish things that maybe six months a year ago their parents never thought would be possible.

00:21:13:14 - 00:21:20:13

Armando Bernal

So organizations like Doug Flutie, to answer your question, are phenomenal, and I'm quite honored to be a part of their organization.

00:21:20:22 - 00:21:30:19

Eileen Lamb

Can you tell us what struggles you have with being a business owner and, you know, being employees? What are some of the struggles that you encounter?

00:21:31:20 - 00:22:04:22

Armando Bernal

It's it's not getting any sleep. It's being a small business owner and hoping that I'm making the right decisions each and every day. And I have obviously, I have the diagnosis of autism, also of anxiety, and I'm on medication for it and helps quite a bit. But it's the idea that I want to do what's best, obviously, for the patients that we're serving and the children that we're serving, but

also for therapists and our staff to make sure that they are taking care of it in any way that we possibly can.

00:22:04:23 - 00:22:26:11

Armando Bernal

Right. To the extent of what a business is able to do. So my biggest concern currently is, again, am I making the right choice? And I feel like both of you guys are able to take that into consideration as well, where it's I'm just doing what I think is right and I hope it is, but I won't know until, you know, maybe a day or week a month later or a year later.

00:22:27:06 - 00:23:00:14

Armando Bernal

And it's the idea that I have to keep making these kind of decisions. And for me, it's it's making sure that my my employees are happy, that they have an excellent work life balance and really, am I listening to their goals for their life. And a lot of my employees will will understand that when I say it where I want each person that we hire, that we work with to tell me what their ambitions are, and I will do my very best to try and support them in any way possible.

00:23:00:14 - 00:23:27:23

Armando Bernal

And I always jokingly tell them I'm a little biased, but I hope, you know, your ambition is to be a PCV, but it's also if you want speech therapy, if you want occupational therapy, any real sector of any kind of area department that you want to be on, how can I support you through that? And looking at my employees, not as employees, but rather as partners in the sense of they are literally what makes my entire company is very significant to me.

00:23:28:07 - 00:23:46:22

Armando Bernal

And in addition, I could not do this without having my sister to support me, who she handles the administrative side of things. So I again jokingly tell her that she does all the boring paperwork and I get to play with the Legos. So it's a win win. But being able to have someone such as that in my life is a real honor.

00:23:46:22 - 00:23:52:01

Armando Bernal

It's a joy. And I truly could not do this without her as well as the rest of the people I work with.

00:23:52:08 - 00:24:17:03

Andrew Komarow

No, that's that's awesome. Yeah. It's funny, too, because, you know, when you know, somebody has strengths or weaknesses, you know, I remember there was someone I was talking to and, you know, their son was on track to be, you know, mathematical professor, but, you know, doesn't like clean his room or like, you know, I'm like, well, I mean, do mathematical professors

make enough to hire somebody to clean their room for, you know, like that?

00:24:17:05 - 00:24:34:21

Andrew Komarow

So, I mean, you know what? But it's okay. Why is it okay? And so I understand for a business owner to have help, what the stuff they don't like to do, like paperwork, right. And have employees. But, you know, so I always think the more people can focus on doing what they like to do and what they're good at, the better.

00:24:35:02 - 00:24:36:00

Andrew Komarow

So yeah.

00:24:36:00 - 00:24:51:21

Armando Bernal

And you get people that enjoy their time at work and I mean, and reality is right that a lot of full time is 40 hours. That is a long time to be away from your family. That is a long time to be away from your home for your from your dog, from your cat, your bird, whatever it is.

00:24:52:05 - 00:25:21:09

Armando Bernal

And it's significant to me as a practitioner myself, as well as somebody that's just trying to do some good for these kids to make work or at least a little enjoyable and not seem like work. Right. And just have that ability to enjoy it a bit more. And if I can have them enjoy it a bit more by just listening to them by saying, I hear you and I understand what your goals are, let me help you and let me look and see what I can do.

00:25:21:18 - 00:25:26:08

Armando Bernal

Like that's a really good day in my opinion.

00:25:26:08 - 00:25:47:16

Andrew Komarow

So and by the way, I would say, I don't know, business owners who only work 40 hours a week, it's the employees who get that. But I used to always say, I don't get any vacation days. Why should you get vacation? So mentorship also seems a big part of your work. Can you talk a little bit more about that?

00:25:48:03 - 00:26:13:18

Armando Bernal

Yeah, it's the idea to right that individuals that are in this field, yeah, it's it's great that they're in it. They're making a change. I try to do a change. I'm doing things like this podcast to try and better support that idea. But it's significant to prepare the next generation of behavior analysts. It's

significant to prepare the next generation of speech therapists, occupational therapists, and also try and have this idea that we can grow and learn from one another.

00:26:14:20 - 00:26:38:22

Armando Bernal

It's by no means do I sit here or do I go to work and say, Oh, I know everything in the world. You have to listen. In my opinion, it is 100% needs to be a continual conversation from one another. It's if I am an owner of a company currently right at once. Upon a time I was a guy just interviewing at a job at another company trying to make my way.

00:26:39:06 - 00:26:57:02

Armando Bernal

And at some point in time, maybe the person that was interviewing me, maybe they want to come and work for my company, right? It's about learning from one another. It's about learning that we are only going to be as good as we can be if we remain open minded. And we talked briefly about that earlier in this in this conversation.

00:26:57:12 - 00:27:15:15

Armando Bernal

And it's just really trying to make sure that we can do as much as possible to promote that kind of growth that can then trickle down to the patients that we're serving and just keep the good times going.

00:27:15:15 - 00:27:30:03

Eileen Lamb

So what would be your best piece of advice to families of young people on the autism spectrum, like if their child has just been diagnosed, what's the best advice you can give them?

00:27:30:20 - 00:27:58:24

Armando Bernal

Sure. It's there's a lot that goes into that. Right. And you're you're bringing up a scenario that for a lot of parents, guardians is heartbreaking. It is terrifying. It is concerning. And just like my mother who expressed all of this to me, that all of these things that just kind of seemed like the lights went out, that is just there was no kind of future for me.

00:27:59:12 - 00:28:19:18

Armando Bernal

She was able to pick herself up and say, okay, that's enough. Now we need to figure out a plan. Right? And so for these parents that are getting this diagnosis, I like to tell them to continue to support your child that despite any kind of diagnosis that a doctor throws at you, your child, you're going to know your child best.

00:28:20:01 - 00:28:42:21

Armando Bernal

You're going to know what they need. And truly, the more that you believe that your child can accomplish certain things, the more likely they will be able to. And again, I say that over and over where it's I wasn't speaking and my mother said, no, we're going to work through this together, you and me, you know, Armando and me, Mom.

00:28:42:21 - 00:29:07:12

Armando Bernal

And because of my mother, my sister, my father, I'm at a point where I like to think I'm successful. But again, if it wasn't for them, I don't think I could call myself that. And it's truly the parents, the guardians, the professionals that 100% believe in their heart, that that that this child, this certain child can do something with their life.

00:29:08:08 - 00:29:10:02

Speaker 3

That's where we see the most success.

00:29:10:10 - 00:29:26:19

Andrew Komarow

Good to hear. And so you worked for several universities as well, right? Talk a little bit about college. Any advice to those on the spectrum? College journey and a little bit about what you do with maybe some universities as well?

00:29:27:01 - 00:29:48:23

Armando Bernal

Yeah, no, that's all really good. I appreciate you mentioning all of that. It's for me and again, I'm very transparent in these kind of conversations where I was ashamed of my diagnosis for quite some time up until college. And again, it had more to do probably with the time period that it wasn't a big topic to speak on, that people spoke about their their mental diagnoses and all that.

00:29:49:20 - 00:30:13:11

Armando Bernal

But once I got out of college, I realized how significant it could have been to be more accepting of it. And so for those in college or seeking college, right, number one, if you believe it, go for it. Right. The worst that could happen is that it just wasn't for you. And that's okay, too, right? It's about finding your calling and look for structure.

00:30:13:11 - 00:30:33:10

Armando Bernal

Look to self advocate and make sure that you self advocate because it can be nerve wracking to try and do that for yourself. It's a lot easier said than done, but if you do start to self advocate for yourself, you can see such significant changes in support systems that I don't know that a lot of people know are out there.

Even some parents that I speak to at a younger age and I tell a lot about the resources that are out there. They're just so shocked by everything that could possibly occur for their child. So I would really recommend regarding the college journey, regarding my time now working with the university. So it's a lot much like this where I do presentations, I do self advocacy presentations, I do panels where I get the conversations of, you know, how could you be both autistic as well as VBA?

Or it's, you know, I can do the opposite. Oh, you're such an inspiration. Tell me more about living with your autism. And what was that like? Right? And usually there is here and there, the stereotypical about you don't look autistic kind of comment. I always suggest and I mean I suggest I always mention that what you see is not a brand new diagnose, you know, autistic child.

00:31:25:10 - 00:31:46:04

Armando Bernal

It is 30 years of work where I went through aggression, self-injury, tantrums, and I had to overcome these things. And for you to not judge a book by its cover as an individual. Right, and to look as is at this autistic individual and see what they want you to see or what I want you to see and know that there may be a completely different story behind that quote unquote mask.

00:31:46:04 - 00:32:18:04

Armando Bernal

If you bring up masking and other kind of podcasts and and understand that there needs to be more work done for less. So I believe about awareness and more so about acceptance at this point in time and through these universities that you mentioned. That's that's what I do is is to try and promote the idea that we need to be more accepting of each other's private life, if you will, and know that each person is really just trying to do the best they can.

00:32:18:16 - 00:32:30:01

Eileen Lamb

In 50 years from now. What would you like the words of autism Advocacy to look like? I feel like you almost answered that question in your previous answer, but go for it.

00:32:30:06 - 00:32:56:10

Armando Bernal

Well, if I was fit, I'd be like 80. So gosh, that's a wow. What I want to see for yourself advocacy, right, is the idea that, yes, there is, you know, some accommodations that come with the diagnosis of autism, but for somebody to not be turned away just because they have autism and obviously there's there's laws and things that prevent that.

00:32:56:13 - 00:33:24:12

Armando Bernal

Right. But there's always much connotation that it is a lot more work to hire someone with autism than not. And that's prevented me from getting some jobs that I had applied for in the past. So what I would really like to see is this idea that somebody says that they have this diagnosis and a company or friends or support system just say, okay, thanks for telling me, how can I support that?

00:33:24:13 - 00:33:49:17

Armando Bernal

How can I support you? And it just being a way of working together in that sense, if that makes sense. I hope it does. And really trying to promote the idea that there shouldn't be a means of competition with one another, there's always this rat race of, Well, I'm better than this person, I'm better than this person. But instead moving toward this person is struggling with X, Y, Z.

00:33:49:17 - 00:34:20:17

Armando Bernal

How can I support them and how can I help them? And having that kind of give and take where if you have one person with something they're struggling with, odds are you have something you're struggling with and that person has a strength in their that they'll help you in turn as well. So advocacy for me is really this idea that I can say that there is something that I need help in and I am aware of it, but I want to learn from it and I want to grow from this and become better.

00:34:21:09 - 00:34:51:08

Armando Bernal

And I think we're getting there each year, I'll say a year just for the sake of time and each year because we got 50 years each year. But it's also there's a lot more work that needs to be done. But it's because of podcasts like this, it's because of companies. You mentioned nonprofits that are bringing more awareness toward and acceptance of autism and the abilities that those with autism can do that We're seeing realistic change each and every year.

00:34:51:08 - 00:35:08:13

Andrew Komarow

Yeah, I mean, I even argue, you know, ideally just one step further, right, where a company is just inclusive so it doesn't to the point where it doesn't matter what somebody says, right. Like every employee needs something that will make them happier so they can do a job better. Like why wouldn't you want them to have it right?

00:35:08:13 - 00:35:35:10

Andrew Komarow

You know, or I think we're a long ways from that. But it definitely is the the dream. So do you and do you have any again, just recommendations on how employers can change their recruitment or interview process to be more inclusive and how many? And also just the separate question, how many employees you have and do you know what percent are Neurodivergent.

00:35:37:06 - 00:36:08:14

Andrew Komarow

So those are both good questions. So I'll start off with like the ideas of what a business can do. And I think for the businesses, right, it is the idea of listening and I for it to be more of a it's not pop culture, but current events. That's the word for a current events sector. You're seeing that more and more the news that people are starting to listen to their workers or their employees and you see several different strikes that are currently going on, the writers strike, the actors strike, and just recently it is supposedly going to be done.

00:36:08:14 - 00:36:43:08

Armando Bernal

So this strike, because a deal has been made that was acceptable. Right. And it's this idea that employers need to listen to their employees and that it needs to be quick in response. Right. It's not the idea of, well, let's do a yearly survey and see how people are doing right. It's having, you know, these kind of anonymous surveys that people are willing to input whenever they feel like and that and the do not be scared of that kind of thing, having quarterly updates or quarterly meetings of all different departments, all different individuals that can really support the idea of change.

00:36:43:08 - 00:37:08:10

Armando Bernal

Right. So for your business question, I believe that the best thing that an employer can do is listen, we've been listening to our employees since our inception and we have made a lot of mistakes, admittedly again. But I mean, what company has it? But it's it's not the mistakes that are the issue. It's when you make the mistakes and you refuse to change and blame others for the mistake.

00:37:08:22 - 00:37:32:16

Armando Bernal

So we look at our mistakes and we say we can be better, we can do better, and doing our very best to complete that. That action. Regarding your other portion of the question, where it's how many employees I have, right. It's where we're small. We're currently at 16. But if you look at us, even a month ago, we weren't at that number.

00:37:32:16 - 00:38:07:05

Armando Bernal

We're continually growing. And it's it's because of wonderful people that believe in our mission, that believe in our values. I believe that we are making a change, that we when we say that we are providing a better form of ABA, a self advocacy inspired ABA or transparent ABA is we mean it and we want to continue to grow that slowly, conservatively, to a point so we can maintain the quality that we are currently providing.

00:38:07:05 - 00:38:14:08

Andrew Komarow

That's great. I think. I mean, I think that's a pretty good amount of employees too. So I mean, definitely not small.

00:38:14:15 - 00:38:18:16

Armando Bernal

So appreciate that.

00:38:18:16 - 00:38:35:11

Eileen Lamb

And that was it for our questions. I'm going to ask you a few more questions. First, where can people find you on social media, if anywhere, anything you want to promote, like self-promotion? That was well done.

00:38:35:21 - 00:39:08:11

Armando Bernal

Yeah, absolutely. So if anybody has questions, concern, questions or ideas or really want to learn more about our company, they can find us at at Autism I Intel on Facebook, Instagram as well as autism I Entercom and that's also where they can find some of our other resources any kind of provisions that we have. Unfortunately, we're currently only serving the Houston area, but we do consultation really throughout the world at this point.

00:39:08:11 - 00:39:29:24

Armando Bernal

We work with other countries, the United Kingdom, we've done Guam, Pakistan, South Africa and really again, the mission here of why we're called Autism International Consulting is because we want to help. There are many people that don't have resources like we do in Texas and other areas. And so we want to help support as many people as we can.

00:39:30:23 - 00:39:50:18

Armando Bernal

And again, I'm thankful for the time here. I'm thankful for the Doug Flutie Foundation. I'm thankful for a number of organizations that I'm a part of and that I try to make some kind of change that can really help promote. So, again, you know, please feel free to say hi to me at autism. I thank you.

00:39:52:08 - 00:40:00:21

Eileen Lamb

Awesome. And to finish this, I'm going to ask you some quickfire questions. Are you ready?

00:40:01:02 - 00:40:02:17

Armando Bernal

Okay, ready.

00:40:04:02 - 00:40:05:10

Eileen Lamb

Favorite animal.

00:40:06:01 - 00:40:09:03

Armando Bernal

Ooh, giraffe.

00:40:09:03 - 00:40:12:00

Eileen Lamb

What do you think of the word moist?

00:40:13:19 - 00:40:14:16

Armando Bernal

Please don't say it again.

00:40:15:23 - 00:40:29:10

Eileen Lamb

It's agreed and wrote. Andrew always sneaks in a quickfire question that he knows I'm going to cringe at. Favorite movie.

00:40:30:06 - 00:40:30:24

Armando Bernal

Interstellar.

00:40:33:10 - 00:40:35:01

Eileen Lamb

Favorite pizza topping.

00:40:36:03 - 00:40:40:02

Armando Bernal

Oh, tons of pepperoni. I guess I'm the double pepperoni kind of person.

00:40:41:24 - 00:40:45:07

Eileen Lamb

And favorite musical instrument.

00:40:46:05 - 00:40:51:09

Armando Bernal

Oh, that's cool. I'm going to say trombone because I used to play trombone as a child.

00:40:51:09 - 00:40:54:13

Eileen Lamb

I wasn't expected that, but that's about it.

00:40:54:24 - 00:40:55:19

Armando Bernal

Yeah. Thanks.

00:40:55:23 - 00:40:57:18

Andrew Komarow

What instrument were you expecting?

00:40:57:18 - 00:41:07:17

Eileen Lamb

I played something like guitar or piano. I feel like if the person is not a musician, they are going to say something more mainstream, you know? But you know. And we did end the same.

00:41:08:00 - 00:41:19:05

Armando Bernal

Yeah, they had no one really knows that. I played in elementary school. My high school didn't have a band like that. But yeah, I miss it. And you're not. You're the second person this week to ask me that. So that's funny.

00:41:20:07 - 00:41:22:05

Eileen Lamb

That is really random.

00:41:22:11 - 00:41:25:05

Armando Bernal

Yeah, it is.

00:41:25:05 - 00:41:33:18

Well, thank you so much for joining us today. I really enjoyed sharing with you and making another great argument in favor of ABA therapy.

00:41:34:14 - 00:41:39:20

Speaker 3

It is an absolute honor to be with each of you. Thank you so much for your time and thank you, everyone, for listening.

00:41:40:08 - 00:41:40:23

Speaker 2
Thank you.

00:41:41:15 - 00:41:43:11
Speaker 1
Thank you. I a good one.

00:41:44:02 - 00:41:44:11
Speaker 2
Make.