

Adulting on the Spectrum: Adult diagnosis, autistic resumes and financial inclusion

Andrew: Welcome to Adulting on the Spectrum, I am Andrew Komarow, an autistic certified financial planner. I co-run Adulting on the Spectrum Facebook group with my host, Eileen Lamb.

Eileen: Hey Andrew, hey everyone, and his podcast, we really want to highlight real voices of autistic adults and not just inspirational stories that you see on social media, which are really good. But we want to talk about the day to day life of autistic people. And basically, we just want to talk to people like us and like you to today our guest is Tara, and I'm going to let Andrew introduce her.

Andrew: Tara Cunningham is the CEO of Beyond Impact, a Ashoka fellow, an internationally recognized, award winning neuro divergent CEO and social entrepreneur working for people with disabilities. If you don't know who she is, you'll know her work. In 2017, she began working as CEO of Specialisterne, where she helped major companies launch their autism at work initiatives. Thank you for coming today, Tara.

Tara: You're very welcome. Thanks for asking me to come on.

Eileen: Hey Tara, thanks for being here. We start our podcast by asking this question to everyone because we think it's important. You know, there are differences in how autistic people like to identify a person-first language, identity-first. So, what do you prefer and also, do you have any pronoun preferences?

Tara: Thank you for that. I don't walk around with a big sign that says, hi, my name is Tara and I have autism. I spent my life with depression and anxiety and was only diagnosed with autism by my autistic peers when I started doing the autism at work, work, which was then certified by my psychiatrist and counselors who were like, yeah. My husband was also like, yeah, but you're not going to use that as an excuse either. So, what do I like to be called? I don't care if it's an autistic person, woman with autism, person with a disability. It doesn't actually matter to me. Disability without context is truly meaningless. So, and I really believe, and I say this all the time and it gets me in trouble if we're having a conversation about what to call it, what to call me, we are having the absolute wrong conversation. My pronouns are she, her and hers, and thank you for taking that into consideration.

Andrew: So, we want to ask what is a question that you don't get asked often enough that you wish people would ask of you. You're a wealth of information and knowledge. What do you wish people would ask?

Tara: How do we stop disability being the first thing that is categorized for students when they're in the in the system. I was diagnosed when I was forty-five, I'm forty-six now. I know I don't look a day of it, haha. But if I was seven and I had an autistic label, I would have spent my entire education learning about the things that I can't do. My parents would be to be told what I was not going to be able to achieve. I would have to convince people that I could drive. All of these things. Happened because of a label, and I believe that if schools took each

individual student disabled or not at their face value, what is their strength, what are their passions, what are the skills? What is going to make that student have a meaningful life? We would not have a tenth of the problems we have today.

Eileen: Go for it Andrew.

Andrew: No so in short, just assume competence.

Tara: Of course, always assume competence. The most infuriating thing is if you watch them, here's a really ridiculous fact, in malls children get kidnapped all the time. You know, the easiest way to kidnap a child is to drug them up, stick them in a wheelchair and wheel them out of the mall in plain sight. We've all been told, don't stare at the wheelchair, don't stare at the person in the wheelchair. And because we are told to avoid disability, don't look, don't look, don't stare. Kids get kidnapped. Now, if you're in a wheelchair, the person who's pushing your wheelchair will be the person who has the questions directed to them, not the person in the wheelchair. These are ridiculous stereotypes that if you have something that's missing or that's not normal, that they're you're incapable of being able to be productive or useful or answer a simple question of which ice cream would you like? It's quite extraordinary. So back to what you said. Assume competence. People really need to start doing that. People need to stop being afraid of disability. They need to stop being afraid of autism. There's nothing to be afraid of. And unfortunately, there was this movement in the beginning. It was this oh, an epidemic. And all these terrible words were used when it was just finally being identified that people think neurologically different. And that's all it is. And if we can harvest and harness that talent of that different way of looking at things, then we are able to progress as a society. Right now, people that have critical thinking skills are lacking in an enormous way. The best critical thinkers I have ever met are autistic, full stop. And so, you know, I, I could talk about this all day, but if you go into a bank and you see a kid flapping. Security might come by and tell you to bring them outside, he's making the customers a bit uncomfortable, like, are you kidding me? But that happens all the time. My 15-year-old son is a white male. He walks into a bank. The branch manager is on him like white on rice because they see white male money. If my kid had Down syndrome, he'd be handed a lollipop. These are both people that have absolute ability to make money, deposit money, invest money and become very wealthy just because there is a label and they're not acting like the person in the front before them does not count, does not mean that they are unable. Unfortunately, disability just automatically means not able. You're autistic. You get. I was forty-five. You're not autistic. Give me a break. You know. How are you so successful? You're autistic like you're not autistic. Autistic people are x, y, z. You know, like God forbid you're able to get out of bed and walk and have a decent conversation and have a disability. It's crazy, you know, society is really weak.

Eileen: I totally get that, I love your answer. It reminds me of that quote from Albert Einstein, if you judge a fish by its inability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing it's stupid. And it is so true. Like we have these assessments for my kids and my oldest especially was level three autistic and is always in the first percentile for everything. But there are also things you can do that society is not looking at. It's all about fitting in the boxes and assessing what is supposed to be doing. Anyway, I know you just touched on that subject, but I was diagnosed in my mid 20s to so late diagnosis. When did you realize you were autistic? I know you mentioned that autistic people told you, which is pretty cool. But tell us more about this.

Tara: Oh, I'm going to throw him under the bus is what I'm going to do. So I was at the Autism at Work summit, 2018 at Microsoft, three day summit. And Scott Robinson, who is at the Office of Disability Employment Policy, ODEP. He was also the co-founder of ASAN. Brilliant guy. I was talking with him a couple of times with other people. And the third day he said, You've never said that you're autistic. Like, why not? And I'm like, Oh, I'm not autistic. And he's like, Oh, you're autistic. And I was like, you know, really? And he said, I remember two days ago you were sitting over there and you got up and moved - why? And I was like, oh, there was a sound. It was driving me freaking crazy. I couldn't listen to the woman. And he's like and he said very much the number of times where I was talking to people. And I was completely focused on the person I was talking to, as opposed to mingling and doing what you're supposed to do at a few other things. And so every event that I went to that Scott was at he's like, did you get diagnosed yet? You know, and it would start this whole conversation again. My whole office, that Specialisterne was cracking up. They're like, of course you are. You know, it was it was it was really funny, my brother and sister. No, not true. Not true or not autistic. I was really proud. My parents flew the autism flag. They literally, my father bought an autism flag and flew it. So, I was really happy.

Andrew: Was it the infinity symbol or was it puzzle pieces?

Tara: They bought the puzzle pieces. So, I didn't I didn't yell at them like they were. They were trying to be supportive and they didn't know the intricacies of all of that. But they equate autism with the puzzle piece, and which is considering their daughter has worked in disability for twenty years. And that's all I ever talk about. They still do that. It's what is in the popular communities. It's what people think and see and it's what they feel. It's on cars. And it's like if we could just find the... So I try to look at the puzzle piece instead of it being a negative that needs to disappear. Especially like my parents they're darling. I was so happy they did that like but it's going back to what I said originally. You know how we are all about. If there a person is a disability, has a disability, it's about what they can't do. And so, if people use the puzzle piece to figure out what's the thing they can do, if that's an easy visual for people to fix their mental state about what they think autism is, there's no harm in that. You know, would I prefer that it never existed? Yes, big fat emphatic, yes. But it's there. It's in the popular domain. It's not going to change overnight. And so, we should take it as positively as we can. I don't think there's menace in it. I think it's just what the community sees. If you're not involved in this space or you are involved in this space, you have or have not an opinion on these things. And for the vast majority of the world, there is no opinion. It's like, oh, it's the flag, OK, you know, so I think people, again, should spend more time figuring out how to make us all come together instead of coming up with things to fight over.

Eileen: Couldn't agree more with this, especially as its Autism Awareness Month and social media is already so crazy. Like, you know, whether you light it up blue, red, puzzle piece, infinity loop, person-first, identity-first. I mean, it turns into a huge thing when in the end, we just, we want the same thing. You know, we want autistics to get more rights and more job opportunities to be seen as equal to be loved. And yet you go on social media and it's just this war that happens everywhere and all the time. And it's just like so tiring. I just wish we could.

Andrew: I made a post this morning for April 1st and it was encouraging everyone and if you if neither of you saw it, well, then you should. But it was everyone this month try to have a conversation with somebody who you disagree with. Right. No matter like because, you know, just listen, you don't have to agree, but that doesn't mean you shouldn't be able to have a conversation with somebody and understand where they're coming from.

Eileen: Yeah.

Tara: Um, yeah. So I will tell you, from my experience at the corporate table, a lot of corporations won't even think about doing autism at work for the fear they do one step wrong and there will be a Twitter storm against them.

Eileen: Right, of course.

Tara: How is that kind of mentality on the side of autistic people using Twitter to attack people who are trying their best. It is destroying the ability for everybody to come on in. If you're a small, medium enterprise, you have two hundred people employed and you want to hire a few autistic kids in your community and you're like, OK, what do I need to do? And people jump on Twitter and then they just see all this infighting. And then somebody, a big company announces an initiative and there's 80 people fighting like, oh, this is bull, blah, blah, blah, yada, yada, yada. Negative, negative, negative. Are you going to open up that door? Absolutely not. And so we've got to start putting manners on ourselves in the Twitter universe. I hope I don't get destroyed for this, but you can't be attacking organizations and people that are trying to move the conversation forward. If you do, we are going to be stuck in Rainman forever. And that is the God's honest truth. So you can either listen to me who was told that we can't start this program because of and I could name quite a few people or we're going to try to do this. How do we minimize the negative volume? That's the other question.

Andrew: So CEOs, again, that's what you did. You spoke to them. Right. That's what your job was.

Tara: I didn't work with CEOs.

Andrew: OK, but the big companies, you wanted them to write you the big checks. Right? To consult and do this. And it was the people on Twitter that they were just afraid of the backlash that even though they knew this would be good money for them, you know, that, you know, it just wasn't worth it.

Tara: it's a risk. So, it's not the companies themselves, but there is a whole department in corporations that do risk assessment. And every time a new initiative comes in, risk comes in the door. Risk and compliance and risk throws up tons of red flags because of these micro fights that we have in the Twitter verse. And that's where it dies. You can have CEOs that want to do this. You can have teams that want to do this. You can have extremely passionate individuals that have used all their social capital to get this thing started, only to have risk go: No way! Like we have to have an autistic person running this from the beginning. We need to have this slew of things where every other initiative is like, great, we're getting a step in. Let's get that first step and then we'll take our second step and our third step. If we don't start off at perfect, whose degree of perfect I have no idea because there's no agreement on what perfect

it. But if we don't start perfect, we're going to get destroyed. And so, if you want to enhance bringing people with disabilities, bringing autistic people into the workforce, we have to do a better job at exactly what you just said, Andrew, having conversations, saying congratulations X company, that you're starting to do this if you want to hear an opinion from an autistic person, DM me. That would be enormously helpful. That would actually move the bar, not who do these people think they are? Blah, blah, blah, that just shoots everybody in the foot.

Andrew: For the record, I've done that. And people are, I mean, some people are assholes. They will always be assholes. That's OK. But I find more often than not, they just don't know, and people want to learn. So, like a great example of, you know, is there was a there was something on LinkedIn, the Financial Planning Association was saying, you know, diversity, inclusion initiatives. So, I said, well, what about diversity, inclusion initiatives? And I'm going to admit I wasn't having a great morning. I think I was being a little more trolly than encouraging, although it didn't come out mean. And they said, you know what, you're right. You're right here. Come talk to us Thursday. We want to we want to include in nuerodiversity we didn't even know about until you mentioned it. So, like, you know, but if they're so open now, not everyone is that way. But it's the nice people. If I was mean to that person from the beginning, right. Then it never would have happened.

Tara: One hundred percent. You could not be more correct right now. And to be honest, those are the people that I get employed, the people that are helpful in these in these places. Like nobody wants to hire somebody whose entire existence is to show what's wrong. I mean, and in fairness, now, let's think about this. Their entire life, they've been told what's wrong. So, they're only acting as they have been acted upon.

Andrew: So I'm going to flip. I'm going to flip that around for you. What do you see people doing right, especially with hiring autistic adults or what could we be doing better? That is the first win or both.

Tara: Oh, so the first step is, sorry I have to turn on the light. The first thing and the most important thing is autistic resumes are horrible. Horrible. We do an entire two hours and it's almost I called it almost like, where's Waldo? Remember where you tried to find the guy with the red and white shirt inside this massive town? We would take out resumes. We would take out all the describing information so nobody would know who these individuals are. But they were all autistic people that were placed in employment. OK, and we give them out to the hiring managers who will be working with us, HR, the talent acquisition, the hiring managers and then the managers' managers. And we hand out six of these resumes to everybody and we say, would you hire them? Now, they don't know that these have been successfully hired individuals and they go, no, there's nothing in here, why would I hire them? And so we would teach them. How do you find the nuggets inside of a resume? So, tutoring means you're able to share knowledge. That's enormous. Put it on your resume. If there is if you've graduated with computer science, I get this all the time. There's people with three point eighty five GPA degrees in computer science and their resume has no languages, not python, not HTML, nothing. The autistic person assumes that the person looking at the resume will know that they know languages because they got a three point eighty-five. That's not true. And furthermore, algorithms, these companies are getting millions of applications every single year, like 20 million resumes a year that they have to process. They need algorithms. If you don't write Python, C++, I speak French, Spanish, Greek and Latin. If you don't write that down, it is going to be missed in the algorithm. You will not get that first call. You will not. So, if you've been in

sports, if you've been, if you helped manage a sports team, if you are a Boy Scout, Eagle Scouts, these things are enormous. Put them on your resume. They show that you're able to work in a team. They show that you're able to bring along a project from start to finish. They show that you're you have an ability to do more than what your degree says. And that is important. And so, if I had a magic wand to fix something right away, it would be that autistic people write a resume that an algorithm could actually pick up. And I just want to say something really quick, because I just want to. At Specialisterne, we had, or they still do have the largest database of autistic people in the world. And only a quarter of them are computer science. A quarter of them are STEM, the rest of the people are liberal arts, language, art, graphic designers, but that's the majority. Yet still, it's always, oh, my kids autistic. He's going to be great at math or my kid's autistic, he's going to be a coder. But your kid may be able to speak 12 languages if you bloody well let him get a shot at it instead of forcing him to play with Legos and making him do math. So, it's, again, these stereotypes that we pigeonhole disability into, it has to stop. And the lovely thing about the Autism at Work programs, is it I used to say I can't do it anymore, but I used to say it spreads like a virus. Now, you never will do that anymore because after pandemic. But what happens is the managers and the teams start gelling so well together, they become the most productive teams. They're the ones that people get promoted out of there. And it's something that is infectious, and everybody wants a piece of it. So, it typically starts with that technology, but it's very softly starts getting integrated into the DNA of the organization because it's a good thing. And then people start looking at other disabilities as well. And they're like, I always talk about if you're labeled with a disability, it's food, flowers or filth. Those are the three places you're going to wind up. And that's disgraceful. These are analog old jobs that are going to be a thing of the past. We need to equip our students today with the technology and the resources so that they can participate in the jobs of today, in the future, if we keep keeping them in old mechanisms like learning how to do. It's crazy what people are doing, like needs to stop it. Absolutely. That kind of mentality needs to stop.

Eileen: I agree with you there, we tend to put autistic people in in boxes that autistic you're good at math and it's not true for everyone. Like, for instance, I'm terrible at math, but I'm good at languages. My first language is French, as everyone can probably hear. And we just need to be given the opportunity to choose what. And that's kind of what you were saying about how you grew up neurotypical. So really, you didn't have the experience of, oh, we're going to push you in that box because you have a label. And in a way, it's good to have the label for that for that reason, because everyone can set you up to the same expectations as everyone else. Right.

Tara: I try to think about how my life would have been different. I look back, I'm horrendous at math and I can't take, I'll come out on the record on this. My SAT score was a seven ninety, that basically means I wrote my name and I, but I was almost a straight A I was three point eighty five in my major and at three six five overall at Rutgers. But my S.A.T. score was horrendous because I can't choose between four things like multiple choice does not work for me. I want to argue, I just want to argue the point

[laughter]

When I was in college. I wanted to minor in psychology, but the tests are all multiple choice. So my first year test, I, I got a C and one and I failed the other and I was balling. I was crying so much and my abnormal psych teacher, I went over to like I get choose, I just get can't choose.

And he's like, all right, explain how you did how you came up with this one. And I explained why each one of the four were absolutely potentially the correct answer. And he was astonished. And he's like, all right, you can write your you could do essays tomorrow morning, 8:00 a.m. the TA will do it. And I was able to write essays for this guy. I love him, but my brain doesn't work like that. And like and so if I was labeled autistic, I would have probably had to spend all of my time learning how to pick one out of four, think what the hell good is that? You know, like so I just got lucky, really.

Andrew: So that leads really well into another question. And Eileen. You want you want to ask.

Eileen: Sure, yeah.

Andrew: I've been asking too much, so cut it out. Yeah, you ask number six. It leads really and well so do the part where that leads in. Well, so, you, OK. Shutting up now.

Eileen: You're telling me to ask the question and then asking it. That's very confusing. I don't get that social cue here, Andrew.

Andrew: There was no queue. I was literally telling you what to do. Continue. We should leave this, by the way. Not edit it.

Eileen: I guess. How did you get so passionate about helping others? What was the catalyst?

Tara: So, I was the director of online advertising for Ogilvy and Mather in Dublin, Ireland, and I volunteered with disadvantaged kids in the inner city and I enjoyed my time so much with the kids more than I cared about my work in advertising. And I have my boyfriend, who's now my husband, told me to use my powers of evil for good. And so, I started working as a fundraiser for Down syndrome Ireland. And in doing that, one of my old clients, Unilever, donated one hundred-thousand-euro worth of ice cream vouchers so that families of kids with Down syndrome would have ice cream parties. People would pay money for the ice cream that they had gotten for free, and that money would go to a center of excellence that would help provide services that were much needed. Because the Irish system is, you know in America we all complain all the time. We've got a sturdy little Ford and might have a lot of rust on it, but we can get from A to B. In Ireland and most of the rest of the world, we have a wheelbarrow with no wheel to get from A to B. So, I didn't know that, I didn't talk to a single kid with Down syndrome, not a single parent of a kid with Down's Syndrome, not an adult with Down's syndrome. I was told this is a brilliant idea. Everyone's going to love it. Blah, blah, blah six weeks in I go into my very first meeting, I explain what we're going to do. And a guy stands up in the back of the room and says, if I sell your ice cream, will, my seven-year olds get speech and language therapy. And I said, absolutely, we'll have this center of excellence ten years from now. And he cut me off and he said, ten years is too late for my little boy, F you and F your ice cream. And he walked out the door and I was like, oh, my God, what is going on here? And thankfully, Ogilvy nailed focus groups into us. So, I knew how to run a focus group. And I was, it's one of those days that you can have two paths. You could say that guy's a jerk. Let's move on or I'm trying to do something good here. Why is it being so poorly received? And that's the way I went and took it. And three different people said three different things. I and the first was that that guy's little seven-year-old was thrown out of mainstream school and into a special needs school with no services. He was being written off and I'm telling him to get ice

cream, OK? And ten years from now, it was completely written off. Number two, there weren't enough speech and language therapists in the country, there was only one school pumping them out and there was as many coming out from maternity leave as there were graduating. So, there was no speech and language therapy. One of the parents said, if I knew what to do, I do it myself. Another parent said, why don't we do groups? And the other said, Oh, well, you can't do groups because my little Billy can speak. But your Mary can't, so you can't do groups and the next day, I was just floored. So, the next day I was driving my husband eh boyfriend down to a place called, I can't remember what the heck, I have dyssomnia too. I can't remember names. I was bringing him down south in Ireland for a drive and I said, somebody's got to do something to help these kids. And he goes, Well, why don't you? And I was like, what the hell am I supposed to do? And he said, You're Tara J. Liston, figure it out. And I was like. And for the rest of the drive, I was quiet, and I was thinking about all these things and it was the running joke forever, was that it was such a drain on our finances. And me personally, like I nearly died because of this thing. And my husband always says it was worth it for those two hours of blissful quiet. But I wound up, I wound up inventing what became the first best practice and speech and language therapy where we trained parents how to become their child's primary speech therapist. And it worked for kids with autism, to kids with cerebral palsy and Down syndrome. All the groups liked me because we wouldn't allow for politics. Politics. If you, only ABA, only ABA, you don't want to come here because the group that your kid might wind up into won't be ABA, you know, so like leave your politics and all the things you know outside of this door, you could know them afterwards when you come in here. We're here to learn a number of skills that are going to help you, your child and the group that you're in. And so, it wound up we worked with over a thousand kids, over four hundred of which we're told they would never speak. Those parents probably look back on with fondness of the days where they couldn't because they don't shut up when they start talking. And a lot of my kids, they're grown now, and they've got jobs. My release kids, it was it was extraordinary. And it showed that if you focus on building skills that will work for the child and work for the family, you can move, you can go forward, you can progress. You can have people that are pro ABA and anti ABA in the same room and the earth will stop spinning. It's quite extraordinary. People love their children. They do their best for their children. They are looking for answers for their children. And the God's honest truth is there is no silver bullet. If there was, the person would have a Nobel Peace Prize and they'd have more money than Bill Gates or Bezos or whoever. It doesn't exist and it doesn't exist because every single person is an individual. You take disability without context and you're at nothing. So, everybody needs to just take it down a level. Think about what you are trying to do. Think about what your child's school or if you're a student, what you want. What is the meaningful life of the person with the disability? What will make them happy? And if it's folding shirts. Fantastic. If it's learning 12 language, fantastic. If it's cleaning houses, wonderful, if it's starting financial inclusion for people with disabilities because that's never been done before. Wonderful. Like what will make you happy and then as a parent and as that individual work towards that goal, that's what I do with my neurotypical kids. What will make you happy? What can I do to help you figure out what you want to do with your life when you have a disability? Everybody's figuring that out for you. And guess what? Nobody knows except for the individual. So, if we could just get down to the person and what they need to be successful, no matter what that word means to that individual, that's our job. And as a society, we need to support that individual in their journey. We need to stop putting up barriers, stop thinking about stereotypes. We need to just take everybody as they are at face value and try to help them achieve what they want to achieve in life.

Andrew: And from what you're saying and what you've been saying and correct me if I'm wrong and I know you will because we've spoken before. So, but that is, it seems like the people who are holding us back are us in a lot of ways. Right. We are holding ourselves back. But and we don't we're not seeing it. So.

Tara: And but everybody does that to themselves except the autistic population is very and this is because we're, that's what we are. We're black and white and it's yes or no. It's like, you know, in Stranger Things the upside down, like, you know, it's and it's the passion that the community has when they're when they may be shooting themselves in the foot. But that passion, if it was harnessed correctly, could literally change the world. So, like my advice would be, before you attack somebody for a belief or for trying something new or for doing something that didn't turn out to be what you thought it was going to be. Guess what? That's life, like nothing. You don't go from A to Z in a straight line. Life is like this. And so we have to forgive people for making mistakes, we have to forgive people for having thoughts in the past that they're making amends for now. If they're honest about making amends, we need to move on. We need to accept that. We could do so much the autistic population in this in this world, like. You know, some people say it's a deviation from the norm and it's a disability, and then others could look at it as the natural progression of the way brains are going to be in the future and maybe; which ones right? Who knows? There's no, nobody knows. So I prefer to think about it as. It just is. I am. This is who I am, take it or leave it. I'm doing my best move everything forward. I'm trying not to be horrible. I screw up all the time. I, all the time. I wish I had a dime for every time I screwed up because I would be loaded. But like, if you can admit you made a mistake, if you could dial it down a bit, we'll be able to get so much more done. We are powerful together. We need to be together.

Eileen: I think that's the big issue in the autism community. Autistic, is that we. All of the autistic people are not able to forgive companies, brands, people for their mistakes, you know, and we're all still learning things that were true 15 years ago. I mean, back in the days people, autistics liked saying person with autism better than autistic person. And now this has changed. And if you don't use the identity first language, then you get harassed on social media, you get insulted. Things are constantly changing. People are making mistakes. People are learning. And it seems like if a mistake was made, then the person or company, whatever, cannot be forgiven. And it's true that as autistic people, we have this black and white way of thinking. And I know that personally, that's something I'm trying so hard to to work on. It's like therapy is literally that thing for me is like, OK, so this person said that you don't agree with it. But you know what? Let's try to find a middle ground. You know, let's listen to that person. Even if you think that's ridiculous and it's something I've struggled with my entire life and I know it's a very autistic trait. And that's why I'm like, I feel like I'm in the gray area right now. I'm like the bridge between the neurotypical community and the autistic people. But it's, it's hard. And I really think that if we could let go of that black and white thinking, we could do so many great things on social media because people want to listen. But you if they hear one thing from one autistic person and the opposite from the other, then they're like, what is going on? But that's just because we're individual, you know, and we have different opinions and that's OK. But if we fight about it, then it's not, right.

Tara: Exactly. Like Stephen Shore's line, if you've met one autistic person, you've met one autistic person like it is, it's magnificent because you don't look at every...

Actually, people do. And that's why this world so screwed up. Everybody's got these like, this person is this color so that means this or this person is trans so that means this like. How about that's a person and they're in my world and how do they fit in my world and how can I become a better person because they're in my world? Full stop, like that's as much as we should care, if you look back and I'm a ridiculous liberal now, ridiculous like I am a lefty and I have pictures and I put them in my bathroom because it's a joke with Dick Cheney, me, Barbara Bush. I'll show them at the end. I'll go into my bathroom hall of Fame. I it's like they're a joke. And if you look back and use the words that I used 20 years ago when I was a Republican and I'm now this lefty liberal like person, am I supposed to be crucified because I used to think that the Republican Party was the right answer, that I believed in that platform? That was 20 years ago. That was a 20. Oh, my God, I'm so that was more than twenty-five years ago.

Eileen: Who's counting.

Tara: But like, if you use those, I mean, it's I'm the same person. But I changed. I realized that that wasn't me and this is who I am. And, you know, like people are allowed to make mistakes. People are allowed to grow and transform. And brands and companies and non-profits, they should they, should be allowed to do the same thing if. Like, I'm sorry for how I used to think, and I make up for it by how I behaved today and how I'm raising my kids, but like you take some of the old words. I mean, today me would hate yesterday me, but if I was running for office, I'd be destroyed by my old words.

Eileen: Andrew, that reminds me of the quote that you told me. Remember I asked you what's your favorite quote was ignorance.

Andrew: Oh, so Harlon's razor. I never attribute anything to malice that can be adequately explained by stupidity. Was it that one?

Eileen: I think that was ignorance, but I guess stupidity works, too.

Andrew: Yeah. Yeah. Same idea. Same idea. Right. But no, but it's true. So, Tara, I know this part's going to be really hard for you. It's called quickfire questions and I think you're going to take too long. So, I mean.

Tara: All right. All right. Give me give me a time. And I want to answer quick.

Andrew: Really quick, like one answer. And so, OK, fill in the blank. Your autism is...

Tara: Awesome.

Andrew: What is the best piece of advice you've ever been given?

Tara: Be careful who you know because it'll determine who you know. My daddy gave me that one.

Andrew: OK.

Eileen, you do you the rest.

Eileen: What would you like to do to relax?

Tara: Oh, God, I right now it's painting my kitchen. There's always, my relaxing is doing something. My kids ask me to just sit down. Just sit down. I can't.

Andrew: I was going to say like, what is relaxing?

Tara: I guess I really wish I could. I've got two different meditation apps. I try to do all sorts of, I can't relax, I just can. It's not in me.

Eileen: What's your favorite food?

Tara: Oh, my God, I'm going with lasagna, it's what I'm making on Saturday, on Sunday for Easter, my my grandmother's from Italy, so I've got the recipe that's passed down from generation. So I'm kind of like looking forward to that. So I'm going with lasagna, my grandma's lasagna.

Eileen: What's your favorite film, movie?

Tara: Forrest Gump. And here's another. I can't. Since Forrest Gump came out, the theme song of Forrest Gump. Dun dun dun dun. I have listened to it on repeat since nineteen ninety-four whenever I have to write a paper.

Andrew: But nobody thought you were autistic.

Tara: Like my kids here that playing and go don't go into her office if she's in work, where I physically cannot do work without listening to that song. Like real work, that movie is so, I'm a history nerd and it is historically accurate. It's like and I heard from Vietnam veterans that it was the first depiction of Vietnam that was even close to the truth. And I'm I'm a war historian, a twentieth century war historian. I am a super nerd when it comes to that kind of stuff. And so Forrest Gump was everything to me. Oh, and I love Elvis. So it even opened with that. It was just pure magic. Love it. Love it. Love it. Love it.

Eileen: Well, thanks for coming today, I was so great chatting with you, I feel like we touched on so many important points, you know, things that could make the autism and autistic communities so much better and united. And I hope that people who are listening are, you know, taking in what we're worth saying, even if they don't agree right now, you know, just take it in and think about it, because a lot of us, all we want is to come together. Even if we disagree, it's OK. And I think you really drove that point home. I think that's the expression, I'm going to go with that.

Andrew: And Tara, if you have a shameless plug, if there's something you're working on, we skipped over that question. But if you're working on something exciting, feel free to put it out there.

Tara: Thank you. I am working on the financial inclusion of people with disabilities. 60 percent of people with disabilities are considered low moderate income. And they are caught in a poverty trap, they're afraid about losing their SSI or Medicaid. Fear is stopping people from living there, their greatest life. And I believe that if people had access to finance, access to their own money, so the SSI goes into the person with disability's bank account that they no longer work for free. Oh, if I could, if I had a magic wand tomorrow to stop something, it would be to end Section 14C, sheltered workshops. Sub minimum wage needs to go. But people need to be paid a fair wage for the work that they're doing. I am sick of seeing kids at Target with Down syndrome, folding shirts, doing the work for free for experience, while Peggy over there is on her phone having a great chat, making 15 bucks an hour. So we need to make sure that every person with a disability has a bank account, understands finances, and that the families learn how to navigate SSI, that it's not the answer. It is a support. It is not. It's an entitlement. It is not a given. What is the best thing for your child? And if you're an adult or you're about to graduate and you're listening to this, don't settle for going to the day center. Don't settle for going to a place that you don't want. What do you want to do? And make sure the people around, you know what you want to do so that they can help support you. You might have spent an entire lifetime being told what you're going to do and be devoid of choice. It's your life. You have a choice. And so, figure out what that thing is and make sure that everyone around you is there to make sure that that is your future. It's your life. And don't forget that.

Eileen: That's such a great conclusion.

Andrew: That was great.

Tara: Thank you so much you, guys. This is awesome. I wish you the best of luck on this podcast. I hope there's hundreds of these.