



Transcript

Episode 38: The Self-Employment Journey for People Who Have a Disability

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Dean Askin 00:00

Dean, this is You Can't Spell Inclusion Without a D, the podcast that explores the power of inclusion in business, in employment, in education and in our communities, and why disability is an important part of the diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility. Conversation with your hosts, Amy Widdows and Dean Askin.

Dean Askin 00:28

Hello and thanks for joining us. Where does the time go? I mean, where does the podcast season go? First, it's April, and spring's finally in the air, and we're just kicking off our 2025 season. Now suddenly it's the middle of October. There's a fall chill in the air, and our sixth season is starting to wind down. This is episode 38 of You Can't Spell Inclusion Without a D. Hi there. I'm Dean Askin. Amy Widdows is away, so my colleague Jenny Hope — she's the Director of Development and Capacity Building on the ODEN team, and she's sitting in for Amy again at the other mic. Hello there. Jenny, great to have you back. I know you've always got a packed calendar, so I'm glad you could fit in this second guest co hosting gig. How are you doing?

Jenny Hope 01:15

Hi, Dean. I'm doing great. You know, I could get used to this. I had a lot of fun, co hosting episode 36 and just a reminder for everybody listening. If you haven't caught that episode yet, be sure to do that. We had a great conversation with Andrea D. Carter about psychological safety and belonging in workplaces.

Dean Askin 01:36

Yeah, that was two episodes back, and jeez, just a couple more episodes left, coming your way. Listeners, next month. But wait a minute, I'm getting ahead of myself here. Let's talk about this episode. You know, October is always a big month for us here on you can't spell inclusion without a D. That's

because October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month, or NDEAM, as it's known for short,

Jenny Hope 02:00

This month across Canada, end Dean campaigns are focusing on raising awareness about disability inclusive hiring, disability inclusion throughout the employment cycle, breaking down barriers to employment for people who have a disability, and creating a disability inclusive workplace and culture.

Dean Askin 02:18

That's right. Jenny, so every season, we like to tie our October episode to NDEAM. This episode, we're delving into an aspect of disability and employment that seems to be not talked about a whole lot in the conversation about disability and employment. We're exploring the self employment journey for people who have a disability,

Jenny Hope 02:38

And there isn't a lot of research or statistics about it, small businesses are the backbone of the economy in both the US and Canada. They make up 97.9% of all businesses in Canada and 99% in the US. But there aren't many statistics about how many small to medium businesses are owned by people who have a disability, whether they're employer owned SMBs, solopreneur ships or freelance businesses.

Dean Askin 03:05

And Jenny there isn't a lot of data on why people who have a disability go the self employment route. Now, the first ever national study on people who have a disability who are self employed was done 24 years ago. Why done way back in 2001 it was done in the US by the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation researchers, Research and Training Center on Rural rehabilitation services. In conjunction with the Rural Institute on Disabilities, an affiliate of Montana University,

Jenny Hope 03:40

The study found over 40% of respondents said they became entrepreneurs because they needed to create their own job. A similar number of respondents said they needed the flexible hours and working conditions of self employment as an accommodation.

Dean Askin 03:55

So how much has changed over the last 24 years since that 2001 study, are there unique challenges faced by people who have a disability, who opt for self employment, and what supports are out there compared to supports for traditional job seekers? Just some of the questions we're exploring with our two guests as they share their self employment journeys, experiences and perspectives with us in this episode.

Jenny Hope 04:21

Jeff Tiessen is a former three time medal win, winning Paralympian, a 2010, achiever, inductee into the Canadian disability Hall of Fame, a speaker and the founder and executive producer of disability today Publishing Group.

Dean Askin 04:36

It's been the leading source of information and content about Canada's disability community since 1990. Jeff joins us from Grimsby, Ontario, that's in the Greater Toronto, Hamilton Area.

Jenny Hope 04:48

Also joining us from out west in beautiful British Columbia is Margaux Wosk. Margaux is a self taught artist and designer with over 20 years of experience in resale and marketing. She creates and sells her own accessible, communicative and inclusive pins in Etsy and Shopify online shops.

Dean Askin 05:07

And Jenny her creations are also offered by over 40 independent retailers across North America, by the way. But there's more to Margaux's entrepreneurship. She also founded the made by Autistics marketplace and the Made by Autistics community on Facebook.

Jenny Hope 05:21

And Dean Margaux is also a passionate, outspoken disability advocate and activist. Jeff theson and Margot wask, you're both entrepreneurs who have lived experience with disability. Thanks for coming on the show to share your perspectives on self employment. Welcome to You Can't Spell Inclusion Without a D.

Margaux Wosk 05:39

Thank you.

Jeff Tiessen 05:42

Yeah, thank you, Jenny.

Jenny Hope 05:44

We're glad you could join us today. So I wanted to start off the questions with asking each of you why you chose the self employment route. So I'm going to start with you, Jeff.

Jeff Tiessen 05:56

I think it chose me. Actually, I grew up in rural Ontario, and a lot of tomatoes were grown where I grew up. And as kids, I mean, as 910, year olds, we were in the fields picking tomatoes and well, the harder you worked, the more tomatoes you picked, the more money you made. And that changed for me. When I was 11, I had an electrical injury at play and lost both hands, so I quickly lost my proficiency in tomato picking and needed to find something else. So, like I say, it kind of chose me, because I had to find other ways to put myself through hockey school and buy a new bicycle. So I think the first avenue I took was a paper route and but what happened is, every collections day, we call it where, you know, people are paying and change. It just was not that convenient for me. It's a double arm amputee, a prosthetic wearing amputee. So my grandfather, who was my neighbor, would join me, and he'd do the collections, and he got kind of tired of that, and said, Listen, I have a riding lawnmower. Why don't you go out and cut people's lawns? And so I created Jeff's lawn and garden service was 12 or 13 and and so the entrepreneurialism began.

Jenny Hope 07:23

Wow, so many great things are created out of necessity. And Marco, tell us why you chose the self, self employment route.

Margaux Wosk 07:31

So I also was gonna say that it chose me, which is so funny. But I have enjoyed working for myself longer than I've known that I was autistic, which is kind of funny. As a child, I Well, I guess young adult, like between 12 and 14, I was starting to buy vintage clothing and selling it on eBay. This was before there were any dedicated platforms to reselling vintage or used clothing other than eBay, and from there, it kind of expanded into visual art and then expanded into my current business. I just always knew that it was something that I like to do. I have, I guess, a sort of resilient, slightly oppositional way of doing things when it comes to being employed by somebody else, I think that's just very autistic thing that I butt heads with management, not because I'm doing anything wrong, but because I tend to take the initiative to really be like a go getter and a leader, and so for me, being able to make all The decisions when it comes to my business, really just ties into my strengths. And I guess it always has been. So eBay really set me up for understanding, like, photography, comparison shopping, like, in terms of seeing what somebody else is selling for. You know, similar price, similar product, product description, just everything that I needed, I taught myself, and it's been just a joy. There's obviously a lot of hardships included in that, but overall, it's a very exhilarating experience.

Jenny Hope 09:13

Wow, that's tremendous and so empowering as well. So you, you've told us already what drew each of you to the self employment route. I mean, Jeff, you went into media and founded disability Today magazine, and that grew into disability today Publishing Group, and Margo, you design and sell pens that communicate about disability.

Dean Askin 09:34

So I want to jump in here a little bit. And you've sort of touched on this a little bit already, but you know, I'm wondering self employment has its trials and tribulations and its highs and lows. So how would you describe your entrepreneurial self employment journey? Jeff, do you want to take shot at this one first?

Jeff Tiessen 09:54

Margaux, and I might have the same answer. Again. I mean Exactly. Accelerating and rewarding at one end of the spectrum, and frustrating and fatiguing at the other end, and but, but that's what we sign up for, and the rewards definitely outweigh the some of the frustrations, for sure. So yeah, I mean, a disability is a tough product to sell, and that was one of the big challenges for me. It always seemed to be a I needed to be educating about why someone should buy an ad in the publication before I could even sell them that ad. So I was lucky to have sales skills as well as communication skills that I learned in university and was able to bring those two skill sets together, kind of like Margaux was was talking about in the skill sets that she married to make it work for her.

Dean Askin 10:53

Thanks. Jeff. Margaux, how would you describe your journey?

Margaux Wosk 10:57

Definitely, yeah. I mean, I've kind of come to this realization that it's just an ongoing learning process. You have to be open to learning. But for me, I don't learn from other people. I learn from experience. I cannot sit in a classroom. I'm a 11th grade dropout with a GED in my late, mid to late 30s now, and I just kind of, you know, every single day, I feel like I'm learning something new, and you have to kind of be open to that, but you also really have to be open to making lots of mistakes. I don't think I'd be where I'm at without mistakes, whether that's, you know, like ordering something where a letter is missing or mis ordering a certain quantity of something like things like that, or forgetting something when I set up and I'm vending in person, all these things I think just drive me to be better at what I'm doing, but also understand that we all make mistakes, and that's just honestly part of the journey of Entrepreneurship.

Dean Askin 12:01

Jeff, you mentioned, a disability can be a hard thing to sell, but from your own experiences, what are some of the unique challenges for entrepreneurs who have a disability compared to the general person who's an entrepreneur, whoever wants to jump in.

Jeff Tiessen 12:18

Margaux, did you want to start with this one?

Margaux Wosk 12:22

Sure, I would just say that like for me, because I'm autistic, a lot of the things that make me disabled would be attributed to my sensory input, so like fluorescent lighting, strong smells, interpersonal communication, at times, there's just like, a plethora of things that fall under, you know, autism or sensory processing disorder. And I think for me, a benefit of being self employed as an autistic person is being able to control the sensory input, which not a lot of people seem to consider, like we talk about inclusive employment, and how that's, you know, being employed by somebody else, and how accommodating they can be, but how often are they going to change the whole fluorescent lighting system to something that can be dimmable or make sure that the employees aren't like, microwaving fish, for instance, there's just A lot of things that people don't really consider.

Dean Askin 13:22

Jeff. What about you?

Jeff Tiessen 13:24

Yeah, I think certainly commonalities with Margot, but differences too, in that with her disability being non apparent or invisible, the word Margot prefers mine being visible fell more quickly into other people's worldviews. And what I mean by that is ableism, myths and misconceptions. So when I talked about disability, was hard to sell. It's hard to sell. I just sell myself all the time too, that I would have the skill set, the capability, the, you know, whatever it takes to get get those contracts. So, yeah, it's been a real sales from from day one, I'd say. So those are some of the tougher ones. You know diverse suppliers is there's diversity in supply chains. Is becoming more welcomed. But I mean, I started this business 30 years ago, and it wasn't the case then it was very difficult to shoulder in amongst able

bodied, owned businesses and suppliers. And again, that's those myths and misconceptions that I had to push through.

Jenny Hope 14:46

So I wanted to ask both of you, how would you describe self employment supports for people who have a disability in your respective parts of Canada and in general, in this country overall, there's a federal. Funded, administered entrepreneurs with Disabilities Program in Western Canada, for example, but nothing like that east of Manitoba. So I'll start with you, Margo, since you're located in BC,

Margaux Wosk 15:12

So I've accessed the entrepreneurs with disability program, and it didn't meet my needs at all. Unfortunately, it's a lot of kind of self guided videos, and for me, that's just not how I learn. There's also no grants available that I'm aware of. So that's a gigantic barrier, because these organizations that do help with self employment will be very happy to help you get a loan. But I don't really understand why they would be putting people who might already be at financial risk or on, you know, receiving ministry benefits to take on debt, when we reckon, we very regularly see, you know, able bodied holistic people who own businesses who hire disabled people, and their business is operating for profit, not not I'm not talking about nonprofits, because there's a lot of those that do amazing things, but for profit. And then I see them getting awards. I see them getting grants from the government. But when it comes to disabled self employed people who are entrepreneurs, we're very much left out. So while these resources do exist, they're just not meeting our needs. And it's also I'm finding very hard to provide them any feedback, to let them know, like we need a grant, and whether it's a grant that is given as a standalone or a grant that is given through like a guided mentorship, which I think would be absolutely ideal. Unfortunately, these things just do not exist. And I'm happy that there's a program that exists, but just for me, it wasn't, it wasn't the right fit.

Jeff Tiessen 16:52

Yeah, again, similarly, I really haven't tapped into any of those programs, and really not aware of many of them either. You know, when I started the company with the name and the title, disability today publishing, I was often asked, Why are you doing this for profit? Well, you're going to preclude yourself from a lot of grant opportunities and and they were right, for sure, but I really felt I wanted to walk the talk, so to speak, that we can be entrepreneurs, and why can't a magazine about disability be a for profit enterprise? So that was sort of my philosophical approach in the beginning. Fortunately, the media industry in Canada does get some decent grants support for for profit organizations. But that has nothing to do with disability. That's that's more industry related. And lately, I, couple years ago, I enrolled or subscribed to an organization. They're out of Toronto, but it's national. It's called iwsc, the inclusive workplace suppliers Council of Canada, if I have that right, and what they do is bring self employed, disability owned, veteran owned, marginalized group owned companies, together with corporations that are looking to be more accessible in their their supply chain. So there are connections and referrals being made. So that's the real, the first real fruitful sort of experience I've had with any kind of support for a disability owned business.

Jenny Hope 18:39

Oh, interesting. I'll look that up. Iwsc. I'm curious to learn more about that. Thank you. So what's being done right with self employment supports for people who have a disability and what needs to be done better or changed? So I'll start with you, Jeff, what?

Jeff Tiessen 18:57

Again, not a lot of experience, but with those those supports, but a lot of the procurement processes with corporations are very inaccessible. And if we could get some help in making those more accessible, I think they're generally inaccessible to small businesses. From a time resource standpoint, they're very involved to get into their, you know, prospect or potential supplier list, but the forms and on and on it goes, just not that that accessible. So support there would, I think be really beneficial. I know Margo. Have you experienced the same thing and inaccessibility with online forms and such?

Margaux Wosk 19:49

Yep, I and I was on IW SEC member for a year. I didn't renew, but I saw a lot of those forms as well. And my. Stock doesn't even fall into any of those categories with those specific numbers that you have to put in. So I'm like, What am I supposed to do? Because I recognized that I was my products are more, I guess, consumer like the end goal, not so much like a supply thing, but I still think staff and businesses would benefit from my work. But these things are so inaccessible, and in terms of like, support being received, I am not seeing very much, to be honest with you, like, certainly these supports exist, but whether or not they're, like, tailored to what our needs are, is I find a very big divide, and especially as somebody who does have an invisible disability a lot of the time when we're talking about like accessibility and infrastructure, I feel like there's a big focus on efforts for increased mobility, or increased accessibility in that type of way, which I think is great. Obviously there's room for improvement in that sector as well. But when it comes to things that are more like cognitive based, I guess I'm not seeing as much because somebody might look at me and oftentimes I get told that I'm not disabled. So then there's that disconnect that I might not need support when I absolutely do. So I'm thinking that a lot of what is transpiring is, you know, like having meetings with different organizations and having the person be like, this happened recently. I can't discuss that with you. She said to me, I was very emotional because of that, because there was a lot of things I did want to talk about in terms of, like, what we're not getting, what resources we need, and we need to have a very open dialog, but we also have to have some empathy and compassion for like disabled entrepreneurs, because it is such a rigid structure when it comes to business that I think oftentimes people forget that there are humans that exist behind the business, and it becomes so heartless and soulless many times when I'm talking to people, that I think we just what we really need to see is we just really need to see a compassionate, empathetic, humanistic approach when it comes to disabled entrepreneurs, because this is it's difficult, and I want to be able to get to a point where I'm 100% able to fully support myself. So we need to understand that these things are not just for us, it's for other people as well, and we want to see systematic change as a whole, so that we are just supported on a grander scale.

Dean Askin 22:29

Well, let's talk about that. You know, inclusivity and empathy for a minute. I mean this being National Disability Employment Awareness Month and all kinds of campaigns going on across Canada about disability inclusive employment. Now, usually the conversation is about traditional employment, and that's what employment service providers focus on. You know, when they're supporting job seekers

who have a disability, but Margo, I know you say right in your LinkedIn headline that inclusive employment must include self employment. Why do you think self employment is being left out or maybe not talked about as much as it should be?

Margaux Wosk 23:08

I have a great answer for this. It's because it does not benefit big business. Big business can utilize disabled people to become more profitable, and there are organizations that help them do that. There are organizations that showcase statistically what the benefit is to the employer, who is oftentimes not disabled, what the benefits financially are to them for hiring inclusively. And I'm not saying that disabled people do not deserve to have work where they're accommodated. I just wish that there was some kind of 50 or like one, for one thing you know, if they're receiving a few million dollars from the provincial government, which I think they did here, those organizations, why are we not matching that dollar for dollar for disabled entrepreneurs? We're not. We're not thought of as equal. I can't. I'm not even invited to the same galas or rooms that these people who hire disabled people are in, and I see them getting awards and accolades. And if we think about it, it is a legal like you have to hire inclusively under, I think at least here the BC Employment Act, or something like that, you have to hire inclusively. That is not something that is out of the norm, like, that's their legal obligation. So the fact that they're getting accolades for that. When I, again, as a disabled, openly autistic entrepreneur, can't even walk into the same rooms. That's a problem. And I've challenged a lot of these organizations and received radio silence so they don't even want to have the conversation of what disabled what it looks like for disabled person to have employment, because, again, it does not financially benefit them. So I think there's a gigantic divide that I am somehow worth less because I cannot be commodified by these companies, whereas I believe that I should be able to work on my business, get support and be able to not have to access ministry. Benefits so that I am more financially independent, and that should be the goal for disabled entrepreneurs, that we support people so that they're not having to utilize government resources, which there's nothing wrong with, but there's certainly a disconnect there. And again, I do say inclusive employment is not truly inclusive until self employment is factored in. And, yeah, it's just not, unfortunately.

Dean Askin 25:26

It sounds like, you know, there's a bit of an analogy there, you know, I'm thinking of of, you know, that song and that famous song where the line is, I feel like a number,

Margaux Wosk 25:34

E100% 100 we are, we are more valuable to the economy if we are a statistic and can bring in money for those who, again, sometimes they're making billions of dollars annually, cumulatively, from these organizations. And I would love to see those numbers, but I know that's not going to happen, but certainly, certainly we're reduced to a number versus a person.

Dean Askin 25:57

Jeff, I see you. You're nodding your head there, and I know you've always been sort of self employed, but why do you think self employment never really gets talked about too much when it's when we're talking about inclusive employment?

Jeff Tiessen 26:12

Well, and I say this tongue in cheek, leading into in playing off what Marco said, I have had a real job, and putting quotes around real because there's some sense of value, like Margot said, and it's almost capitalistic. It falls into that ableism and the value of our bodies and our contribution and our productivity. And you know, I'm often asked, Where do you work, or who do you work for? Well, I'm self employed. Oh, you know, there's that, that stigma. Oh, what do you do? Almost like that's an excuse for not working or something. So, yeah, that's that's been a challenge, and I think it's exacerbated because of our disabilities. I mean, many people you know with without disabilities have are self employed, but I think those of us that have a disability, it might be looked at a little bit differently as well. So yeah, I can definitely relate to what Margo is

Jenny Hope 27:12

saying. I have a question primarily for Margot, though I've really been listening to what you've been talking about it, and this sounds like there's a lot of a level playing field that needs to happen here, and numbers always seem to impact that. I wanted to ask you, you've been talking a lot a little bit about advocacy here, and what is it like? What do you think it's the important part for you to advocate for small business owners and self employed solopreneurs who have a disability.

Margaux Wosk 27:48

I think the most important thing is that we deserve like support. We deserve recognition. I know it's multiple things, but you know the opportunities that I wanted to see created, I tried to create. So for instance, I held a market in two consecutive years called the we belong market, which highlighted disabled and neurodivergent entrepreneurs and small business owners. And the first year we got a downtown Vancouver Business Improvement Association grant. So we were able to have this lot, 19 area full of tents, and everybody was able to participate for free the first year. The second year, I had to charge a very small amount, but I tried to make it as barrier free and as accessible as possible, because I was just not seeing that and seeing the overwhelming response of people that are in that category. We exist. We're out here, and we need support. But there's also a program provincially here in British Columbia, called the self employment program. So when you're doing your monthly report for disability, you can actually write off your business expenses so that that doesn't go towards your annual earning exemption before you get cut off of disability, so that can help. But that's the thing is that the government here is fully aware of how many self employed people are on disability accessing that program. So it's not like they don't have the numbers and the statistics to recognize that this is a very underserved demographic. But we just need, we need greater visibility. And it's true that when people see that you're self employed a lot of the time, they're like, oh, because they don't necessarily view it as a viable thing, because real jobs, right? Being employed by somebody else certainly may look better on paper, but for somebody like myself, my qualifications, I'm a retail employee, nobody's going to look at me and even give me a chance because I didn't go to business school, but I have an innate sense of business. So again, I've had to give myself opportunities that nobody would give me. That's kind of can be a big barrier entry for people, because they may not know how to get started.

Dean Askin 30:06

Jeff and Margaux, you both got me thinking about how, over the years in my career, there were times when I was a freelancer for a little while, but I kind of only freelanced when I needed to, when I was

between jobs. So if somebody's trying to decide whether they should go the self employment route, or whether they're a job seeker who's thinking, Maybe I should go for traditional employment, what would be your best advice based on your own experiences? Jeff, do you want to take a shot at that?

Jeff Tiessen 30:38

Well, that's a tough one. You know, it's not for everybody, that's for sure. And you know, not being able to find traditional employment isn't always the right reason to be self employed either. You really need purpose and a plan and contingency plans for success and for struggle, both, so a real assessment of what that service or product that you want to provide needs to be done, a lot of consultation. And you know, I know, you know, as entrepreneurs, we have great ideas. We love them. We just fall in love with them and and sometimes they're not always the greatest ideas. So, so getting that feedback and listening to others advice, I think, is, is really important too. But you know, I hear in Margo and I'm the same. I mean, we wear disabilities on our sleeve. We're proud of it. It's we're it's our culture. And I think, you know, framing that as a value proposition and what we bring to the table in terms of unique traits and characteristics and lived experiences and and I think generally, although disability is a very general term, and there's there's so much diversity within that one word, disability, you know, I think generally, we're pretty good problem solvers too. We've had to be, which is, would be a tremendous asset for a company that we work for, or a company that we supply to as self employed. So yeah, purpose and a plan is probably where I'd just kind of end that.

Dean Askin 32:34

Margaux, what do you think?

Margaux Wosk 32:36

I definitely agree for me, a very big thing was to find a niche. I did a cohort with an organization here called curacao, and I helped individuals kind of understand, like conception all the way through execution of their creative small business. And something we really focused on was niche. So find your niche. So I think the thing is, if you can find a void in the marketplace for something or a way to do something in a different way than it's been done before. So for instance, the communication pins that I had seen prior to the ones that I designed were round buttons with very bright, childlike colors, and the fonts that they used were very rounded. And I understand that there's certainly a market for that, but I didn't see anything that was more professional looking and modular. So that's kind of where I was able to kind of figure out, okay, where, where does what I want to do fit in with everything else. And the feedback has been amazing. So I definitely think if you can find the niche or find a different way of doing something, that's a huge benefit to getting your business off the ground.

Jenny Hope 33:48

For listeners. So we're looking at the screen, I can see all of everyone who's in this podcast today. I see Margot's workspace behind her. I'm following you on Instagram, Margo, and I see you're quite busy, and you were posting there the other day about how you have limited space for some demands that your customers have. Is that the limit of your space that you have there behind you.

Margaux Wosk 34:15

Essentially, there is a shelf to my right that is full of pins, and then I have two shelves behind me that are also full of pins. So if I want to expand, it'll certainly be a bit of moving stuff around. But yeah, this I have my own office, and I'm very grateful for that, but I'm constantly, like, always shifting stuff around, trying to find room, and that's another thing that would be so nice. The government tends to subsidize employees that are disabled for different businesses. I would love to subsidize some help, and I would also love to subsidize some space. Would be amazing, or to be able to write off my space in a larger way, because I think I. Write off some of my space on my taxes, but I don't know that I can write off my space for my disability that I receive monthly. So there's certainly some infrastructure things that need to change, but yeah, I do not have enough room. Thanks.

Jenny Hope 35:17

What's the most important message you want people listening to this conversation right now? What? What is the most important message you want people to take away? Let's start with you Jeff.

Jeff Tiessen 35:31

For me, I begin this entrepreneurial journey with the magazine itself with a bit of arrogance, admittedly. And what I mean by that is I just didn't. I thought I knew what I really didn't. And yeah, there was a gap, a need, that niche that Margo talked about for a publication about disability in in Canada at the time, and so I filled it. But it's not like, what's the movie Field of Dreams where build it. And I think they say they will come, He will come. Yeah, that that wasn't the case. I built it, and it was a struggle selling it. So what I have learned over the years is the marketing and the networking and the connections and the building email lists and things that are very you know, the minutia of building a business, the real, boring, tedious stuff is what needs to be done for For the to propel your dream and and be successful. So, yeah, in a, I guess, sort of an overarching way, it's not just about, you know, having an idea. It's how to float that boat, sail that boat.

Jenny Hope 36:55

Margaux, you've, you've touched a lot on what the potentials are, what what you feel would support you best and and other solopreneurs. So I wanted to ask you, what would you like to see happen with self employment support, supports for people who have a disability in the next, let's say, five or 10 years?

Margaux Wosk 37:16

Well, there's a lot of things. I do want to mention, though, that there is a researcher named Jennifer Fane, F, A, N, E, who has been researching what it's like for neurodivergent entrepreneurs. So I have spoken to her, and so we are going to get some data very soon, which is fantastic. I'd love to see more of that. I would love to see more research, but I'd also love to see the organizations that are interested in self employment, or are, you know, helping people get employed, try to fight for some funding when it comes to self employment. Or further, talk to us, you know, consult with us, and something that Jeff was saying earlier is that he's for profit, and I want people to understand that our contributions as disabled people should we should be compensated for them, and that we shouldn't be working for free. I see that happen far too often, or we're not properly credited for our contributions to different projects. So as a whole, I would just love to see more respect for us, and the resources increase, but the resources that are available increase with us in mind, because so often these projects move forward and they're not even consulting with the demographic that they're aiming to serve.

Jeff Tiessen 38:42

Yeah, good, good point. Margaux, I've fallen into that trap of undervaluing myself financially. I do a lot of public speaking. And, you know, friends have said that doesn't sound like very much, and then, well, that's, you know, more than I'd make it a week. But they said, Yeah, but it's not that hour or two hours that you're presenting, it's the decades of experience that you're bringing to it. And that's our currency, really. And, yeah, I value what we bring to the table.

Dean Askin 39:17

Yeah, that reminds me of that there was, I think, a meme or something on my Facebook stream a while ago, and it's about, I think it was like, you know, there was a ship where the engines weren't working properly, and, you know, the engineer couldn't get it going. And he brought in a senior guy and he, you know, he whacked it with a hammer, and then charge him about, you know, \$250 instead of 25 and the point was, you're paying, you're paying for the decades of experience, and the guy knew exactly what to do to get the engine going again. So, yeah, I hear you exactly. You know you've both built your your businesses. I mean, do you consider. Self successful or deep down, you know, are each of you the kind of person who's always striving to reach that next mile post? I mean, whoever wants to jump in on this one first,

Jeff Tiessen 40:16

Take it away. Margaux

Margaux Wosk 40:19

Sure. Thanks. That's good. Thank you. Um, so there's certainly a feeling of success, but there's also the imposter syndrome that goes along with it, because sometimes I'm like, I could be doing better. I could be doing I could be expanding my stock faster. But you know, when you're kind of self guided, you have to figure out what, what makes sense for your budget and stuff like that. I am very close to 15,000 sales on my Etsy store. So that is going to be a next milestone. And then another milestone is that today, which we'll just say in the past, recently, it was announced that I am a recipient of the BC Achievement Award, the BC community Achievement Award for emerging leaders. So getting my first award is just really exciting, and I'm hoping that as I continue on this journey, you know, understanding that my business is mixed in very much with my activism and advocacy, my milestones, while they're very important to me, it's the change that I want to see for other people that would be the biggest like milestone of all.

Dean Askin 41:28

Jeff, what about you?

Jeff Tiessen 41:30

Yeah, really good point and how Margo ended that I've always talked about, you know, I want to do good. That's what disability today is all about, helping, helping others with with disabilities and increasing awareness, but I want to do well too, as as an entrepreneur, so I look at the metrics, the numbers ask if I consider it a success? Yeah, 33 years in the publishing business, that's a success. Think we've released over 300 titles, 20 different books. I think it's 3 million copies of everything that

we've done that are in print, but I'm always trying to build a better mousetrap. And you know, different projects come along that are of interest to me. We just moved into e learning courses and modules that we're creating that was very new, so it was a two year learning curve for me. I mean, fortunately, the company had the means to support that or endure that. It might be a better word, and it's almost like starting over with a new medium like that. But I love it and seeing it grow and becoming successful, that's a real thrill to me, and that's that success too. And again, these are based on disability, inclusion, education, so there's the do good part as well. Basically, everything that I've done has been related to disability and, yeah, making for a better life for us, I guess, would be a way to put it the best I can as one person.

Dean Askin 43:10

And I guess the way the media landscape is changing so rapidly today, you've got to be in flux all the time to be striving forward to reach that next milestone

Jeff Tiessen 43:22

For sure, you know, and I don't want to give covid any credit whatsoever. But during that time, it did give us some time to think about what's next for us, and we saw opportunities like we have right here today, digitally that weren't as prevalent before, and it gave us an opportunity to reach greater audiences and meet new people, and we're trying to utilize that the best we can.

Dean Askin 43:51

Well, you've both provided some great insights. You know, I'm wondering, before we wrap up this conversation, I mean, have we covered all the essentials. Is there anything we haven't talked about, about the self employment journey that you think is important to mention before we wrap things up?

Margaux Wosk 44:08

I would want to say that when we have when we're thinking about accessibility, oftentimes I feel like there's a disconnect between accessibility and disabled people striving for accessibility. So for instance, my tools, things I design, are completely focused on accessibility, and yet, for some reason, there's like, a disconnect. When people know that I'm autistic and disabled with the stuff that I do, some people will be like, Well, those are just like, labels or whatever, and I feel like we need to understand that when we're talking about business and we're talking about accessibility, the way that people utilize tools or utilize, you know, even the written word, we're all going to kind of process things in our own way. But there's no one right or wrong way of doing that. And if somebody. Doesn't see the value in something, it probably just means that it's not for them. And I think that a lot of people, or at least I, would benefit from people not coming after me and criticizing my work and maybe moving on and finding like the next thing that works for them. And so often, I feel like we are targets from the public because we put ourselves out there. And so if the goal is really to help people, I think there's also something to be said for understanding that, you know, again, not everything is for every person, but there's still a benefit to other people that people may not see. I have to have a sign up at my booth that essentially says, Why would anybody wear labels? And explain it very kindly, because I see people walk by, and I hear them and they're like, well, that's ridiculous, so I think there needs to be a little bit more understanding when it comes to how people access tools or information, and that is definitely left out of a lot of conversations.

Dean Askin 45:58

Jeff, any final thoughts, thank you, Margaux,

Jeff Tiessen 46:01

That was good. You know, something we didn't, haven't talked about is disclosure. And again, as I talked earlier about Margo and I we wear where our disabilities proudly. Not everybody does. And in some folks I know, even in applying for jobs, or if you have your own business, Do you or don't you say that I, you know, I have a disability. For me, it's a natural for me. There's, there's no getting around it's, you know, I'm a prosthetic wearing arm amputee. But, yeah, it's a very personal thing. I know I don't have an answer for it, but I certainly lean into, again, that value proposition. It's, it's we bring, we have currency in, in our experiences, our lived experiences, our authenticity, our creativity, our problem solving. And that comes from having a disability and living life that way, so I encourage it for disclosure, but I know for some it's it's a conundrum,

Dean Askin 47:13

Yeah, because we talk about that a lot at ODEN don't we, Jenny? Where people aren't going to disclose if they don't feel safe and comfortable in the workplace environment doing so,

Jenny Hope 47:26

Yeah, it's really important for people to feel that way in the workplace culture. You know, when people are able to see themselves in an existing workplace culture where people are fully supported, it really opens up those doors for them, I think, and makes them feel a little bit more comfortable about disclosing their disability. But it is challenging and it's a personal choice. This has been great. I've loved chatting with you in the midst of National Disability Employment Awareness Month. Of all times, it seemed like the perfect time to have this conversation. Jeff and Margo, thanks so much again for coming on the show and for talking about this with us. Who knows, maybe the conversation we've just had will generate more broader ongoing discussions about disability and self employment as end Dean 2025. Winds down.

Dean Askin 48:19

Jeff and Margaux, thanks for me as well. You know, so many great insights, and I'm like Jenny, you know, hoping this conversation makes a bit of an impact and drives a broader conversation out there about the self employment option for people of a disability. You know, I'm thinking again about that first ever national study about self employed people of a disability, and that we mentioned off the top of the show, and how over 40% of people said they became self employed because they needed to, not because they wanted to. And, you know, frame of mind is such a big factor in all of this.

Jenny Hope 48:52

There's definitely a lot to think about, and probably a lot more we could talk about on this self employment issue, for sure, but we're at the end of this disability and self employment journey conversation, and that's it for this episode of You can't spell inclusion without a D. I'm Jenny, hope and Dean. It's been fun guest hosting with you this season.

Dean Askin 49:11

It has been fun. Jenny, you know, Are you up for some more guest hosting again in season seven, in 2026?

Jenny Hope 49:20

For sure before I go though, I wanted to ask our guests how people can find them online.

Jeff Tiessen 49:26

Go ahead, Margaux.

Margaux Wosk 49:28

You can find me under retropheliac. So, r, e, t, r, O, P, H, I, L, i, h, c, I'm on Facebook, tick, tock, Instagram, and then on my LinkedIn. My name is Margo wask, so m, A, R, G, A, u, x as an x ray, and my last name is W, o, s, k, oh, and my website, sorry. Are retrophiliac dot F, c.com, and www, dot shop, retropheliac.com i.

Jeff Tiessen 50:00

And for me, disability today, network.com the email, it's simply Jeff, my first name at Disability today, network.com and can find me on LinkedIn at Jeff teason, my last name, T, as in Tom, I, E, S, S, E, N,

Dean Askin 50:19

And we will definitely put the contact information for both of you in the show notes for this episode. Well, it has been great, you know. Well, we've still got two episodes left in this season. I'm Dean Askin, thanks again for listening wherever, whenever and on whatever podcast app you're listening from, join us each episode as we have insightful conversations like this self employment one with Jeff theson and Margot wask and explore disability inclusion in business and in our communities from all the angles you can't spell inclusion without a. D is produced in Toronto, Canada by the Ontario Disability Employment Network, our podcast production team, executive producer and co host Amy widows. Our producer is Sue Defoe, associate producer and co host Dean Askin. Audio editing and production is by Dean Askin. Our podcast theme is Last Summer by Iksen. If you have feedback or comments about an episode, email us at info@odinnetwork.com that's info at O, d, e, n, e, t, w, O, R, k.com, join us each episode for insights from expert guests as we explore the power of inclusion, the business benefits of inclusive hiring and fostering an inclusive culture, and why disability is an important part of the diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility conversation. Tune into you can't spell inclusion without a dean podbean or wherever you find your favorite podcasts.