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Thank you for joining the webinar will begin in just a moment.

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Okay, Kelly think you're all set.

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Morning, everyone.

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My name is Kelly Curtin. And I am with NYC and company, I'm sure.

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I know many of you who are joining us this morning on this zoom. Thank you so much for joining us. I'd like to welcome you to this morning's NYC and company Talks on ADA31.

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As you know, the NYC and company talks, is the branding for our educational sessions, and we we've brought you many sessions, especially over the last year and a half, on everything from our marketing programs to two different events that are happening

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and we are so thrilled to be talking about at 31. This morning, you may know that this is our fifth session on ADA, and we're going to jump right in. As we have a lot to cover, and we have some great speakers on but first, just a bit of housekeeping.

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We do have closed captioning available as well as ASL. And if you'd like to view our ASL interpreter and full view, you can pin their screen.

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Also we welcome all questions you might have throughout this hour. Please use the q amp a function, we will try to address relevant questions as they come up.

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And we hope to address all questions before we wrap up.

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Today's theme is ada 31, celebrate learn and share. And so we are celebrating the 31 years since the passing of the Americans with Disabilities Act, and where we have come in that time.

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We are also here today to learn, because we still have quite a long way to go, as a city, and as individual businesses and being truly welcoming to all.

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And we're here to share to share our best practices, and to share some of our favorite places, who are doing a great job.

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I'm honored to introduce a great lineup of experts who I'm quite sure will inspire you with their stories, their knowledge and their perspective.

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We are so thrilled to have the Commissioner for New York City's Mayor of Office of people with disabilities, Victor Calise. We have our board member, Lakshmee Lachhman-Persad of Accessible Travel in NYC.

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We have groundbreaking restaurants where Yannick Benjamin, the owner of Contento in Harlem, it's a fully accessible restaurant. And our longtime consultant advisor and friend Peter Slatin of The Slatin Group.

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And I'm going to turn things over to Peter, he's going to be our moderator for today. Thank you so much.

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Thank you so much Kelly and welcome everyone and thank you to this terrific panel, I'm really excited to have all of you here especially Yannick where I have dine twice at potential and recommend it to everyone it's truly delicious.

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And I hope everyone can hear a little bit of New York City intruding into the background there, a siren passes but I'll just jump right in. So we're here again for to talk about the Americans with Disabilities act, but we're and really to talk about accessible

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travel accessible.

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Entertainment accessible living accessibility, here in New York City. And one reason that I love working with NYC and company on this and working with all the members and what's what's really important about this intersection is that it's really hard

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to get the message out.

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One on one to businesses and people about creating accessible opportunities in the city for people to people to go and work and live and enjoy and NYC & Company in the unique position of speaking to both the visitor.

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And, and the business person business owner.

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So you're really reaching all the possible audiences and that's so important to work through a destination marketing organization that can reach every one of you.

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So I'm really pleased about that. So today, we're just going to be going through all of all of the things we can talk about at 831.

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I'm thrilled to say that, you know, I've been doing this for a long time now and, as some of you know I do a lot of training and my first hotel, since the start of the pandemic has finally called me to come to New Orleans to do some training there.

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So, it seems to me that hotels are, if I can go by that directionality I'll say hotels are coming back, and I think many of you are just beginning to welcome visitors back.

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But we're going to start with Yannick Benjaminn when I want you to tell the story of Contento, how it came to be his own story as a, as a some LA and wine expert.

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I will be asking, that'll be speaking with Commissioner, DC, asking him about what mo PD has accomplished, and what it's up to what it's looking forward to, and his role on the board of the MTA crucial role and wonderful advancement for NYC New York's

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disability community.

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My good friend and intrepid colleague determined colleague Lakshmee Lachhma-Persad, we'll go through some top line. Information about people with disabilities, and the needs they have and how the community is responding to them, and then we'll all

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just get into it and have a free for all discussion.

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I will say that if at the end we haven't gotten to your question if you've asked a question on.

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We will try to get to it, either. Respond after this is over, you can stick around and chat for a little while, or if we can't get to it then we'll get will respond via email, and we'll work that out.

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I want to say that in looking over the, the roster of the attendees who signed up. I'm really excited because it's really a diverse group of people from hotels, restaurants, organizations, museums, convention centers all across the board so I think it's

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really cool that there's so much interest in this topic now it's, I'd say it's it's reaching a new point on the curve. So without further ado, I'm just going to induce introduce the amazing Niantic Benjamin urge anyone and everyone to go to content out

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at 88, East 111th Street, except on Mondays Yannick, tell us the story.

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I paid her lovely introduction.

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I'm here currently would see.

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You know I can tend to the restaurant exactly correct at eight East 2011 shoot which important Madison.

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We actually just celebrated our 60th day of being open yesterday.

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We opened on June 10, and it's been incredibly exciting, we were originally supposed to open.

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In the spring of, 2020, but something called coronavirus came and prevented us from doing so. So we actually had the restaurant ready but we decided that it was best to only open up the restaurant when we found more consistencies with what was happening

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with it. And when the vaccine would come out.

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We just could not afford to like have to open and close and then open and close and so I think we made the right decision decision I mean despite the fact that there's this delta variant and it's incredibly dangerous.

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So far we've been very blessed, things have gone very very well.

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The story of contemptible is, you know, my background has always been in restaurants pretty much by the age of 13 years old. I completely devoted myself I made that firm decision that I wanted to have a career in hospitality. So it's very strange for

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teachers to hear when you know most kids are saying I want to be a police officer I want to be president united states. And now I want to work in a restaurant they slapped me in the back of the head and say what do you what do you mean you want to be

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a waiter or a busboy What does that even mean, but any case, that's what I kind of stayed with.

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And I kept at it, I was very blessed I worked at this really some top restaurant owners, some wonderful places and it really allowed me to explore parts of the world that I probably would not have explored, had I not been in this industry.

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At the age of, 25 years old I was in a car accident, formerly paralyzed from the waist down.

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And so you can imagine how incredibly challenging. It was to have to try to come back, working in a business where it's incredibly challenging from a physical standpoint for anybody able bodied or disabled.

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And so here in New York City in particular, where every square inch matters, you know, trying to roll around in a, in a restaurant where you know you have to get around the tables are just on top of each other and we're all kind of like discussion with

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each other, certainly was not easy.

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And so, you know, right after that I was kind of guns blazing and I was very optimistic I was sending my resume.

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At that time, that still fax your resume I was emailing whatever it was, contacting people that I you know that I knew and it was definitely not an easy feat.

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And it wasn't so much about people not giving me a chance it was more so that people just didn't fully understand on how to deal with someone with a disability, they just didn't have the education and resources.

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Those number one but number two, just a physical layout of trying to find a place that could really accommodate me and what I needed.

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And finally I went into the world of retail so I was working, selling wine, the world of retail, and I would happen to work at a place that was incredibly.

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You know, very wheelchair accessible. All the shells are spread out and the owner of the place happened to be from the small villages my dad so I had that connection so I was very very fortunate in that aspect.

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But deep down inside I always wanted to get back in the restaurant, you know I wanted that whole rush I wanted that feeling of being back to the weeds and, you know, being screamed up by customers where's my food you know and all that kind of stuff but.

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So in any case, you know I did a lot of like wine competitions and what that is solely competitions where you get judged on how you taste the wine so blind tasting theoretical knowledge, your business savvy of the industry, and then service.

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And so that was a good opportunity to really challenge myself, and see what I can and cannot do. And what I really needed help on what I needed to improve upon.

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And so I did that and slowly, slowly but surely I developed a trade that really allowed me to work on the restaurant for being able to hold wine glasses, your glasses wine bottles of wine.

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And I did that with a carpenter from France so we were able to do that together and it really evolve as time went on, and because I did the summary competitions because I put myself out there.

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I, one of the judges happened to be the general manager of a very famous private club called the university club, and he reached out to me. He said hey Yannick I really love the way you work service, and right now I need a summary I need a wine director

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at the University of are you interested. And I had given up at that time, hold that I was ever going to work on the restaurant floor, you know, because I had been told by many people that the only way for me to ever work the restaurant floor will work

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in a restaurant, would be needed to be designed around my specific needs. Not completely false in many ways, but I kind of a crappy thing the year.

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And he came in case I started there on June of 2013. And my last day was May of 2021.

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So it was a great run, and it was an incredible place even though the building was well over 100, years old, incredibly accessible, believe it or not, and they, the first thing he told me was Johnny, what can we do to make this place, comfortable and

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so I said, Can we move this table here and said no problem. So anyway, that's how it all worked up.

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And then, my dear friend, George A girl who was I met who's my mentor or so my mentor, and my best friend.

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He lives on this block, he discovered this a location he said Yannick I think I found the place I know you thought your eyes glued on certain locations for I think this is a perfect spot for you.

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He said, however I want to be I want to be and I want I want to be your partner. I said, of course, and that's how it came about. So, you know, to small location, it's a it's a humble location but it's a beautiful place.

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It's small, but we made it work. So not only in myself and my work in here and I'm a paraplegic with George by ego, I didn't mention that I apologize.

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He's a paraplegic and he also works here. So we both work here comfortably.

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We've got a pretty much set up to what we need to be able to work here but we also made sure that it's also accessible for people to come here and eat, and feel comfortable and, more so than anything else I want to I want to really point this up.

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Yes, the physical layout is accessible. But the one thing that I hear all the time when people with all disabilities and when I say people disabilities, whether it's someone with the physical disability neurological invisible loading vision, hard of hearing,

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or intellectual, they always say how there's a certain empathy that we were providing them and they feel so comfortable they feel so welcome, you know, and I think that's really key, and I always tell people, you know, just one example, other restaurants

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hers. You know that work in the same yacht and how can we make people with disabilities, feel more comfortable I said well you know when they come in.

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Maybe some of them are a little slower to get ready. Don't stare at them. Let's give them time to settle in. You don't know what it took to get to your restaurant.

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For example, maybe I'm if I'm going to a restaurant in Tribeca and I live in the South Bronx. I probably have to deal with a couple of a train transfers maybe even a bus broken elevators.

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So just give them time to settle and I think that's what we really tried to cultivate here, not just myself with George, but with the entire staff. And I think that's what's really exciting and hopefully Listen, we don't want to be the first restaurant

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doing this Incorporated. We just don't want to be the last. That's the most important thing. So I hope, I hope everybody is else's copy and copy this model because that's what we want.

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We want this to be infectious you know what I mean. And that's the bottom line that's just that's a very long story of content too.

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Well, thank you so much Yannick and it resonates I think with all of us and you know what, what got me into this world is really trying to help restaurant owners hotel owners and their staffs and people work in service everywhere, feel relaxed and comfortable

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and confident when working with customers with disabilities, and you've gone a long way toward making that happen and I think just the press that you've received since, since content started and I refer everyone to the New Yorker, just shows the amazing

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interest in what this is about accessibility is about and why it's so important. So thank you very much, Commissioner Colossi, we first met in a restaurant slash bar where it was very difficult for you to find space and get past my guide dog and all of

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that. And every call that meeting fondly.

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I would like it if you would talk to us about what you've been in your position for.

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I think it said, eight years I'm not sure.

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But tell us about some of your, what you think your favorite accomplishments what's happening now. And what are you looking toward, where do you think the city has made some great progress in becoming an accessible destination.

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Well, thank you, thank you Peter it's always great to run into you at a bar.

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It really wasn't a restaurant but, you know, we'll just leave it at that.

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I am a white male with salt and pepper hair, wearing a purple shirt and a blue jacket.

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Just want to describe myself because I think it's important, as we're thinking about the 31st anniversary the ADA to make sure that we incorporate these things for people who are not able to see us on the screen.

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Um, I want to thank NYC and company for always thinking about people with disabilities, making sure that they're part of the culture, making sure that people with disabilities are recognizing tourism.

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Because in the end, people disabilities, want to talk. They want to come to restaurants, they want to be able to be part of everything, the city has to offer New York City is certainly doing that many certain ways I've been in this role for nine years.

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And my goal simply and our vision is to make New York City, the most accessible city in the world, just like this restaurant. Now everyone is claiming how wonderful this restaurant is and great articles in the New Yorker and the Wall Street Journal things

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coming out, times we're seeing great things. And this isn't an exception. right.

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It shouldn't be an exception. This should be a norm. And that's the problem with with this right and yon excited he doesn't want to be the last.

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And we're 31 years into the ADA we need to ensure that everything is accessible, and that's what our office does or office works with the Department of Transportation, to make sure our streets are accessible, so we can get to this restaurant.

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We have to make sure that our taxis are accessible we're the only city in the world, to, to make the for higher vehicle sector the ride sharing companies, accessible for people with disabilities or Yellow Taxi fleet is accessible, we make sure that we

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employ people with disabilities through our NYC at work program, public private partnership to employ New Yorkers with disabilities throughout the city of New York.

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We work with organizations to get their feedback, so we can make sure that what we're planning and implementing is exactly what the community needs. We've also put together something called accessible NYC, which is the state of persons with disabilities

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in New York City, and it runs through everything The city has to offer for accessibility and it keeps us accountable for the things that New York City is doing our parks are fully excuse me, Victor.

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Yeah that's accessible NYC that's a report you issue every year is that correct. Yeah, it's a report that we do every year, and you can find it on your website, it's on our website you can go to nyc.gov slash disabilities and look for Accessible NYC.

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We'd be we put it out for the last five years and we're going to end with it this year, and the great part about the ADA is the mayor just codified.

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Our office in lots of different ways through an executive order, and one of them was to make sure that all of our duties that we're doing now aligns perfectly with the city, and most importantly, it is to make sure that accessible NYC continues to live

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on, and the net and administration's to come, making sure that the city is held responsible for the accessibility features that are planned and implemented throughout the city, excuse me one more time Victor on, since you did bring up the mayor, there

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is a question I wanted to ask and I know this is difficult, because it's, it's sensitive for everyone, but, you know, the mayor did issue this mandate regarding vaccines and admission admittance to restaurants and other venues, requiring vaccination,

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and yet there are of course people who have medical exemptions that logistical legitimate ones to having a vaccination, and there doesn't seem to be any provision for that and I know we've heard from some people in the community who really feel segregated

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out by by this decree that didn't seem to take too much into consideration. About, people who have legitimate exemptions from vaccination. Can you address other plans to expand the definition to go back in and work with this, so that it's more equitable.

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So, so let's say, here's the thing here. You asked me earlier what was happening what what the mayor's office, people just really concentrating on right now is to get people back, get people back to whatever the new normal list and and then in order to

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do that we need to make sure that we get in our offices done this is work with the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene work with vaccinations centers to ensure that if accessibility is built into those vaccines centers for those who can get the vaccine

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have the reasonable accommodations that they need at these centers as they want. So we've been working hard towards that. And the only way to get New York City back to, to really get people back onto transportation to get people back into our restaurants

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to get our economy running full speed is to get vaccinated. And that's important. That's the work that we've been doing, and will continue to do through the under this administration to ensure that that happens.

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But that being said, we know that there is a segment of the population that cannot get vaccinated. And that's real. And we are certainly working on making sure that guidelines will come out in the next couple of weeks in regard to that, but if anybody

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does feel discriminated in in any way shape or form because of their disability because they cannot get back to me too because of that disability, they should certainly make a complaint to the Commission on Human Rights, and they can call 311 to get that

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done because that is the mechanism, along with guidelines that will, we will be working with to plan and implement within the next couple of weeks. Great, thank you so much.

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I'm a couple other questions. First, we have.

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Everyone knows that the Olympics just concluded and the Paralympics are right behind, and we're all very excited about that. And you yourself are a former Paralympian, I don't know if you're ever former right your former Peter always Paralympian, and

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I'm never will be. But I certainly admire.

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All of you. So, what are you looking for how will the mayor's office help New Yorkers tune in.

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Be aware of, promote the Paralympics that's a great event. So, yeah, Paralympics are great event it's the reason it's called Paralympics it's parallel to the Olympics, it's two weeks after the Olympic Games, and it really is about athletes with physical

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disabilities participating in every sport from, from swimming to wheelchair racing to to biking to hand cycling and the list goes on. So we want to make sure that we get the word out, we will be doing some social media reposting some things.

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Peter you just informed me that there was a link for audio description, like I want to audio described myself earlier, the audio description will be available

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as well so we will make sure that we provide that link and get that stuff out there. So, it's really just about showing the competition and thrive of people with disabilities and how whatever put in their way.

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It's easy No I'll be forwarding you that link. So, I want to turn to your role with the MTA you were appointed I think was earlier this year or perhaps late last year to the board of the MTA a really significant move for the MTA to have someone with a

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disability and with the knowledge and awareness that you have to sit on the board of an organization that is so critical to, it's really the lifeline it's the it's the bloodstream of New York City, and in so many ways it's still compromised.

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There were efforts. There were promises made and some captain. Many not kept and not laying that at your feet at all. Of course, I'm just saying the MTA has a lot of work to do to to get to make it as fully accessible as we would all love it to be.

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How do you see your role there and and also how can our members who have restaurants, hotels, institutions, museums, etc. How can they help the disability community know what's near them in terms of accessible transportation.

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So my role at the MTA is pretty, pretty big added I am the first person would self disclose disability in a wheelchair to be on the board. And that has extra tremendous responsibility on my part one because I have to represent the disability community,

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and number two is make sure that I have my fiduciary duties to the MTA, so it's a balance that I play by play that in government now.

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One thing's for sure is the MTA knows that they, they have a long way to go. And with the new leadership of general lever and Comella royal that are there, the commitment has been redefined, and I've spoken to, Jana Lieber on this very issue.

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Last week as he starts to have the MTA and how important it is to push for accessibility. So there's a lot of federal dollars that have come in.

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We I plan to make sure that all of that federal dollars that's allocated for accessibility goes to accessibility. So that is what I'm working on now to make sure that that happens, making sure that their capital plan includes 70 new stations that they

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committed to. So those are the things accessible stations that I'm working on. And it's not just about elevators when we're looking about this Yannick talked about it a little bit earlier about the restaurant, it's not just for people with physical disabilities

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people with cognitive disabilities, people with hearing disabilities people with visual disability, we have to be aware of that make sure that we plan and implement for those as well.

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Yes, a Yannick and I both are in wheelchairs, but it's not about wheelchair accessibility. It's about going over and gone everywhere that we can, and I'm holding the mth feet to the fire, they know it I'm pretty vocal and we have to find ways to make

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sure that accessorized is more equitable and people do have issues. We have to find them.

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We have to hear from the community especially through their transit Advisory Committee, working with their active constituents to make sure that we drive accessibility everywhere that we can.

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I just wanted to point out that your camera is not on, I'm not sure if you're aware. There you go. Thank you.

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You're on mute. Peter, I mean, I'm all here now.

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I'm all here now. So you know what you what you say what what the MTA is doing is really important what you are doing your contribution. And you know, I think what's interesting about this is that just the MTA knows.

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We all know that we can't snap our fingers and make everything accessible that it is a process awareness of disability and public accommodation and the ADA is a process it's a it's a long long road that we're on.

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We have to be patient and persistent. And again, I want to commend people who are here, and thinking about accessibility in their businesses and organizations, at a time when everyone's been consumed with a lot of problems all kinds of challenges that

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have just never been anticipated before. So I really think it's important that that we're here at this point, and commend you for joining us. I want to turn now to Laxmi, who is the founder and editor and all things of accessible travel NYC calm I urge

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you all to visit. She's also on the board of NYC and company, She is a colleague of mine.

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And she knows an awful lot she's very active in the, in the Advisory Committee to the MTA as well was recently appointed to that. And I don't know how she does it all but she does, and she has a presentation for us and I'm really excited.

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I haven't seen it, I don't know what she's going to do, but I know it's going to be worthwhile and extremely informative. So Laxmi. Please take it away.

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Hi there.

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Morning.

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Susan Am I on,

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you're all set. All right, thank you. Hi. So my name is Lakshmi and it's a real pleasure to follow, Victor and Yani Yannick I wanted to let you know that me and I will be over a content too soon enough because I know you have a wheelchair accessible bar

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and it's something we've never done before in our lifetime so thank you for making that possible.

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So, I'm following Victor's lead I wanted to let you know that I am a person of color from Diana, with an Indian heritage and mid age, my pronoun is she, her, and I'm very proud to wrap the Bronx here today because it's my hometown and it doesn't get a

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lot of recognition.

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So, without further ado, I was actually putting together this collage of photos, which are great, without going into details about it but looking at them and doing a run through of my talk, it made sense to talk a little bit about each of the photos so

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here are those. The first Photoshop cases and he and I in my family over at the Bronx Zoo. Imagine being 40 years old and having your first carousel right ever.

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So, thanks to the Bronx Zoo for making something like that possible for us with the wheelchair user. We actually spent a lot of time during the pandemic eating our way.

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If you haven't seen the article in The New York Times about the plus 15 pounds. And this is, this is the reason we're eating and happy to have visited our friends over at the Bronx Beer Hall.

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We took the opportunity to head over to the Bronx museum where we saw Sanford Biggers coach which.

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It's one of a piece of art that actually really spoke to us where we got to explain some of our heritage and how looking at art pieces from across the continent just made the world smaller from something that I knew about thing Diana, that I was actually

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able to share with me and Rachel Tron.

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to share with any and Rachel Tron. We also like checking out hot spots. So we went over to visit little island and we have a family photo with a little island in the background. Sometimes we're actually treated to some really really nice photo shoots

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with NYC and company.

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In this photo. It's a family of. It's a family photo of all of us with the photographer, the Empire State Building, it's clearly in the background, some of the photos from that we're actually use in the holiday Christmas card by NYC and company, and across

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and across their social media channel and written piece of Article I did for all of the observatories in New York from an accessible perspective. And then we heard MoMA have this big.

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I love New York sign and if you know us you know we love New York so we had to get a family photo there for the ground.

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And our final picture was actually taken over at, we feel we're my Gen Z doctor spent some time giving us some poses for some photography.

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While we were killing some time.

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While waiting for our transportation home.

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Next slide, Susan.

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So this slide, it's black and white and I'll text, and it goes into why disability inclusion. Well, it's for us to build back better. We have an opportunity to reset and restart and have a more welcoming industry.

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The market segment, it's valued valued.

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Actually, sorry, the market segment, it's one in five Americans that identifies with the disability.

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We're all aging population is expected to be 95 million of people who are 65 and older. By the time 2016 comes around, and we all age into disability and the pandemic has increased this segment with a long haulers and people who are suffering from mental

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illness amongst many others. So it's a growing market segment and accessibility needs to, you know, increase, so that we can welcome everyone into everyday living.

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The market is valued at 490 billion dollars with over 60 million people and these stats are just for the United States.

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So keep that in mind, and there is an increase in brand sentiment when associated with inclusion. So those are all good reasons to market to people with disabilities.

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And I have, I have a specific notes here note here because a lot of businesses are taking on D and I initiatives, without including access and I wanted to let you know that it's not equitable because it's our bypass community that's mostly affected by

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disabilities both, visible and invisible so access needs to be a part of a de and I initiative. Next slide, Susan.

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So, I'm presenting some examples of inclusive marketing because it's something that's quite lacking in our industry. Next slide.

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NYC and company and for those who don't know me or some of the work that I do with NYC and company it's that our family was used about two years ago to create an acclaimed video I would say, on how to explore new york city with a wheelchair, it's a video

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that's actually leading the way in the tourism industry and inclusive marketing. So NYC and company posted it on their HGTV for at 830 and I highlighted the fact that it got 6600.

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Plus, views. And it's actually more views than all of the other videos for two rows down and that's not to showcase the other content isn't great, but it's just to highlight the fact that the customers out there would like more accessible information

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in it and it is well received. When you put the information out there on access. Next slide please.

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I also wanted to showcase These are two more photos that was taken over at the edge with our family that NYC and company used on their Instagram account that also, you know, got quite a few interaction and some very nice comments.

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Next slide, please. Thanks, Susan. This one I saved an entire slide for a photoshoot session that I did with the New York Botanical Garden, and then I wrote an editorial piece for NYC and company so the to merge together and became one beautiful piece

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that actually, I call it the viral effect. So thank you for the botanical garden for these beautiful photography, which NYC and company used, I love New York we shared.

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The Bronx tourism council Mars Park did Bronx times of re shared the peace amongst many others, and I know it was showcased at state tourism level on a DNI initiative.

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And I know Fred showed it at the US travel Association, when he talked about reopening strategy for NYC that focused on accessibility.

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Next slide please.

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So my closing thoughts and my words of wisdom to all of the members here today it, I wanted to say, organizations are really made up of people like you and me, which means we have the choice to create an inclusive industry.

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It's not just up the NYC and company or accessible travel and receive to do this alone.

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Start with yourself, address the liberalism and stigmas, understand that disability is visible or invisible, then build out with your organization and your community.

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Right now everyone is doing mostly local travels and people with disabilities are right there in your communities. So it's a great way to start so that by the time, New York City is ready to welcome international travelers, you would have already built

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the confidence in yourself and your organization to welcome people with disabilities. Disability representation and inclusive marketing can be vibrant and viral, as you've seen from the previous slides, please readily share information on programs we

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access and inclusion through all your marketing channels, it will get to a wider audience.

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And finally, we shouldn't be on footer and just access information pages, and after top are thought of as compliance, where people were customers worth over 419 billion dollars that wants to be welcomed with digital information, physical and social access

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from your businesses so that we can have those lifetime moments that you saw earlier in our photography.

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And that is it. That's the end of my wisdom.

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Thank you so much Lakshmi.

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And yes, I don't think it's the end of your wisdom, it's the end of your wisdom for the moment but yes, I'm just going to go around and ask a final question for everyone and then I know, I'm sure there are some questions in the chat.

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But I want to start with Yannick, and say su Yannick what.

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Why do you think that accessibility is really, people are really becoming more aware of it today.

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It's growing people there is growing awareness of it. And where do you see that coming from.

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Yeah, I mean, I mean it takes. It's not a come from people, I could speak on behalf of like the hospitality industry. It's being able to have the ability to share your resources and taking your time to mentor others, but sharing your platform with others

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that have less than you. Right. And I feel that we're still in a funny stage, amongst people with disabilities, where it's incredibly territorial. I'm still.

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And I think that in itself is a problem.

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For example, you know, if one wanted to get into and try to become an aspiring Paralympian, the steps to becoming one is simply very complicated right.

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And if you look at the majority of the people that compete in these games. Most of them look like me, right, and there's a lot of reasons for it, one you have to have the access and the financial resources to be able to pay for all this stuff.

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We already know that the majority of people that have a disability, or on Medicaid right and so if you're restricted by the amount of income that you're making.

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How could you possibly be able to prioritize buying extra equipment so you can compete in that sport, you know, every year. Well, not every year I did the New York City Marathon I think nine times right.

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And every year that I would compete in the New York City Marathon, it was the same people it's the same people that always win that's a marathon right.

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Um, let's make no mistake about it.

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The people that are competing in the esports, are they really the best that we have to offer. I don't know, but I do think the people that are competing the sports have the resources to be able to participate.

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And that's a flawed system and that's something that we certainly need to look into. I make no mistake about it make that I and I certainly, you know, I'm very grateful.

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The reason why I was able to succeed so far in the hospitality industry with a disability. Well, I started at a very young age, I was able to practice my craft before I had a car accident.

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My family was in the business I already had a network of friends.

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But if I was 25 years old, and my prior life I was I don't know maybe I was, I was doing I was working in construction, and then I said well I want to work as as somebody I want to work in the restaurants, I would not be in the situation that I'm sitting

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here right now. So I think the issue is that I still think that we like to think in the disability community that we're very close to where we're very tight, but I think we have to a long way to go.

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And I want to get rid of this concept of like there's this kind of, there's the low vision community, there's a hard of hearing community I mean I definitely think that we have to recognize that, but I would like for all of us to realize that when we're

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advocating it myself I'm in a wheelchair, and I'm advocating for the rights of people with low vision and and the heart of caring community that it also benefits us and it benefits also people with intellectual disabilities, and also benefits people with,

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you know, so on are the little people community. And that's how we have to look at it as, and then now.

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seeing, and it's really important for us to be for people with disabilities to reflect diversity. So I'm going to say this, if you're if you're looking at diversity, and you're not including people with disabilities, you're doing it wrong, right, that

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our Yannick here has really hired people with disabilities through our NYC at work for program.

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And we've, we've gotten people with disabilities involved here we've targeted disabilities. So if you know we're really thinking about that and and the yogic set of people just really don't have resource they don't have the resources because people just

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believe in poverty why because they can't get work right they need real jobs or real pack this industry can be able to, to, to pay people, real, real money, have a real job, and what benefits that's important.

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That's what we need to move towards hire people with disabilities do diversity right include people with disabilities and will pay in the 10 folds, just like it's paying here wow factor.

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Yes. What would you say to the employer and I think this is really key to the employer who wants to do.

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The quote right thing, but really is concerned about whatever way might take too long to train them might cost too much to train them might they might not know how to integrate them into the their mainstream workforce who just feels confused about it,

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and you know and it's this goes right to the heart of what I wanted to also say as Yannick says there is this huge community in the disability community that's not only fragmented by disability but by socio economic status.

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But it's not about charity changing things is not about charity it's about moving society forward. So, in that spirit, what, what is your message to the employers who who want to and should make this move.

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So, why don't you bring it back to the why we're here, the 31st anniversary of the ADL remember it's a law, right, we've seen restaurants.

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Come in and follow the Department of Health Regulations Fire Department regulations.

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You know, building occupancy regulations, why are they following Ada right that's important, you need to make your place accessible you have an obligation, through the ATF, so that's number one, right, because if you build it accessible, people will come,

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your next restaurant was definitely bionic George plays will definitely let you know that right. There's a reason why people are coming here because they have money to spend.

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And here's the other thing you mentioned right Peter, um yeah there is some idea well I don't know how to provide a reasonable accommodation or I'm not sure where to find the talent.

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And that's where mYc at work comes into play. Our office works with businesses, get them up to speed, searches for the talent trains people let them know all that we're one stop shop.

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Come to us, we'll be able to help you out.

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And I see one thing although one of the biggest issues that we find ourselves in the hospitality industry, and this is for able bodied individuals is being able to provide adequate health care, you know, and I think that's the biggest issue to for someone

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that has a disability, where, you know, they might be hesitant to go work in a, in an industry where we're not exactly known for our healthcare. I think one of the biggest ways we resolve this whole issue.

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Personally, which I thought that we would learn our lesson from a coven is that we provide universal health care, but there's no cap of like you know if you're on Medicaid you can't have more than $2,000 in your bank account where you can't get married

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to someone legally because they count as additional income. I think if we eradicate all that stuff, because that in itself is a form of oppression and we are in 2021.

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I think if we get rid of that, we definitely see an increase in a freedom. And this mentality of people with disabilities wanting to get back to work, but until we get that law until we get universal health care and we get rid of these restrictions or

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form of oppression, people are going to go like listen I want to work, but I need my Medicaid, and I need my 150 catheters and I need my, so on, whatever it is, that's the that's the way forward.

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And I think we still need to talk about that, and we need people who are incredibly successful in the disability community who have an incredible platform to speak about that because that's the only way changes going to happen.

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Couldn't agree more.

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Peter in a jump in and Yani, thank you for pointing out the inequities people with disabilities face and Victor I wanted to ask you touched upon people are building. You know their restaurants or their spaces for different agencies in compliance with

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whatever agency they need to be. Who is out there that's helping businesses that wants to build to add specs. There's a lot of talk that goes around within travel and tourism, I don't know what to do, or I have a building but nobody comes to check on

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me to enforce these rules, how do we handle that because honestly I it's a difficult, it's difficult for us to find accessible places and accessible information, even though it's 2021.

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Actually I I hear what you're saying.

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I am fortunate enough to sit on and chair, the accessible portion of the New York City building film. And on that accessible portion we, we have to we have to go through the building code every so many years, and I run the accessible portion and we do

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everything we can do to make sure that building code adheres to the ADA and actually goes over and beyond. So, Lakshmi you made a good point, right, that you're looking for, forward to coming to a wheelchair accessible bar.

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Right.

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And and in the New York City building code when we went just went through the revisions, we made sure that there was a section of the bar in a prominent place that was accessible for people with disabilities so you're going to see more of that come out

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and the new codes and standards. Businesses have to realize that they're obligated under the API. Right, so some people will think I'm grandfather in there's no such thing as a grandfather law, no such thing as a grand father in law, you have a barrier

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Act, so you need to remove barriers that exists in your place, you need to start that if you're not doing it, do it now because there's a lot of drive by lawsuits that are going on and people are getting sued the Department of Buildings when you go through

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your plan examinations they're supposed to look at, accessibility as well because they're planning examiners are trained in that. And if you are having issues accessibility, reach out to our office, we can guide you to two people that can direct you in

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the right way for accessibility.

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Here's the thing.

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Everybody's looking, especially right now looking at ways to increase their business right to find out to increase your bottom line.

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If you want to increase your business by at least 10 to 20%.

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Make your place successful, right, because people disabilities, although there are some inequities. We still have money to spend. There's a good segment of the population that money spent, we could add to your bottom line.

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There's 11% of people with disabilities in New York City.

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We know that you add aging into that it's even more, and you have parents with strollers that's even more, you're going to increase your business, at least, 10, to 20%, if you make your place accessible.

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You know the argument is well people with disabilities don't come to my business.

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Well we said, People disabilities didn't ride cabs either. And now that we've made our calves accessible.

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Three coronavirus we had our, we had over, 200,000 trips in accessible vehicles, so if you make it accessible, people disabilities will come into yeah like think about it right you're a business right.

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Yeah, and you're having tons of people with disabilities, come here while, yeah.

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61 million Americans have a disability, and there's just too much money being left out there, and they want to spend, but they're smart, and they're going to spend it at places where they feel wanted.

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Right. Now, another thing is free coronavirus was 60 million people. I think that NYC and companies that came and visited the city every year of that 9 million of them are people with disabilities, right, there you go you got 9 million people coming in

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to visit the city right and their families. There's everything else, Victor. Yes, I think I want to.

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These are also important points and to me, I always go by the watchword compliance is the floor, not the ceiling of working on accessibility in your establishment your business.

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It's not about compliance it's about quality of life for everyone equality for everyone and compliance is the floor, it's not the ceiling. I'm sure there's some questions in the chat Rob Can you give us throw a question or two out there if you see any

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that particularly catch your eye.

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We have a question here coming in as a corporate event, producer, and board director of NYC and company, and founder of live events coalition of New York.

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We of course source special vehicles translators to ensure our events are accessible.

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We then have clients complain about the cost, it shouldn't could definitely use a complete list to ensure we're compliant as we want to be inclusive.

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So I guess that's just a request for companies who reasonable to provide this service. I really like to address the cost, cost issue.

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You know if people have said that to me about editorial to if they want to add text to captions though it takes longer at cost more, and time etc. Well, it costs more.

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Well, it costs more. Only if you think of all the people you left out beforehand. So, it doesn't cost more. If you're thinking, from the start that you want to reach everybody.

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So it costs more from a Floyd.

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Floyd base point.

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Yes, it does. There's no question. On the other hand, if you really want to reach everyone. It doesn't cost more. It actually pays more because you're reaching, as we've just been talking about a wider bigger audience with more money to spend.

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The price of doing business theater.

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Yes, exactly. Exactly. So, you know, is it when I speak to design groups about designing for accessibility.

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I talked about how a VA is often seen as an obstacle a barrier just another chore to get through, guess what, it's a design driver accessibility is a design driver, just like it's a business driver.

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And that's that's my answer to that. I know it's a it's changing your mindset to go there, but it's a critical change in mindset because that's where we're headed.

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As as a city as a country, as people, we're all headed toward inclusiveness, disability is not, and should not be the poor stepchild of the dti movement and age should not be the poor stepchild of disability.

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So, it's, including everyone is really where we're going and that is your return on investment at Peter, Kelly would like to jump in, can you give her a minute or.

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Absolutely.

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So, just wanted to also jump in on that question so and and Lakshmi helped me out here, you know, we do at NYC and company we do track.

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Those are numbers that are able to accommodate. I do think we could do a better job of this.

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is largely what populates our website so our website for consumers and our website for meeting and event planners to, and we already work with Lakshmi on a lot of the info that is out there for consumers.

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Thank you, Kelly and I want to address the data question that you just raised you know one area, and there's so much data about travel and tourism, how people go where they're going where they say what they spend, etc etc.

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There is so little data about the disability community, and its travel practices.

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And I urge everyone to begin thinking about, especially those of you with large venues who really track who comes in really pay attention to the percentage of people with disabilities numbers of, and of course those are visible disabilities who come to

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you and and raise questions I think you'll see a noticeable uptrend we all know that the airlines.

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Every year increase their alarm in a wheelchair seating. So I think it's really important.

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Rob another question, we don't have too much time but yeah I actually have to jump in, sorry this is Kelly, because we are running out of time and I want to I want to be cognizant of everyone's time.

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And, but there's something important that I did want to talk about, and that is related to all of this.

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That NYC and company is excited to announce on this call that we are, I believe the first destination correct me if I'm wrong on that Peter, that we are going to engage in a special training for GMOs, which is destination marketing organizations, and

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it's an accessibility blueprint, and we're excited that we are, we're just we're just we just green let that yesterday, and we're going to be working towards that working with Peter and Lakshmi.

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That's great. Thanks, Kelly thank you so much and we're very proud of that.

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We did create the X ray and I created a destination marketing organization, accessibility blueprint, which is to help demos, really do what I talked about at the beginning, which is look inward to their communities and themselves and then look outward

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to their to the visitors and customers who've come to destination so we're excited about that as well.

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And do we have time for one more question.

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Introduce and describe yourselves, and also describe the slides so just you know more of a thank you to end it off. Well that's great practice going forward.

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So did everyone's included in our presentations and as a blind guy I appreciate it, but I forgot to describe myself, but that's because I don't want anyone to know that I'm.

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No, just an old white guy okay

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that's that's the truth.

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And I really really appreciate this great panel Yannick.

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Congratulations really on not just being not just having a great restaurant, which is hard enough in a, in and of itself.

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I actually think content is going to be a real estate marker, set a real estate mark for for that area, and we're going to see more development around it, as it continues to be successful.

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And I hope I said that first but I think it's true, and Victor thank you as always for sharing your experience and your knowledge and commitment with us and Lakshmi, your energy, your passion.

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Just beautiful to watch and I've watched you pour yourself into this.

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And despite. We all know here on this panel that there's lots of roadblocks in the way. And we just keep pushing forward because that's what we can do, and I urge you all in the audience to.

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Don't be. Don't be discouraged by the thought of taking this on I already said you're already pioneers and path path breakers, to come here to be interested in this, and just move forward stay dedicated and you'll see the rewards.

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And I don't know if that's it. Thank you, NYC and company for putting a celebration together for us to share our knowledge and learn from each other. We look forward to the next one to come.

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Thank you so much likes me thank you for joining us and sharing all of your experience and and great insight on thank you so much Commissioner Khalif see for just being such a great partner with us at MIT and company and we can all do do better and more

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so please call upon us. Whenever and and all the time. Thank you Yannick, I can't wait to come in person to sit at the bar because I'm definitely a need of a cocktail most days these days.

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And thank you so much, Peter. You're the best. You did a great job moderating and presenting everything. I want to thank our wonderful interpreters and, and the team in NYC and company particularly Susan and Jenny for putting this together for us so thank

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you so much, and most importantly, thank you to the audience thanks to our members for joining us today. Thanks for your time. Thanks for your commitment you're obviously committed to this for spending time with us.

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We have recorded this session, and it's available to everyone in all different formats audio video, etc. So, we'll be sharing the link to this session.

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Very soon as soon as it's downloaded appropriately. Thank you very much, and Kelly, can you please share the chat box and q amp a with, with the panel so if there are questions directed at us, we can respond to them, and don't ask before we log off we