Building An Embodied Experience by August de los Reyes
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[Applause]

Hi everyone, my name is August. Yes, I was born in the month of August. And as I mentioned, I worked in design and I currently work for a company called Varo which promotes financial inclusion for the majority of Americans that are overcharged and underserved or just outright excluded from everyday financial services. But I have worked for companies and products that you might have heard of. I spent 14 years at Microsoft, where my last role was head of design for Xbox and then I moved to the Bay Area a few years ago where I worked for Pinterest. And then right before Varo, I spent some time at Google.

What's interesting about the sequence of jobs is when I used to tell people I worked at Xbox, **[01:00]** I'd often hear, "Oh my son or husband or boyfriend would want to meet you." And then when I worked at Pinterest I'd hear, "Oh my daughter, my wife, my girlfriend wants to meet you." When I worked at Google, no one wanted to meet me [laughter].

So, I want to start my story with a little bit of a provocation, which is this… Whenever I see a bendable straw, I see a love story. So, let me explain. Back in 2013, I was working for Xbox and at that time, I would have characterized it as my dream job. And well into that role, I'd read an article that suggested a good night's sleep is the new status symbol. And knowing my obsessive personality, I really got into it. I learned about thread count and different strings of cotton and how many layers are the right number to make your bed just so. And at that time, I bought an **[02:00]** overstuffed a summer weight duvet and what it did is it kind of changed the visual proportions of my bed. One night, when I thought I was plopping down into my bed I actually fell on the floor and hit my back against the side rail of the bed. This resulted in a trip to the emergency room and because of hospital error in this diagnosis, I ended up with a spinal cord injury. And I'm now in the chair, that's a whole other talk. But what I found was over the next six months, I'd spent time in the hospital going through recovery and learning my new normal. And the one thing that I knew would make me feel like my old self again was getting back to work, so I just rushed and rushed hoping to get back to my day job. What I had found in typical corporate American fashion is when I returned to work, **[03:00]** the entire company had gone through this massive reorganization and I returned to work with a new boss and then a charter. And what we found was that all the different heads of design for the different products now reported up to the same person. And this head of design tasked each of us with creating a design agenda. Or in other words, what are the themes or qualities or principles that all the products at Microsoft could share? And obviously, what was top of mind for me at the time was the notion of accessibility.

I, along with a couple of colleagues, really pushed for accessibility being part of this design agenda. And in doing so, in our exploration of accessibility, we came across things like universal design and inclusive design which really struck a chord with me. Just for the purposes of this conversation, I often hear **[04:00]** accessibility and then universal design and inclusive design used interchangeably. But I just want to clarify this point: accessibility is an outcome and universal design and inclusive design are two out of many approaches to realize this outcome. Where on the one hand, a universal design emphasizes the end result creating as accessible as possible a solution to as many people as possible. In other words, it's a kind of a one-size-fits-all solution. While inclusive design, on the other hand, focuses on the genesis of the problem, typically involving just one person or a small group of people. Inclusive design has been around for a while, but it's really taken **[05:00]** a lot of traction for two reasons: one because of the advancement of digital communications technology. And for others, in 2006 the United Nations General Assembly in their convention on the rights of people with disabilities redefined disability from the so-called medical model to the societal model. In other words, the medical model suggests that disability is really a phenomenon based on some sort of physiological or a cognitive impairment or difference. While the societal model suggests

that disability is, in fact, a mismatch between any person's given spectrum of abilities **[06:00]** and the artifacts and environments with which he or she interacts.

So, this brings us to the kind of damning conclusion the disability is, in fact, designed. And so, in thinking about this one might think, well, if we apply inclusive design to these kinds of single cases or to small groups of people, how does it benefit everyone? Then looking at the history of examples of inventions and innovations, we find that this approach benefits many people. It takes a kind of a leap of faith to assume that if you solve for one, that it'll benefit many. For example, let's take a remote control. The original design intent of the remote control was actually to help people with mobility differences who couldn't easily get up and cross the room to change the channel [Laughter]. **[07:00]** But, you jump a few decades ahead, each one of us expects a remote control to come with the television. And the list goes on. Early email protocols were invented by Vince Cerf who was hard of hearing so that he could communicate more seamlessly with his wife who was deaf. The keyboard was invented by an Italian aristocrat whose lover, a Contessa, was blind so that she could write letters without assistance. I'm really curious what were in these letters [laughter]. Think about the last time you took advantage of closed captioning at the airport or in a noisy bar. The telephone was originally invented as a device to assist the deaf. There's the electric toothbrush. The cruise control on the car was invented by an engineer with low vision who longed to drive again. And think about listening to audio books, **[08:00]** which brings us to the bendable straw.

The bendable straw was invented in 1930 by Joseph Freidman right here in San Francisco. So, it's kind of ironic that we were one of the first cities to ban these things. [Laughter] But what happened is he had taken his young daughter Judith to the soda fountain, and he noticed that she was fussing with trying to drink her milk shake because the straw went over the table last and she had trouble drinking from it. So, when he got home, he took a straw, he put a screw inside the straw and wrapped it with dental floss and invented the bendable straw. And, the rest is so-called history.

What's interesting about all these innovations is the they're all love stories. That they're are all expressions of love from the inventor to someone for whom they care about. **[09:00]** So, what's interesting about this is if you want to start thinking about inclusive design in your own practices, there are kind of three steps to it. The first is seek out a form of exclusion, whether it is you yourself has felt excluded or to understand how someone has been excluded from an everyday experience. Then, solve on the personal level. Solve for that one person or a small group. And, this is where it takes that leap of faith. That solution could not only benefit the person who's been excluded but will benefit others as you start to scale it to broader and broader audiences.

So, as Courtney mentioned, inclusive design is a shift from a kind of rational model design where there are hypotheses to an empirical model, where even if one person is the target, we have evidence to show that the solution actually works. Which I think is much greater than **[10:00]** designing for so-called average user that doesn't even exist. There's no such thing as average users. So, it's my hope that as you embrace inclusive design, you'll be inspired by the words of Charles Eames who suggests, "Design for someone you love that someone might be you." And in doing so, as you look around in your everyday lives, that you realize that you're surrounded by love stories. Thank you so much.

[Applause]