LOSING SIGHT OF WHAT MATTERS
at, mattjs
“We are a people of great differences, converging at a critical moment in history. At this time, we must embrace those very differences for the greater good of humankind... Only then can we advance forward rather than to claim our own extinction as a species. We must be the change we want to see in the World.”

“It is from our differences, that we bring unique perspectives and even more unique thoughts. It is from this merging of individuality, that are born the greatest ideas.”

“Everyone sees what you appear to be, few experience what you really are.” Niccolò Machiavelli
“To be blind is not miserable; not to be able to bear blindness, that is miserable.” John Milton

“My darkness has been filled with the light of intelligence, and behold, the outer day-lit world was stumbling and groping in social blindness.” Helen Keller

“There's none so blind as they that won't see.” Jonathan Swift
LOSING SIGHT OF WHAT MATTERS
SANJAY NATALY-GANDHI
THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO MY WIFE
YOU HAVE BEEN A ROCK THROUGHOUT
THIS ADVENTURE.
AUTHOR’S NOTE

I would like to start off by thanking you for taking the time to read this book. Be warned, it is non-conventional and at times a hard read. These are my thoughts on an issue that is very close to me, and I hope that if you are someone who has struggled or is struggling with what is covered here, that it gives you a sense of purpose and motivates you to act, not only for yourself, but for this community.

I want you to share your hope,
I want you to share your faith,
I want you to share your love.
Good morning; family, friends, peers, and doctors.
Before we get started today, I want to ask you two questions...
Please raise your hands if you know anyone who has an accessibility requirement?
OK, so not many of you.
Now, raise your hands if you know who I am?
All right, a handful of you!
Before we start, I want to take five minutes and tell you about myself, as I find we are more open to having these conversations with people whom we know.

Born on the South Pacific island of Fiji in January of 1979, I am the youngest of three boys. My fondest memories from this time include; climbing up to the flatbed roof of our home in Nadi, Fiji to watch the spiraling sun set in to the sea, exploring and playing on Wailoaloa beach, our family trips to Suva, Fiji, and gazing up at the planes that would take off from the nearby international airport, of particular interest was identifying the vast number of tail markings.

In all honesty, I wasn’t much for school, often skipping out at lunch and going home, or getting in trouble for not copying down the work from the blackboard.

In 1985, the family immigrated to Canada. While sitting in my seat, before we took-off, my mom gave me a Mickey Mouse watch, his hands would move around the dial to tell time. I remember looking out the window as we took-off, the sadness of losing friends and a home, gave way to the excitement of a new adventure, as the island disappeared into the sea, the clouds and the sky.
We moved to city of Brampton, Ontario, and quickly adjusted to our new life. I didn’t much enjoy school other than English class, and Music. Recess was a great deal of fun, playing foot hockey, handball, hide and seek, and tag... which I But I was always cautious about playing, as I would quite often run into walls. There was so much that was different here, there was Cable TV, cartoons thus became an essential part of the morning routine. I was always one to get into trouble for sitting too close to the TV. Video games were also a vital daily activity, with me playing my Nintendo, every chance I got.

Then there is the matter of Snow... That fluffy white stuff that would ever so gently fall magically from the sky when the temperature would hover around zero Celsius. May I remind you, I was born in Fiji! Moving on...

In my teenage years, I really began to love Hockey. Watching the Vancouver Canucks, my favorite team, mainly because of number ten, Pavel Bure. Every time he would step out on to the ice, my eyes would perk up to see what magic he would create. Also playing street hockey after I got home from school until when the lights came on, made up a big part of my days. I loved being goalie, and the best part was stopping those incoming long-range shots.
Another one of my loves was music; it was around the time I turned thirteen that I started to listen to a lot of music from various genres from which U2 was my favorite group. I loved that Music didn’t need a visual component.

In my third year of high school, it was my English teacher who helped me discover a talent I had for creative writing. It is a gift that was given to me, that I am thankful for to this day.

When I turned sixteen, I began to drive and loved it. It only got better once I had my full license, on Sunday mornings I would get in the car, crank up the music and get out on the empty highway and drive, occasionally going much faster than I should have been.

After high school, I didn’t really know what I wanted to do. I had two loves, Technology and Advertising. University was an option but didn’t appeal to me, so I took some courses at Sheridan College, and eventually enrolled in the Marketing program full-time, and went to night school to take Database Systems, Computer Systems, and Computer Programming. Most days were spent in rush-hour commuting between the Brampton campus and the Oakville campus.
Once I completed all my programs in May of 2000, I took a break to concentrate on my own development. After some time trying to create music and writing, I began to apply and soon was hired as a Client Service Representative at a Financial Institute. Not really what I wanted to be doing, I soon after took on a sales role and had success, but wasn’t content. I concentrated most of my time outside of work on my own business and my girlfriend. I would pick her up and we would go out for dinners, movies, and spend time just driving around and talking.

In early 2004, I began a new role at the same organization, this time as a project manager at the head office location in downtown Toronto. The commute was quite different than any I had experienced. I still remember getting off the GO train at Bramalea, the race was on, as passengers would leap out the train before the doors would even be fully open. You see, if you didn’t get to your car and into the queue to get out, you would be stuck for a good twenty minutes in the lot.

...It was reminiscent of a herd of animals being chased by their predators.
In July of 2005 Rashmi and I married, after escaping Hurricane Emily on our honeymoon, that August we moved into our new home in Brampton. We love travelling and trying different foods. Rashmi, who is a chef in her own right, introduced me to a new way at looking at food. Opening me up to eating with the senses, not only taste, but smell, texture, and the visual layout. In 2007, our son Raj was born. He showed up a month early, needless to say, he interrupted my nursery-room painting project, which was colorfully Suess-ian.

Some of the greatest moments in my life have to do with Raj, including his birth, him take his first steps, and taking him to see Despicable Me, his first movie at the cinema. In the last ten years, it has been amazing to follow him on his journey, and being able to cherish the time we have, whether it be playing tag, football, wrestling, or having a Nerf dart war, and of course playing Monopoly, watching movies, and bizarre YouTube videos on Saturday mornings. One moment I will never forget is taking a seven-year-old superhero-loving Raj to New York City, to watch the Spider-Man play; highlighted by seeing Raj get a high-five from Spidey mid-play... Priceless.

These days our little Raj is an aspiring YouTube content creator.
In 2015, I finally got around to self-publishing six books of poetry. Though I have been writing since 1996, I never thought to make public my writings. It was a painstaking process of reading the writings over and over until they were near perfect. Every detail had to be reviewed from the front cover to the back cover.

I must admit, I am very conscious about my surroundings; I am always making sure I pay extra attention to people in public spaces. I try to ensure that I do not ignore people, though it happens. I often feel like turning around and saying, “three’s something you should know” and telling them about myself, just to clear up any misconceptions.

These days, I continue to have a passion for Technology, specifically with as it relates to accessibility. I love to see and hear about emerging technologies and how they are helping to change people’s lives.

Well that pretty much brings us to today.
So before we go on, I just want to return to the two questions I asked earlier.

How many of you now feel that you know me? That’s great… All hands up! Ok so leave your hands up for the next question.

How many of you know someone with an accessibility requirement? Keep your hands up… Look around the room.

Thank you.
WHAT DO YOU SEE?

We are all blind to what we cannot see. Sometimes, as humans, we must raise our vision over what is visible. After all, that is what makes us human.
INTRODUCTION

Hope... In my young life thus far, I have found hope to be a leader, a driver in most everyone’s life. Hope for a better life, hope for a brighter future, hope for peace, equality, love, salvation. Hope is always there.

My hope is that we can find understanding, acceptance, and a mindset within which all peoples can be given the tools they need to achieve the potential that they have.

One’s ability to be successful should not be predetermined based on a perceived judgment of their physical or mental functionality. We must evoke as a society past this stale viewpoint to put into place the foundations for success.

We all have the ability to have successes and accomplishments. Our richness as beings is only limited to our inability to be a diverse and inclusive society, within which many views are incorporated. We are made greater by a culture within which there is a wealth of ideologies and opinions, rather than a society of humans with a stagnant and stale vision.
AN ADMITTANCE

This book is a collection of many separate dialogues, strung together by three overarching themes: Awareness, Enablement and Accessibility.

The intent is to create an awareness of how we should strive to ensure that we provide the tools to create both an enabling and an accessible environment for all, no matter their accessibility requirements.

There are many who struggle on a daily basis with acquiring simple accessibility tools, because of the surrounding environment’s inability to adapt and provide basic accommodations, which would allow for them to function and be a strong contributing member of society.

Furthermore, many with accessibility needs sit quietly, pushing themselves through the day-to-day, worried about repercussions that would be faced for raising their needs.
It is the combination of these two factors that often results in many with accessibility needs having to combat mental and psychological disorders, as a derivative of the frustration and anger they’ve pent up inside themselves.

As a result, the culmination of these events, eventually leads to the harvesting of an environment within which depression can flourish.

I feel strongly about the dependency of those with accessibility needs to lay the fault of their inabilities on themselves. We are all able, no matter the differences we may have between us. We are all capable of achieving; do not let yourself be told otherwise.

We are a rare bred... Trust yourself and let your capabilities lead you.
DON’T GO TO WAR WITH YOUR SELF

In that moment, when you break and the sadness passes, you will discover an angered rage like none you have ever known. You will punch walls, bang your head, and physically hurt yourself. It’s ok, live in that angered rage, but not for too long, and not to the point where the pain you inflict on yourself is greater than the reason for it.

You must harness that angered rage, control it, and will it to a greater purpose. You are the only one in your shoes; don’t go to war with yourself!

Some battles are not worth waging. Use that electricity to spawn and give birth to bigger ideas, let them drive you and raise your determination to achieve a greater goal, a greater good for all who are walking with you.

There are many among us who are voiceless, don’t look down on them. Stand up for them; arm them with your voice.

Let our manifest be to create a world that is inclusive. There’s a battle to be won, so stop destroying yourself; our destructive nature is not the solution to achieving our goals.
I know you may be in a place right now, where it is hard to see this light. That’s all right; just know that you can do it.

Once you become aware of the power you hold, and what you can do with it... Don’t look back at your actions, as there is no room for self-deprecation.

Is there anything that can take away the loss of trust, or the hurt? No, but remember, I need you, this is our battle, we are in this together.

Don’t lose momentum over the past, stay focused on the future, it will be here sooner than you know.
We often take for granted the tools that we have. Our eyes, ears, mouth, nose, feet, and hands enable us to complete a multitude of tasks. Each of these tools is capable of completing dynamic tasks, but tend to be under-utilized.

It is often said, when you lose one of your senses, the other senses are heightened... Well, as you may guess, the truth is your senses just work harder to compensate.

For instance, if you lose your sense of smell, your taste buds work as a substitute and play a greater role, making up for the initial sense of smell when eating or drinking.

Sensory compensation also occurs when an individual loses their sense of hearing; in this instance, the eyes pay closer attention to detail. In certain situations, when communicating face-to-face with a person, individuals would use their vision to view the intricacies of facial movements to understand what is being said and the emotions that are being expressed.

For an individual who have had a loss of vision, the ears learn to compensate by identifying people by their voices, distance and time from the sounds that surround them.
In addition, often the sense of awareness is also heightened. Being aware of where you may be standing, the presence of walls, people, and objects through the use of light contrast can be extremely helpful to those with vision loss. One must not feel disengaged, rather more aware. We have the ability to reprogram the base functions of our senses. The brain is a super-computer and with the right coding, allows for certain senses to be heightened.

Close your eyes and listen. Listen to the hum of electricity, the echo and reverb as sound bounces off walls, and down hallways. Listen to sounds as they pass from left to right. Separate your ears, and let them orient direction, use them to interpret how and where vehicles are moving, and pedestrians are walking. Listen to voices; database them in your vast memory to decipher who the person is, that is talking to you. For your eyes, your ears can be programmed to identify: direction, distance, emotion, activity, and space.

With vision, we tend to take for granted all the little things that make our vision so dynamic. Vision is not just looking at a picture; it is a high-definition, multi-dimensional experience, which cannot be created through a camera lens.
RECOGNISING RESULTS OF INACTION

For a sighted employee, it may be difficult to understand the full extent of the impact that not having a fully accessible system can have.

For someone who has a visual impairment, not having an accessible environment takes a tremendous toll not only on their ability to be a productive member of society, but also their overall well-being.

Individuals, who are faced with challenges on an ongoing basis, create a level of normalcy through daily routine, which aids in maintaining their well-being at home and at work. As you can imagine, the fundamental collapse in the ability to be productive and be dignified, can lead to depression, emotional imbalance, and erratic behavior, which is not only limited to a mental breakdown, but also a physical breakdown.

There are many solutions to combat such an eventuality. Keys to a successful resolution include the identification of an accessibility issue, the deployment of a well-developed, tested, and working solution, with urgency.
URGENT ATTENTION REQUIRED!

In an elongated process during which the needs of an individual with accessibility requirements are not met, may result in emotional and mental strain on said individual.

As you may well know, there is a great deal of emotional, mental and physical stress on an individual within their daily function. For many, work is vital for them, in that it helps them to be a productive and contributing member of society, thus it is incorporated and plays a primary role in their daily routine.

Many build a routine within which they are able to live as normally as possible. Changes to this routine, which are out of their control and have a negative impact, such as prolonged neglect of accessibility requirements, can cause irritation, leading to aggravation.

It is important to understand the adverse reactions that can occur due to a lack of urgency to solution accessibility needs. We should never wait for the moment when an individual becomes completely undone and broken to react with urgency.
BRIDGING THE HUMAN GAP: RESOURCES & RELATIONS

We spend far too much of our resources disabling those with accessibility needs further, rather than working towards a solution that would enable them, and in turn, empower them to reach their potential.

There needs to be a shift in Human Resource Management towards Human Relations Management. We need to start building relations with our employees, instead of having the view of employees as resources.

Where Human Resourcing takes the approach to employees as being a resource. Human Relations Management champions employees, builds relationships, and had empathy.

Whether it is resources or relations, when dealing with matters of accessibility, it should be a requisite to solution the requirement with urgency and with empathy.
INVISIBLE BARRIERS

Those with accessibility requirements are capable and deserving of the same opportunities to be productive and contributing members of the workforce. As a requisite, all employees should be held in the same regard, no matter their differences.

It is not for management at any level to decide how successful an employee will be, without giving them the opportunity to succeed. The ideology that we can overlook employees or withhold their growth based on differences, without first letting them prove themselves, is not a culture that can be tolerated or should be nourished.

Leadership needs to lead in the development of all employees and seek out how best to utilize talents to steer the organization to success. Each individual’s success plays a key part in the overall success of an organization.

We should not limit an individual based on what is thought to be their abilities. We should not predetermine one’s performance level, without previously engaging and including the individual in the conversation.
Perceived abilities and career aspirations are often vastly different than an individual’s actual abilities and career aspirations. Understandably these are difficult conversations to be had for any leader, but they need to be had, otherwise you are setting the precedent that both physical and mental limitations should withhold progress.

It is easy for a leader to create a culture within which there is failure. It takes exceptional leadership to create a culture where individuals succeed.
I have found that far too often, the stigma of accessibility requirements determines the capabilities of an employee. This may at times be forced by the negative connotations associated with the word "disability".

The reality of the fact is, most individuals who are faced with such adversities, have an unrelenting drive to succeed and overcome that what hinders their potential.

Many achieve greatness through the use of a vast array of tools. Many of which with the onset of “smart” technologies are not only more readily available to the masses, but also very affordable, if not free.

As individuals we fight through, we do not fear adversity; rather we face it head on. For us, more disappointing than failure is being held to a lower standard of achievement or a lower capacity than our peers.

Do not judge us, based on unfounded notions of what one can accomplish because of our physical limitations. We are a driven and determined group of individuals, we overcome and beat the odds, these are our core traits.
EMPLOYABLE, DEVELOPABLE, SUCCESSORS

We may often question if we are employable. I don’t think there is any doubt we aren’t employable.

Where I find myself often questioning careers and career paths is whether or not we are viewed as developable and can be successors.

You see, there is a difference between someone who is employed and someone who is with strong leadership given the opportunity to not only develop, but be a successor, that is to be promoted and acclaimed for their work, ethics, and driving the business forward.

Talent development comes with a price, time, and resources. But with development comes loyalty. As leaders our success should be based on the success of the individuals who make up our team.

It should be the goal of leadership to understand the obstacles that stand in the way of an individual’s success and fight to remove them, rather than to shy aware or plead ignorance.
DON’T GIVE UP, ARM YOURSELF

One of the most important lessons I’ve come to learn during any struggle, is also the one thing I would change, and that is arming myself.

No one knows our battles like we do.

We live and breathe them every day; everyone else is on the outside looking in, with only a fraction of an understanding as to what we are struggling with.

There is a vast level of knowledge and information online. The accessibility community is growing and bringing lots of solutions to the table. Arm yourself with it.

We must be our own advocates, and we must also be accountable to fight our way to the table and provide answers.

Utilize the Internet to find the right solution, and demand that it be implemented.

Keep in mind that no solution is permanent. Today’s needs may not necessarily be the needs of tomorrow. As we evolve, so will our needs.
AN I FOR AN EYE, SO THAT THE WHOLE WORLD CAN SEE

If we are to build a better world, an inclusive world, we must remove stigmas and in their place build a system that creates awareness and praises individuality.

We all bring different skills and traits to the table; these traits come from our history, cultures, upbringings and our own struggles, battles and conquests.

We must support each other, praise each other, and claim each other’s successes as ours. We’re in this together, so just as we claim each other’s successes; we must claim one another’s struggles. Understanding the struggle is the key to solving it.

Rome wasn’t built in a day, but it was built. It was built because of an idea and supporting ideology, albeit, by force. We can talk to our hearts content, but strong leadership needs to swallow the hard pill and act... Demanding success and strong results.

It is this individuality from which spout magnificent ideas and forward-thinking visions. To build the future we want, we must take ideas and act on them. Action over inaction!
We know that some of the purest minds are the youngest minds. From them come bold new ideas that form new mindsets, and more importantly, the future.

To our accessibility leaders and developers, we are here, and thankful for your hard work. Call upon us and utilize us, so that you can understand our unique needs in fine detail. Our future and our independence depend on your ability to understand us and to foresee future trends in technology, to create advanced accessibility tools and assistive devices.

There are no dumb ideas, and no idea is impossible. Technology is ever evolving, and in its evolution, more is possible than ever before, and what is not possible, is definitely in the line of sight.

Do not let the impossibilities of your ideas discourage you; the Personal Computer was an idea. Graphic User Interface (GUI) was an idea. The Smartphone was an idea.

So whatever the idea or concept, we must share it, put it out in the open. Someone in our global community is bound to see it through to fruition.
DISABLING THE DISABILITY

Working towards a change in the mindset begins with the term Disability and all of its variations. There are only two types of people who are disabled, those who have passed on, and those who have given up. For the rest of us, we are not disabled. The term does not apply here. We have accessibility requirements, and are fully capable. This relates to those with vision, auditory, speech and mobility access requirements.

I have come to the conclusion that there are distinct sets of people.
1. Those who are willing and capable: These are the individuals who have the means and are able to successfully achieve on a daily basis, without struggle.
2. Those who are willing but do not have the means: These are the people who know their potential, but find themselves surrounded by hurdles at every turn. They may struggle to get through the day, but they do it... Yet quietly, they hold on to their mental and psychological burdens.
3. Those who have given up: Those who just weren’t willing, maybe they didn’t have any support, found the struggle much too hard, or just didn’t care to see their own potential. To you, I am sorry.
4. Those who have passed on.

It’s time to abolish Disability.
GUIDING PRINCIPLES

There are various guiding principles that can be utilized in terms of accessibility. It should be noted that these are just guiding principles and are not the be all and end all of the accessibility conversation. While it is always recommended to utilize resources and principles as part of an organization’s responsibility to accessibility, it is essential that there be user experience testing from those with accessibility requirements. Quite often, this can come from employees within the organization with accessibility requirements.

It is immensely important to encourage participation and create an environment where their feedback is valued. In many cases these employees are also clients, and are willing to provide critical details on where guiding principles fall short. This critical feedback prior to deployment can often save organizations from embarrassment and clients from frustration.

Don’t just settle for any standard, be the standard!
I once heard that our eyes, when healthy, are the world’s greatest cameras, with a resolution of 576 megapixels. They process a staggeringly high volume of data per second, with the aid of course, of the world’s greatest supercomputer, the brain.

Every day, technology is taking small steps forward. Today’s reality could very well be tomorrow’s history. These advances have led to the creation of a wide range of solutions, more than at any previous time in history. With the evolving world of mobile computing, Wearables, and Embeddables, the future looks ever promising.

There is one caveat to the growth in innovation. We have multiple organizations creating multiple solutions to solve niche problems relating to accessibility. We need innovation to be collaborative. We need organizations to come together to create a group solution. Each organization brings their specialization to the fold, to help create the most dynamic and versatile solution to solve for a need.
Technology within the accessibility field needs to be open source. If we are to look at data alone, a single organization is limited to the data they have, whereas in collaboration, software can communicate via multiple data sets from a broad selection of organizations, creating a full picture.

Imagine sequencing data from Microsoft, Apple, Amazon, Google/Alphabet, Amazon, IBM, Samsung, Xiaom, Uber, Salesforce, LinkedIn, Facebook, Snap and so on... Wow, that’s a picture, and not just pieces of a puzzle.

Though technology in the accessibility field has advanced, it isn’t quite there yet. Collaboration with the intent of innovation would be the giant leap that is needed in order to attain the solution.

We are so close to resolving many problems, so close. Let’s come together, work together, and deliver. These innovations are not just products or applications... They are life-changing tools. They are enablers that need to be accessible and readily available to all citizens of the world.
INCORPORATING ACCESSIBILITY AS PART OF QUALITY ASSURANCE

As organizations move towards becoming future focused institutes, we must evaluate the impacts of the changes we make and how they will impact our broad employee and client base. Technology is at the center of both employee and client relations, and as both are key stakeholders, we should not only be industry leaders, but also engagers.

This means that in terms of decisions pertaining to deployment, we should ensure that in our efforts of being agile and quick to market, we do not alienate clients. We are obligated to not only taking into consideration their accessibility requirements, but also testing to ensure that the accessibility features are to the needs of clients.

By not doing this every time we are deploying to clients, we run the risk of isolating clients, losing clients, and most importantly having a negative reputation impact and creating an environment for profit loss.

It is imperative that accessibility is incorporated as part of all Quality Assurance testing for both employee and client facing deployments.
INTELLIGENT DESIGN

Creating a truly accessible environment is all about design.

Understand how the end-users will use the accessibility functions and then improve their effectiveness, flexibility, and ease of application. These are the keys to great accessibility.

For instance, accessibility on websites should not be hidden in the footer, rather, prevalent and easy to find in the header. Ramps should be marked with either a cultured border or made of a different material, so that they can be easily spotted or identified on approach. Glass windows and doors should have distinct and visible frosting at a height which would be visible to people. Stairs should have markings to identify where the steps are. Mobile Applications should allow users to switch to high-contrast settings within the application and have zoom functionality. Buildings should have contrasting walls and floors, with flat lighting to avoid perception loss.

Always aim for setting the standard. These types of design modifications do not limit creativeness, rather create new ways for organizations and solution drivers to create design intelligently.
It is essential that we maintain as part of standardized curriculum and extra-curricular activities: the arts, music, painting, drawing, photography, creative writing, and drama.

Not only are these key for the development of our children, they act as a safety, a form of release for those who may face physical and mental challenges. The Arts aid in the nourishment of our children, not only do they impact their physical development but also by creating mental stimulation and sensory awareness.

The Arts are as important as English, Math, and Science. Cutting such programs, removes a vital outlet for children, leading to the further suppression of emotions and separation from reality.

Additionally, it has been noted that many who are faced with accessibility needs, have a great level of creativity, and can often create masterpieces. We would be wrong to not let such capabilities cultivate.
A SHIFT IN ACCESS TO SUCCESS: IT’S ELEMENTARY

Changing the mindset is generational. Not only is it a core set of beliefs that must be instilled at an early age, it is a core set of values that need to be applied, starting in our education systems.

Rather than segregating children with accessibility needs into separate schools or classes, we should work towards creating fully accessible environments in all our institutions, starting at the elementary school level.

No student is more special than any other. Let’s remove the application of the word “Special” as a descriptor for those with accessibility requirements.

As teachers, teaching aids, and social workers, you have a unique insight on our children... You have the ability to show students who they are and what they can achieve, in the process developing their strengths and helping them discover their passion.
By adopting these measures, not only do students strive, they also gain an understanding of the diverse set of accessibility needs and tools, and how they enable individuals. By molding these minds at an early age, we can change beliefs and values, and create a more inclusive society now and for the future.
THE RIGHT FIGHT

You never really understand the fight for rights, that is, until you find yourself at the center of it. It’s unfortunate that human nature has a tendency to sweep these matters out of sight, rather than to face them, and work towards making a positive change. Far too often, we only hear the words and not what is said, or we only see the image and not the story that it tells.

Every day I am rediscovering my Identity through my passion. This is a struggle that is as old as man... The struggle for equality is a fight of colour, gender, race, preference, and accessibility. I want to live in a world where the social stigmas associated with these matters are eradicated, and I am willing to fight rather than to be idle.

Discover your passion, whatever it may be, live and be led by it. Our achievements as individuals tell a story of our defiance as a group. Our successes as individuals help to break down the barriers that hold us back as a collective. In times of retreat, do not count it as a loss, but an opportunity to regroup and gain greater yields.
THERE’S SOMETHING YOU SHOULD KNOW

I’m not a prick. No really... I’m not. What I mean is, there was a time when I was quite arrogant, cocky, self-assured. But that... That was long ago, and since then, a lot has changed. I’m not really sure what happened, whether it was an accumulation of events, or just a defective human clock that timed out too early. But I do know, the man I am now is not the man I saw myself as a decade ago, or for that matter, ever.

This is not a plea for help, more so a call for understanding. I hope that you gain something from reading this, and if nothing more, know that I am more full of fight now, than ever before.

I have always had poor vision, from my early youth in Fiji, through my teenage years and to this day. Though I had poor vision, nothing prepared me for what it would become. Near the time when my son was born, I began to experience many changes, most of which were physical and mental. It would continue for years, my weight would constantly increase, emotionally I was all over the place, my memory was deteriorating, I was always tired and in pain.
Along with these issues, over the next seven years, my vision had become dramatically hindered. I developed what is known as visual snow, which can be best described as a layer of permanent static that covers the field of vision. My tolerance for light decreased significantly to the point where bright light in particular would delay my ability to see at all, meaning I would have to pause for some time in order to regain vision, as it affected all areas of perception. Eventually with my decreased vision, hyper-nystagmus developed, which essentially left my eyes unable to focus on objects. Finally, adding to this growing list, were islands of complete blindness, which led me to learn how to utilize the surrounding vision and memory to fill in images. Once the degeneration stabilized, I was left with a low percentage of functional vision.

The root cause although unresolved, resides with the optic nerve wherein many abnormalities were discovered.

My visual degeneration began while I was young, however went undetected for many years. I didn’t start to wear corrective lenses until I was six years old, so after years of struggle, I found that I could somewhat control the effects of bright light with tinted lenses.
One of the most difficult aspects of vision loss for me has been the inability to identify faces. At times faces are not visible, and at other times, facial features are missing. As you can imagine, this can make it difficult in not only conversation, but also recognizing visual cues.

In my daily routine, there are many obstacles. Stairs that do not contrast or have markings appear to me as a slide would. White walls and floors under bright white light, meld together into one indiscernible surface. Projected light creates a thick blanket of white noise that envelops my field of vision.

At work, I was able to setup the high-contrast settings on Microsoft Windows XP, which enabled me to be productive and work, without issue. I am lucky to have a great support group, from doctors to an eyewear specialist, and my wife and son.

It was during this time that while I could no longer make out objects more than two feet away, I discovered that my hearing was compensating for my vision loss. I learned to distinguish sounds and identify unique voiceprints. With the vision I did have, I trained my eyes to tell apart contrasting shades to identify certain objects so that I could carry out normal functions of the day.
Though as strong as I seemed to be, I began finding myself at odds, my daily routine became unhinged, as many of the tasks I was once able to do, I could no longer, or would struggle to as there was a great disconnect with the tools I would utilize. There were patchwork solutions to remediate the issue, however, the solutions would almost immediately lead to other issues. Eventually the emotional toll of no longer being in control began to surface, leading to a full blowout and breakdown.

You see for someone who managed to function independently, it becomes hard to have to rely on, to trust, and have faith in others. Within the constant failures of having a fully functioning accessibility solution, I lost my faith and trust in my peers. It was at this moment, when I had lost my appetite, ability to sleep, and my calm, and when I decided to no longer sit idle, but rather discuss my experience and seek to make changes.

If I were to share my learning with you, it would be simply this; none of us can change the world, but we can all action small changes, within our organizations, institutions and cities. Over time, all those little actions and changes will make for a world that is inclusive.
WE SEE THINGS, THEY WILL NEVER SEE

All my general eye exams started and ended in failure. That is until I could no longer see failure, rather only a blank slate. Sometimes it is what we can’t see, that lets us see further... Sometimes when you see that blank slate, and you squint your eyes, you will see that we too are equal.

Realize that you are not defeated, but all conquering.
IN CLOSING...

Dear family and friends, your work far too often goes without acknowledgement. You are our guardians, watching over us, and always on the ready to step in. Don’t give up on us, we will never give up on you.

To those who are already making a difference, those who are fighting for accessibility rights, and those who are advancing accessibly, to those who are enhancing technology solutions and those who are advocating accessibility issues every day. Thank you for all that you do.

For those who have struggled in silence, to those who feel they don’t count, and to those who are no longer sure of what they should do. Know that you are not alone; understand that there are others just like you, who have been in the same situation, and many others who are in the same situation.

Once you accept this fact, stop what you are doing and think. Think for yourself and think about what it is that you want. You have the way and the will to make a difference. Think about what you can do, and remember even the smallest of actions, make a giant statement. Use technology and social media to your advantage and utilize them at every opportunity.

And to those who are not able to see as we do, or understand the need for accessibility, I want you to step into my shoes...
I want you to envision your daily routine, through a different lens. Imagine doing those things that come naturally, all the little things that we often take for granted, with your eyes closed. Take a moment now, close your eyes and go through the events of a typical day and all their nuances, and then imagine doing those same things if you could not see and did not have the aid of any accessibility tools.

Do you see it?

I am sure that it became rather apparent, quite quickly, how fast one can lose their confidence, trust, and faith in their own abilities, when simple tasks require your full attention in order to navigate through the intricacies of what they consist of.

Going forward, I want you to keep this new lens, and when you are making decisions that impact our society, no matter how big or small that decision is, I want you to bring out this lens and consider the impacts of those decisions, and ensure they are inclusive before deploying them.

With Love,
Sanjay
“Out of many, we are one”

“Take your weak, your diseased, and your broken. Give them hope, faith, and love. Raise them up, and once again make them whole!”

“There is no excuse, only ignorance.”

“The most unethical of all means is the non-use of any means.” Saul D. Alinsky
Losing Sight of What Matters was conceived in 2013. Initially the book delved into the intricacies of the medical condition that afflicted me, and how it transformed everyday life. Since then, it has cycled through many evolutions, based on a series of personal experiences, until finally reaching its birth. This book is less about me or a conversation, and more about the actions we need to take with one another.

So let's have at this!