Haben Girma:
Oh, I'm having a great time here. There are so many people from the accessibility community from all over the world, so it's been an amazing opportunity to connect and network.

Mark Walker:
Great. And what is the significance of the event? Why is it important that we're hosting it?

Haben Girma:
It's important that there's collaboration between all the different organizations that are working on accessible tech, because then we can share knowledge and come up with better solutions for everyone.

Mark Walker:
Great.

Paul Walsh:
Yeah, I'd say from a Lenovo perspective, we're kind of really excited to be partnering with AbilityNet. Look, we talk about the whole area of a smarter technology for all. We are looking to drive a much richer, inclusive environment to ensure that we can... Not as an after thought, but when we think about from a design perspective all the way through to delivery of products, solutions, and services that we are truly enabling and building systems for everyone. And so we're excited to be here, and I think it's our first time that we've partnered and sponsored this event. So, it's been really good so far.

Mark Walker:
Mm-hmm (affirmative). Very great. You do not stop. In terms of this morning, Caroline talked about a feeling of excitement, that there is a sense that this is a real tipping point in terms of accessibility. I just wonder whether you would you agree, and also based on what you said whether there is still more to be done in terms of embracing touch I guess.

Haben Girma:
I'm seeing wonderful, positive things, but I'm also seeing tech that's inaccessible and shouldn't be accessible. So, we still need to educate a lot of organizations to make sure a tech is being designed with access in mind, and if we could increase hiring of people with disabilities so that the disabled are participating in all aspects of design from testing and customers to designing the actual products, that everyone will have more accessible designs and better products overall.

Mark Walker:
And for me that's been a theme of the conference so far is inclusive design, which is that it's less about designing for disabled and more about taking those principles and designing for all. So, I guess I'd just be interested in both of your take on that from Lenovo's persepctive, and from yourself.

Paul Walsh:
Yeah, look, one of the reasons why I'm really excited about our partnership with Haben, and then obviously our partnership with you, is to really think about how do we look at inclusivity within the actual culture, part of our DNA, then we can actually... Whereas we're designing products, that we're looking at those products, or designing those products from the beginning with an inclusive point of view.

Paul Walsh:
And really not thinking about it as an afterthought. So, what we'll see with Haben and our relationship is really ensure that one, we are looking at it from a cultural perspective and what do we have to do to ensure that we're really diverse and inclusive, and I mean that in a very holistic manner. And two, how when we're thinking about designing our product solutions and services that it is very inclusive as well. And I think the only way to truly do that is by having that within our DNA.

Mark Walker:
Mm-hmm (affirmative). And how close would you say you are to having that in your DNA?

Paul Walsh:
Well, we've done a lot around accessibility, and, well, really this partnership with Haben is how do we make a step change, how do we even do more, how do we ensure that we're doing all the right things and everything that we possibly can do when it comes to delivering smarter technology for all.

Mark Walker:
Great. And do you both have a sense of what success would look like?

Haben Girma:
Success would look like a culture where disability is celebrated as a driver of innovation and as people with disabilities as talented.

Mark Walker:
Great, perfect. And can I just ask you a couple of questions around what it was like for you studying at Harvard? A higher education is something that's close to the heart of AbilityNet, and we're doing a lot of work in terms of accessibility around that. What was the experience like for you? And what was missing that you'd like to see coming through?

Haben Girma:
Harvard was ready for me when I arrived, but if I'd come five years earlier, I would not have been able to attend the university. Throughout most of its history, there've been so many barriers that woman couldn't attend, or people of color couldn't attend. Helen Keller really wanted to go to Harvard, but back then they only admitted men. It's society that creates barriers and society can choose to dismantle barriers, so people with disabilities are fully included.

Haben Girma:
I did not know all of the solutions I would need when I entered Harvard. Harvard didn't know exactly how it would work, but we engaged in an interactive process to seek solutions and create them when we encountered a wall. So, it was an ongoing conversation to find accessibility solutions and tech has made it much, much easier for me. I've met a blind person who said he had to quit working as an attorney, because he was losing his hearing.

Haben Girma:
And I questioned him, "How could you say that? Of course, a deafblind person can do law." And he said, "Back when I was working, we did not have access to braille computers." And the existence of technology that instantly makes braille available has made it much easier for me and my generation, generation EDA, to have access to careers like law and to be able to enter places like Harvard University.

Mark Walker:
Great. And you talked earlier about the importance of community for you personally and the impact of tech in creating that sense of community. How big a role will that play in the work that you're doing with Lenovo as you go forward?

Haben Girma:
So, I really want to help change the culture so that disability is centered at Lenovo in all aspects of design, and community helps create that. So, we want to build up the disability community at Lenovo.

Mark Walker:
That's great.

Paul Walsh:
I think it's really important for us to look at all of the advancements that we've been making across technology, whatever it be cloud, big data, AI, mobile, social, blockchain, et cetera. And with all those advancements we still see across industries that we still have friction. There's still friction in the system. So, where our goal is really... How do we understand that and then remove that friction? And then if that's not going to be for any organization a monolithic change, it's continuous improvements.

Paul Walsh:
And I think what Haben is going to be able to help us with this, even within Lenovo, is how do we continuously improve as they're getting better. And some of that is, as we said, it's in our culture, some of that is going to be in our product sets, and that's going to be really important. But at the end of the day, we believe what we can provide and what we will provide is going to benefit all.

Mark Walker:
Mm-hmm (affirmative). And just finally, because you're in here, it's finally. Is there anything that we haven't asked you that you'd like an opportunity to say, either of you, to attendees at TechShare Pro, or to the accessibility, or the tech community as a whole?

Paul Walsh:
Look, I'll say from Lenovo's perspective, there's a number of certain... There's a number of verticals that we're really excited about and we're really thinking of, which is how do we enable smarter retail, smarter manufacturing, healthcare. How do we think about and re-invent in many ways true advancements in technology as smarter education. So, I think by delivering against the principles and visions that we have in play and then by partnering with Haben, I think we'll start seeing some of those capabilities being brought to market.

Mark Walker:
And for you, Haben? Is there anything you'd like to say? That we haven't asked you?

Haben Girma:
I would love to see these conversations continuing throughout the year and continued collaboration between organizations. People with disabilities are talented. If we develop more accessible products and services, the whole community will benefit. And this is... We know this through the Curb Cut Effect.

Mark Walker:
Thank you both for your time.

Paul Walsh:
Thank you.