Speaker 2: Today's full length interview to kick off the run is with Lenovo's chief digital officer, Paul Walsh and they're recently recruited all around accessibility superstar, Haben Girma.

We are very privileged to have two speakers fresh from a session here at tech show pro, Paul and Haben of Lenovo. I'm going to ask them to introduce themselves.

Paul Walsh: Hi, this is Paul Walsh. I'm the chief digital officer at Lenovo and it is an absolute pleasure to be here with you guys.

Haben Girma: Hello, my name is Haben Girma and I'm also thrilled to be here. I work as an accessibility and inclusion advocate and I'm helping Lenovo make services more accessible.

Speaker 2: Brilliant. Thank you Haben and Paul. Now listeners may have heard some typing in the background there before Haben introduced herself. Now she has both a hearing and a vision impairment and I am in awe as a blind person myself of someone who is able to be productive and a brilliant example of how technology is really helping level the playing field despite having two very significant disabilities.

So what we'll do for the rest of the interview is snip out in the edit those gaps where her colleague is typing what people are saying to her in through a keyboard so that she is then looking at that on a refreshable braille display because that's her tech. Haben, would you like to give your story? How you came to work at Lenovo and just to reiterate for people that aren't familiar with how that tech works, if I haven't done that fully already, how you as a disabled person are able to be productive in a professional environment?

Haben Girma: I identify as deaf, blind, hearing impaired and vision impaired focus on medical conditions and impairment. I prefer simpler direct words like blind and deaf because it gets right to the heart of the point and it moves away from medicalization. So as a deaf blind person, I've had to come up with solutions. Tech has been a powerful way to access information, but it's really the stories behind the tech that affect access.

If you have negative disability stories, you get inaccessible tech. If you have positive disability stories, then the folks who work at tech companies are more likely to design products that embrace the disability community and increase access for all of us. I graduated from Harvard Law School in 2013 and I wanted to use my skills and talents to increase opportunities for people with disabilities. And for the last few years I've been working as an educator and consultant to help increase opportunities for people with disabilities and to get the tech community to see this market as innovative and talented so that more tech is accessible to people with disabilities. And Lenovo learned about my work and was excited and that's why we partnered together.

Speaker 2: I think that's absolutely brilliant because disabled people have a lot to offer. They are often very highly educated because they find it so difficult to get employment and they're as capable as everybody else in being able to really bring value to any organization. But then they have this extra value associated with having insights, unique insights that will help make products better, more inclusive.

Time and again we have seen tech organizations develop things in a bubble where the end product doesn't seem to be accessible or inclusive because of the people that help design them. And obviously Lenovo are taking that step, many steps they've taken in the past towards more inclusive products. What are you working on at the moment?

Paul Walsh: So Ty, this is Paul. So it's really exciting to be partnering with Haben on our accessibility and inclusion. We believe that in order to truly deliver smarter technology for all, we got to really think about diversity from product inception. It cannot be an afterthought. We really got to ensure that everything from our human based design, all the way through to our delivery of products is really thinking about the entirety of the diverse world that we actually live in and ensure that we can actually drive the right outcomes, both for life and how I live, how I learn, how I work and health.

And in order to do that, you really have to ensure you're building those processes, understandings, ideas right into the beginning of the product, I'd say, inception as opposed to, as I said earlier on, just an afterthought. So again, working with Haben as our first accessibility and inclusion advisor, I think it's really going to move us even forwarder than we've done in the past and really enable our product sets.

Stephen: If I could just ask, hi guys, Stephen here. Paul, I want to ask you about that accessibility and what that means at Lenovo. What I mean by that is maybe we take this in two parts, in terms of the corporate structure, in terms of the culture, but then perhaps also into the products themselves. What is accessibility at Lenovo?

Paul Walsh: So when we think about it, we really look at everything from, and I think you touched off it. First of all it's a culture, that we have to think of how we ideate around products or solutions. And in order to do that we need to ensure that we have diversity, accessibility, inclusion built into our culture. We shouldn't have to go and tell people don't forget. It is just something we naturally do and that to us is really important.

And then being a part of the Lenovo diversity and inclusion board, which has a number of executives across Lenovo, we really believe that this is something that we're working on from a DNA perspective. And the feedback that we're getting from our employees and then the impact that it's obviously having on our products is great.

And then secondly, as I said, what I'm excited about working with Haben on is truly building the right technology, that smarter technology for all. All, I want to emphasize all, being really going after every aspect of life, diversity including gender, including ethnicity, including disability and making sure that we are delivering what I would call new levels of convenience for all.

Stephen: And just to pick up that point of a product though, because as a consumer, I think of Lenovo as the computer company, right? The guys who create the great computers, the backbone of pretty much most, if not all of the businesses that you see buying all these wonderful computers to do the job. But what is accessibility in those products for you? What does that mean?

Paul Walsh: I think it goes back to what I just said, right? If you think about Lenovo, yes, we've built and we are according to IDC, number one in the PC market, but we've also moved into the mobility market for mobile devices. So Motorola and we've acquired the Motorola devices, but then we also have acquired the data center fabrics of servers and networking, et cetera. So we're really looking at accessibility, not just in one aspect but from handheld all the way through into the data center, let's say for businesses. And that's important for us, not just to think about it in one aspect, but I truly mean it's got to be a part of our DNA across the end to end experience.

So when we think about our consumer, we want to deliver the right offerings for our consumers. But when we think about the enterprises, we want to ensure that we enable them too, and we build that end to end or that ecosystem. So we can co-create together to deliver the right solutions.

Haben Girma: In terms of product. Paul, do you want to share the Stephen Hawking story?

Paul Walsh: Yeah, I think it's a fantastic story.

Stephen: Oh, we've got to hear this.

Paul Walsh: I'll just touch off base on it just a little bit, but like one area that I spoke about earlier on and what I'm saying here is that there has to be a co-creation across brands where brands are working together to ensure that we're delivering an inclusive end-to-end story. And one of those examples is the partnership obviously that we had with Intel really to deliver a solution, the right solution, for Stephen Hawkins to enable him to in essence, as I said, be able to educate us. Right?

And because could you imagine a world that that didn't happen, right? And what we would miss in that world. Right?

Stephen: Exactly, yeah.

Paul Walsh: So this was just an example of co-creating a great partnership with Intel to deliver the right solution set or tools or enablement for Stephen Hawkins.

Speaker 2: Wow. And Haben, is there anything that you can be specific about what you're working on at the moment or is it all very top secret about what people with disabilities in particular can expect to see from Lenovo? Either in the PC space or the broader platforms that Paul was alluding to earlier.

Haben Girma: I actually just started working as an advisor from Lenovo. I actually don't work at the Lenovo headquarters, but I am sharing advice and expertise from the disability community because we have a lot of wisdom to share and it's fantastic that tech companies are now listening to us and want to learn from the disability wisdom.

Speaker 2: Absolutely.

Paul Walsh: And I think to add onto that as Haben will say, globally there's approximately a billion people that have disabilities and what we want to, you know, we again from an inclusivity, we want to include, we want to understand, we want to learn from those people so we can help all.

Stephen: Haben, if I can broaden that question slightly to you because you are fairly new in this role, but I guess you have aspirations within it. What do you hope your role will achieve?

Haben Girma: What I hope to achieve with my role is to increase opportunities for people with disabilities in hiring. So increase hiring of people with disabilities at Lenovo. More jobs where people with disabilities and then Lenovo would benefit from more talented, innovative employees. And then also products and services, more accessibility and culture and stories that help influence design. Stories influence the organizations we create, the products we build and the futures we imagine for ourselves. So if we could get positive disability stories to influence the design process and have designers with disabilities participating in the design process, then we'll have better, smarter tech for all.

Speaker 2: Absolutely. And Lenovo creating inclusive products, it couldn't actually be more important because as Stephen alluded to earlier, you guys are the go to manufacturer for the corporate environment, aren't you? For the workplace.

Paul Walsh: Right.

Speaker 2: Nobody ever got shot for buying a Lenovo. So it's absolutely pivotal to hundreds of thousands or millions of jobs out there that you guys are creating inclusive products. So yeah, no pressure.

Paul Walsh: Well, look, I mean, again, as we think about how do we simplify? How do we make it easier? How do we make it better? It's not just simplifying, it's not just making it easier, but it's actually taking all of that knowledge that allows us then to design from the beginning, a much richer outcome and solution.

Stephen: Haben, if I can ask you about your experience growing up prior to joining Lenovo, what was your employment experience like? And I want to touch on the technology you use as well a bit more, but if you can talk us through years of past in terms of employment and what you've done post Harvard.

Haben Girma: So I studied law from 2010 to 2013 at Harvard University. I was the first deaf blind student at Harvard Law School because throughout most of its history, Harvard denied access to woman, people of color and people with disabilities. So it's not necessarily that all of a sudden we have talented people with disabilities. We've always had talented people with disabilities. It's that society is finally removing barriers so that we have more opportunities and society can benefit from talented attorneys and advocates who just happen to have disabilities.

Stephen: Interesting. In part of the conversations that we've had here at [Tex Year Pro 00:14:23] touch on the subject of the ideal world being a world where disability was no longer a problem essentially, or seen as a problem by society. What do you think about this idea? Do you fall on the idea that the eradication of disability as being an issue is a good thing? Or do you think that the identification of disability, being disabled, is something to be proud of and we should work with others to understand?

Haben Girma: Disabilities and mismatch between a person and the environment. So you could have someone who is disabled in a certain environment and non-disabled in another environment, and the more our tech and environments and our cultures are inclusive and accessible, then people will experience fewer disabling situations. And I think disability is something to be proud of. It's an identity. It contributes to diversity and unique lived experiences. Our world would be incredibly boring if everyone was identical.

Stephen: I think we can all agree on that for sure.

Speaker 2: Haben, just on the tech side of things, is there anything that you wish was different about your tech or does it meet your needs? Have you got plans or aspirations for the future to be able to do more given the right tech?

Haben Girma: I'm using ancient technology. I'm using a braille display from 2010. It's amazing it still works. There have been newer braille displays since then, but what I needed to do has not really changed. So the new ones don't offer features that would enhance my ability to communicate with people. My hope is that someone will develop more affordable braille technology that would make braille displays accessible to more people around the world, including books in developing countries.

Braille is a powerful tool, especially for deaf blind individuals, but also for hearing blind individuals because it helps increase literacy and literacy is essential to employment. So if we could have better, more affordable braille displays, I think that would even help increase employment opportunities for blind individuals.

Speaker 2: Absolutely. And we are beginning to see that and we're beginning to see employers like Lenovo really reaching out and embracing a much more diverse workforce and seeing the benefits of it. So thank you very much indeed for giving us your time. Enjoy the rest of the conference and keep up the good work.

Paul Walsh: Thanks, guys.

Haben Girma: Thank you Robin, and thank you Stephen.