Interviewer: Next in the feed, guys, it's me talking to Paul Smyth of Barclays.

Okay. I am here with longtime friend and colleague in the accessibility space, Paul Smyth. Paul, do you want to introduce yourself?

Paul Smyth: Yes, sure. I'm Paul. I head up digital accessibility for Barclays. I know we've been involved for the last two, three years at [TechSharePro. 00:00:34] Real excited, hosted TechSharePro last year and it's great really one year on, it's got bigger, better, two days, huge amount of speakers and contents so I'm really looking forward to sort of attending. I think there's so much change and challenge that's happened over last year, which I'm sure come on too, that really means accessibility is kind of more interest, of more benefit to more people than ever before.

Interviewer: Brilliant. Yeah, we certainly will and you're not just attending, you are on the accessibility leadership panel session as well.

Paul Smyth: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Interviewer: Let's start there, shall we?

Paul Smyth: Yeah, I mean... So in terms of explaining, so my role for Barclays so leading accessibility for a big corporate, as you can imagine, that's wearing several hats. It's about sort of setting standards and processes that folks follow. Making sure our members of staff have a sense of empathy and compassion, our customers come in different shapes and sizes so helping them care and helping them code in an accessible way and then looking at partnerships and innovation, how can we use new, clever, [whizzy 00:01:45], emerging tech to solve the existing challenges faced by disabled or older, vulnerable sort of customers and colleagues.

So there's sort of lots going on leading the accessibility agenda for a large corporate. Sort outside of the bank too, I kind of coach a... Their business disability forum. I'm at Tech Task Force, so I speak to lots of businesses and organizations daily about what's changing. I'm kind of in this unique position around being a disability sector champion for the UK government, for the disability minister around web accessibility. So me having a severe sight impairment, I've kind of got a foot in each of these three camps of what's going on with businesses around accessibility, what are the government doing around legislation and so forth and also as a disabled leader and role model and involved in lots of charities, about how can we really make sure that the disability community are more visible and more vocal at shifting things forward.

So maybe just unpicking that more over what's shifted in the last year. When I reflect on this right and kind of why I'm team up... I'm back at TechSharePro is the last year we've seen a huge amount more around sort of legislation over the past year. So the last couple of months in Europe, the kind of new accessibility regulations around public sector websites, which is slowly coming to private sector too, and that's really great that the law is more clear in demanding things and we're seeing this mistakes too with more litigation and Domino's Pizza and others. Right?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Paul Smyth: But in short we're saying the law requires more around accessibility and I mean, I might ask you too right? I guess you use expectations for so much great accessibility goodness cooked into people's smart phones. Now that extending to, whether it's your voice assistant or to smart TV's and all sorts of other things and that's [fab 00:03:40] that people, they're starting to expect it and require it in others. So there's really sort of raising the bar, which is fab to see from a user perspective and being a bit more vocal when people and brands aren't doing enough and just from a final points. So that's about consumers, I guess the business is right, we've seen certainly over the past year I think about we as Barclays, we've been involved in most of The Valuable 500 campaign about this disability inclusion revolution, putting disability right at the top of your sort of group board. Committing to it by being serious commitive it brings a multitude of benefits.

So you know I speak to lots of businesses daily who are waking up to the fact of this. So whether it's because new laws dictate you have to do something... I think we're now starting to see what I think about accessibility leadership come back to the start, there's only two tiers. There's kind of organizations that are quite new to this and are asking the basic questions about where do I start? How do I get an expert or the things they should focus on. How do I reasonable adjustments to staff and then there's the more sophisticated organizations who are looking, how do we build kind of champions in this space? How do we go beyond the legal minimum around checklists that we're... That we've failed and more about customers that were failing and all sorts of things about baking into everything we change or build or buy, you know, our processes and not just bolting things on-

Interviewer: Absolutely.

Paul Smyth: In terms of new services or features that we offer to some customers but actually for everyone.

Interviewer: I mean, absolutely. So you're right, there's different organizations are on different stages of this ongoing journey and it's never a... You never get to the final destination. It's always something that you need to work on and you've been championing accessibility within Barclays for many years now. As a result, I'm assuming you've been instrumental in this because it takes an awful lot of effort... Barclays don't push anything live without having factored in accessibility, prioritized it at the core of everything that you do and end results, you've just got better products that are more inclusive for a really diverse audience as you mentioned before but it can't have been easy.

One thing that I usually touch upon is that an accessibility champion, however potent and however good their superhero powers are, it's not enough. You need to have an accessibility champion in each department. You need to have an accessibility champion in each team. Each member of that team also needs to own inclusion, as well. So how much of a challenge making this an ongoing process that sticks, has that been for you?

Paul Smyth: Yeah, I mean I think you're right, that's a real uphill battle. When you work in a large corporate and there's a whole bunch of other priorities and relations going on and I sort of think back to me and my vision impairment, right? And disability, I guess it teaches us to be very resilient and resourceful and I think that kind of comes through actually leading accessibility and some of those attributes and traits. The superpowers kind of really help because I think that you're certainly right Robin, that sort of making sure that everyone understands what accessibility is and plays their part.

This isn't an us and them, but we have an accessibility person and they're the only one that worries about and does anything around accessibility. It's really sort of shifting that culture that this isn't sort of an... A legal have to, but it's a commercial and more want to. I know Barclay's shifting our culture, we've often talked about these three... Three kind of pronged approach that we need to again, really build empathy and compassion. If we've got offshore teams building stuff, they might not always see the Barclays customers walking through our bank branches say, and the fact they do come in different shapes and sizes so we need to sort of inspire hearts. So that the wow moment when we get things right, [inaudible 00:07:45] parts that we do. We need to kind of educate heads about all the lovely accessibility courses, resources out there so that people know how to consider and deliver accessibility, inclusive design. Then we need to kind of enable hands I.e. very practical tools for a job or they can actually apply in the day jobs what I need to think about and do differently.

So, I think there's something about just raising the bar around culture, right? Accessibility and that kind of not legal have to do, but commercial more want to do is, is really key and not just having one champion or one accessibility lead, but again, lots of senior leaders who understand this. Who are all visible and vocal in saying that this isn't just lip service, but it's really important. I think for Barclays, we've gotten public statement about being the most accessible [FTSE 00:08:38] company full stop. Which is great, kind of linked to our values about how... Creating some opportunities for customers, clients, colleagues to rise but again, it's a very longterm challenge to make sure that we weave this into the DNA of the organization. So again, it's not just this low hanging fruit of doing a pet project over here, certain pockets of disability community, but actually how we apply this to everything, all our products and services. You can imagine it takes a little bit more time because more of them a little bit more challenging.

Interviewer: Yeah and I love that. Well, you just so good at getting the message across that triumvirate of heads, heart and hands and what that means in reality for an organization and for every employee, every member of that team. The passion that you have I'm sure has played a big part in really shifting the needle within Barclays and I mean there isn't kind of clear data on how accessible the FTSE 500, 250, 100, whatever are, but you're probably at the top or very near the top because of the commitment that you've put in. You mentioned earlier on about how accessibility or inclusion is being baked in into almost every product these days and it's absolutely the case.

Apple, I would probably argue has led the way and brought everyone along with it and that... I don't know about you, but that really strengthens the argument to say, look, you can't turn around without seeing accessibility in front of you everywhere these days. If the big names in tech and digital are taking it this seriously, then us as a digital organization absolutely need to too, to make sure that our products and services are fit for purpose going forward in like a digital first platform agnostic proliferation of tech world that we're, that we're definitely living in.

Paul Smyth: Yeah. I think Apple and others, Microsoft have really stepped up-

Interviewer: Absolutely.

Paul Smyth: And I think that rising tide lifts all ships.

Interviewer: Yes.

Paul Smyth: Is really valued point, right but... There's a lot of organizations out there that are really differentiating their services when we double down accessibility and a lot of other businesses kind of standing watch that thinking cripes, how do I do that too? Which is why it's so... Such an important time to get involved in the accessibility community. You mix accessibility profession to professionalize that. So of course lots of what we're doing with [inaudible 00:11:23] business disability forum and sort of new benchmarking tool so that at an organizational level you can look at here's the sorts of things that being awesome accessibility you need to focus on and then which few things do you focus on over the next few months.

So you'll have there some great new resources at an organization level and of course the individuals for accessibility experts. I think events like texture pros are important, when people can come along and learn, share, grow from others and we know that Mark, his inability, [inaudible 00:11:53] our relationship goes back a decade in terms of working with external experts who really know their stuff around disability, [inaudible 00:12:04] needs, preferences, abilities of folks and also International Association of Accessibility Professionals. So how do we kind of build the... Certification is a bit of a fluffy word, but for me it's sort of building the textbook for an accessibility expert would need to know and the kind of test and title that they have as more and more organizations are looking externally and saying crikey, we need to get an accessibility expert in here to help us with this. To help us with our digital presence to be more accessible.

So yeah, there's a number of moving parts to this, but it goes back to the, it's kind of never been in my mind, such a fab time to be involved in accessibility and inclusive design. I think the sort final sort of point that I'd make is that with all this added focus and attention over the last year or so. In particular with the tech community right around diversity and inclusion. We're that's kind of the gender agenda and women in tech, it's about the gender pay gap and so forth. I think sometimes more and more people are now jumping in and talking about inclusive design, inclusivity and sometimes that muddies things. So I think the point you made before about being sort of really clear, concise about what accessibility kind of means.

I think for Barclays, we've certainly over the last few months been looking at kind of inclusive design and I think sometimes when you think about diversity and inclusion it's always seen as competing about what do we do to help people who might... From a disabilities perspective versus culture or gender or sexuality or whatever and often it's kind of competing and disabilities seen as the poor cousin often and an account [KCM 00:13:51] a valuable 500 sort of you use this language. I think for us we've almost gone back to basics and how we talk about inclusive design within the bank but it is really for everyone and maybe just to kind of bring this to life with the kind of story of, I tell of how to explain inclusive designer.

I sort of think if I'm building a product, I want to make sure it works for everyone and I sort of think about I have all this population of users and if I sort of drew them on a page, most device users would be clumped to the center to the average or normal. Whether we're talking about age or gender or disability and let's say really [numpty 00:14:30] example, right? If I'm building like a lift for a building and I'm figuring out how do I design this product? Where do I place the lift button?

Interviewer: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Paul Smyth: And often most organizations when they're building a product, they think about step one they consider how's it going to work for their customers. That really means the average customer. So, that my lift buttons say... I might say, well people are so short, people are so tall. If I placed the lift button here, it should work for most and that's kind of like the one size fits most or one size fits all approach.

Most businesses kind of stop there and I guess what inclusive design is really all about is saying, well that's not really good enough and we need to kind of be consciously, conscious that we [inaudible 00:15:08] excluding on a minority of people. Maybe that's 20% of people around the edges of whatever and we need to pay attention to those and actually speak to individuals, individually to say, well, what would I need to do to get this product working for you? So continuing this numpty analogy, right? Maybe that's the lift button that I've got someone super tall over here and I need to have a second button placed higher so it works for everyone else as before but works for this other person or maybe someone who's a wheelchair power user who needs some beacon say at work. Or maybe a blind person might need some audio announcements to know where the button is, but you get the idea you start to build in added things so that people can use your product in a multitude of ways.

Slowly I... sort of step one was I considered, how do I get this working for average customer? Step two was I actually consulted with real world people, paid attention to the edges and I sort of think that when you imagine all these people on the page, we're throwing a lasso of inclusion, a sort of net over that. There's the people that are contained that my product works for and then there's people excluded. It's really focusing in on those kind of excluded groups and looking at what added steps do I need to take to get my products or service to work for them and again, people are different, the worlds messy. So it takes time. It's about people and it's not about to checklists. So again, there's some really important messages for me when I think about inclusive design and how we kind of tell that story.

We're making sure everyone's on the same page, that we have a consistent understanding of what it is and many people in... We're in Barclays and beyond they sort of step back and think, I never really thought about that. So the spinny doors to our corporate offices are great if your right handed-

Interviewer: Don't I know it or if your guide dog gets chopped in half. Yeah.

Paul Smyth: Oh, yeah. Tell me about it, people have done that or the sensors on loos, for if you're blind really hard to flush. Or maybe you wash your hands in the sink and your skin color, you know, who were designed for the taps and the sensors it doesn't work for you. These things are horrendous and real world examples of how the way something was built unintentionally excluded a certain group of individuals whether it's about disability or whether it's about more broadly.

So this lasso of inclusion is kind of a really useful tool and again, thinking about one, consider average customers. Two, consult with real world people and three if you hired diverse disabled people to build your products, to be involved in your projects, they're kind of better. They can see things from more perspectives to make sure that that lasso of inclusion fits over more potential users who are using your product. So I know a bit of a tangent mode, but it's really important just to share some of these ideas around how we think about how we talk about inclusive design so that folks on the same page and that people new to this kind of have a similar understanding.

Interviewer: Absolutely. That's a really powerful message to convey before we sign off because that Barclays and [BDF 00:18:14] have created a lot of really powerful, really useful external facing resources around diversity, around inclusion, around accessibility. But you know, plan survives contact with the enemy. That's probably not a good comparison, but you're absolutely right. You need, it's a process and you've got the... You need the guidance. You need to create an initial concept or prototype or product, but then you absolutely need to get end users involved. If there's a diverse team creating that initial [MVP 00:18:48], then you know it's going to be pretty good to start with but you're absolutely right. The beauty about digital is although we absolutely need to consider inclusion in the real world as you are using the lift analogy there, it's a lot more reasonable and easy to do in digital when it's just bits that you're pushing around. So why aren't people doing it?

So yeah, absolutely. Barclays is a brilliant example of taking the right approach, a really mature model that you've got towards ensuring that accessibility and inclusion are sufficiently prioritized and implemented. So fantastic. Yeah, you mentioned Karen Casey she's keynoting at TechSharePro guys, if you haven't got your ticket, get in there quick. There... I don't know if there's any left now by the time the podcast goes out, but you'll obviously hear her, you'll hear Paul and see him. Sorry, I'm going from the blind centric point of view there.

See Paul in all his glory on the accessibility leadership panel along with loads of other brilliant contributors as well. Paul, thank you very much.

Paul Smyth: Yeah. Well thanks Robin and see you at TechSharePro. Cheers all.

Interviewer: Looking forward to it. Thanks mate. She is all looking forward to it. Thanks mate.