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TRANSCRIPT

Mary Lightfoot on Community Accessibility

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

captioning, community, deaf, interpreter, person, provide, accessibility, automatic captioning, work, people, information, hearing, sharing, universal design, access, university, intentionality, instance, accessible, sign language interpreter

SPEAKERS

Anne Mbugua, Mary Lightfoot

Anne Mbugua 00:03

Hi Mary, if you could introduce yourself, what you do, the kind of community that you work for, and how many years you've worked in community.

Mary Lightfoot 00:14

Okay, let me turn my volume up here. I'm the senior digital learning manager at a university that whose focus is on deaf, hard of hearing and deaf blind students and individuals. The university not only has an internal focus, but a national focus, as well as an international focus again, with that same emphasis on deaf hard of hearing and deaf blind people. So I've been in this type of space for, I would say, most of all my professional career with whatever I've done. And the department that I work in currently focuses beyond the university to the nation to all 50 states and US territories, providing outreach dissemination and knowledge sharing about deaf hard of hearing, deaf blind children birth through age 21. So I work with an external community which eights our work, and provides a meaning means for knowledge sharing, for collaboration and for outreach.

Anne Mbugua 01:26

Mm hmm. So briefly, share your experience with creating spaces for individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing.

01:37

So I also want to say that as context, I've had different roles in working with deaf and hard of hearing people. You know, I'm also a certified sign language interpreter, which is where I started and how I get

my initial interest in community. Because in my role as an interpreter working for the university, I not only did direct services, but it provide meant I provided mentorship for those who came from across the country, as well as coordinating events, and it made me want to reach out for more. And then I went on to a position that was more of coordinating for states across the US, where my my real emphasis with community. Direct emphasis with community started with how to engage people across us in an online fashion that it wasn't just direct services, but also people helping people as well as my own outreach. And then in my current work, it's not so much focused on the field of interpreting either through teaching and learning or through direct services or mentorship, but more of a Deaf centric environment, focusing one stakeholder groups that either work with or have deaf and hard of hearing children birth to 21. So this current role has really enhanced my community work and helped me to think about community and what does that mean, as we have a greater emphasis on accessibility. As a side note, accessibility, just we don't think of it as accessibility, at least in my mind, it's just day to day work. So with all that we do, we all we have an interpreter who can share messages between a deaf person and a hearing person. We have closed captioning that's accurately produced, we may have a transcript so that someone who may not be proficient with sign language, but also may be hard of hearing can then look at a transcript. So it's you know more about universal design and providing information in a way that a variety of people can take part of it without something extra or different, being shared. But more about having a premise having a way of being that automatically has systems in place to provide access to Deaf, Hard of Hearing deaf blind and hearing people. And so with that, I would say one thing that I hope I'm not getting ahead, but one thing that's often a challenge is captioning. Because often people will think that

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if I use the automated captioning, for instance, it's often provided with video conferencing kinds of platforms. We're good, you know that people are good people who need to rely on the printed. Printed sources are good, right? But we've seen that really this closed captioning, for instance, even captioning that's done by YouTube is not that effective. I'm trying to go up to my notes here to talk about the percentage. Yeah, so according to the University of Minnesota Duluth, they stated that YouTube automatic captioning typically provides about 60 to 70% accuracy. Now all of that depends on a person's accent, their rate of speech on technical, is it more of a generic. And this is true with any kind of automated captioning, it's much better than it used to be, right. But unless it's accurate, like meaning 99% 100%, it really doesn't provide access to a person who's relying on that for the primary source. So for example, often you will see something like when talking about a deaf person, D, E, A F, you'll see print death, D E, A T H, frequent error that you will see in in automated captioning. And the one way to understand how much understanding can be had from the captioning is to turn the sound off and just look at the captioning. And sometimes having captioning that's not accurate, is worse than not having anything because then it can lead to a person having a misunderstanding of the information being presented, right. So really, having captions that are accurate, is so important and a little bit different than often protocols have. So that may mean hiring a person who is a professional at providing captioning, or doing post production, where you take the automatic captioning and you go in and you do the corrections before the final is uploaded for consumption. Another thing I would say is an accent accessing material that's produced outside the university. Organizations may produce or have some material that has captioning and other material that doesn't have captioning. Not a good way to provide equal access to people. And so being intentional and being thoughtful with inclusion of people, including deaf and hard of hearing people is so important because without that intentionality. There's a

lot of things that can be overlooked. You know, when might an interpreter be a sign language interpreter who is qualified, not just someone who knows some signs but a qualified sign language tripper, when might that be needed? For instance, when hosting a webinar or hosting a conference? Is there a way to ensure that people can let you know that they need some kind of accessibility within the process, not the day before, oh, my gosh, I need an interpreter because then you're not going to be able to secure an interpreter because of the level of need that has to be thought out well in advance. And so I would say that intentionality is something that we have within our process, and that I would say often is needed within the community space. So you know, often now we see a need for video, as a part of community and what it means and how we interact with people. And what are we doing in terms of making sure that if there are deaf people internal or external to our organization that they can access it, as opposed to saying, well, there's no deaf people here, we don't need that. Why not automatically provide it so that if there is just one deaf person, because it is a low incidence thing, that they don't have to be held back from accessing the information, because community is about people, and it's about a sense of belonging and a sense of shared ownership. And with that kind of stance, having things accessible for Deaf and Hard of Hearing people, it's a natural segue into that. It's just like, the gentleman who

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is thought to be the inventor of the World Wide Web, Tim Berners-Lee, who was a British, who is a British community, computer scientist. He said the power of the web is in its universality. Access by everyone, regardless of disability is an essential aspect. And I would say the same thing is for our work, you know, we need to make sure that what we have is accessible by all people, not by defining who is within our audience, but by allowing a universal design so that anyone who may be coming Part of our audience can still be a full participating member of our audience.

Anne Mbugua 10:05

Great, right? So it is really important to, to have intentionality when you're thinking about accessibility. And I think more so, you know, thinking about 2022, I think we need to be thinking in terms of what are we doing as community managers to provide and to create those spaces? Right, so that we can be able to include everybody within the community, because that is what community is,

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yes, absolutely. And, you know, doing something very simple, like, making sure that there is an image description for every image that you have is something decorative, just put, you know, let it be known that it's decorative, and what it is, when you have some kind of event, people who are presenting can first, you know, identify themselves and what they what they look like, what they have on one is something else that we've started to do is just a natural part of our way of being, so that if someone is blind or deaf blind in the audience, they can have a similar experience to someone that sighted. Um, so there's just little ways and little things that we can start, just start the process of, of what how we can be inclusive in our intentions in our processes, setting processes that can begin to look at making sure a captioning is always available. And that's something often by law that's supposed to be there anyway, although it's not always there. Right? Law, minimum, there should be captioning always with things that are recorded. Also, in terms of how we have our community is our community mostly print it is are there a variety of ways of presenting information and presenting knowledge in a variety of ways that people

can share their knowledge. And, you know, in in this day and age, there are many ways of being We're way beyond the old days of where everything had to be in a written form. And so how might that in April or encourage more accessible accessibility from a variety of people not only for deaf and hard of hearing people or blind people? But you know, in terms of cognitive differences or, or other types of differences? How might these different ways of presenting information and also the universal kind of design in terms of allowing people to access the information in more than one way? Or some of their ideas?

Anne Mbugua 12:58

Right, right. Which brings me to this question, what would what can community managers do differently around accessibility, you know, even in terms of thinking about, you know, the tools and the platforms that we use, what can be done differently?

13:18

So I would say, first of all, understand what accessibility means. And start somewhere because accessibility is a huge field in of itself. There are legal requirements, and then there's intentionality behind those legal requirements. But you have to start somewhere. So you're starting with nothing, start small, you know, just start for instance, with making sure you have a description for every image that you have. When you have video, make sure that there's captioning or if you have a webinar or something live, for instance, if you're using zoom or you're using another video conferencing software, have the settings set ahead of time, so that if someone needs to have the captioning, they can self select to turn the captioning on, but they can't do that. If you don't have in the settings, the captioning available. If you have captioning, what can you do to enhance the quality of the captioning so that it is 99% accurate, as opposed to 60 or 70%? Accurate? Think about what context for instance, if you have a conference that is connected with the community, are you allowing people to let you know if they have accessibility needs in advance? Right and then So, do you have a means to accommodate those needs? What kind of needs might you need to address and accommodate? And how might you do that? And you know, putting some systems in place. So start somewhere. So if you started with nothing, start with something small, if you already have something small, deepen what you have, if you're deeper, how can you why not? How can you finesse it? And how can you make it better because for each of us, we can always start from where we are, and make it better and widen our scope, or deepen our knowledge and approach. And so I that's what I would say. And I would say, number one is start with intentionality, to ensure that accessibility is thought of, and there is a system for including it with everything that we do, and with all programming that we set.

Anne Mbugua 15:56

Thank you so much, Mary, for sharing that wealth of information. And I usually like to end with this question, what inspires you about your community?

16:10

There's a lot that inspires me about, about the community that I'm a part of. And, and I, I phrase it like that, because a community is made up of people, and it's owned by, you know, the larger group of people. And I really subscribe by that, you know, the collaboration and the community is is only as strong as its members. And I really appreciate the enthusiasm of people in my community and their

dedication to the field and their desire to help others in providing services to deaf and hard of hearing children or themselves being family members of deaf and hard of hearing children and wanting the best for the children. And so, again, the community is really about the stakeholders, and there's a variety of stakeholders, but each has a part. And so it's it's inspirational to see people's knowledge and what they bring to the community every day.

Anne Mbugua 17:21

Well, thank you Mary, for sharing that information. And I am going to stop the recording now.