**S3 E9 Starting Up: Accessible Accommodations, Inclusive Marketing, and More with Martyn Sibley**

**Molly Lazarus** 00:01

Hello and welcome to Changing What's Possible: The Disability Innovation Podcast brought to you by Cerebral Palsy Alliance Research Foundation — CPARF. I'm your host, Molly Lazarus, and this season, we're excited to bring you cutting-edge stories and insights on research, technology and innovation for people with CP and other disabilities. This is the second episode of our Starting Up series, where you hear from established startups and learn how they got where they are today. Now, before I introduce our guests, we're excited to let you know about CPARF’s upcoming STEPtember campaign, which runs for the whole month of September. Join thousands of people from across the country to raise funds for life-changing cerebral palsy research and assistive technology that will reshape what it's like to live with a disability.

If you want to pair physical activity with your fundraising, you can challenge yourself to get moving all September long. You can make a team of up to four people and get your friends and family in on the fun Sign up today for free at [www.steptember.us](http://www.steptember.us). That's S, T, E, P, T, E M, B, E r.us.   
  
And now, I'd like to welcome Martyn Sibley, who is the former co-founder of Accombable, which was acquired by Airbnb in 2017, and is currently the co-founder of Purple Goat Agency. Welcome Martyn.

**Martyn Sibley** 01:27

Thanks for having me on. So I'm Martyn Sibley. I have the lived experience of disability with a neuromuscular condition called spinal muscular atrophy. So I'm always in my power chair. Have a lot of physical care, support. I love travel. I've been to many, many countries and wrote a book about my travel exploits and adventures, and generally, my work is very much around building a world and creating a world that is inclusive for everybody.

**Molly Lazarus** 01:57

I love it. Well, we are so excited to have you here on the podcast today, and one of the first ways that I got to know you and your partner Srin was through your work at Accomable. Can you share a little bit about Accomable and how you got started doing that work?

**Martyn Sibley** 02:13

Absolutely. So if it's okay, I'll go slightly before to frame it.

**Molly Lazarus** 02:19

Take it as early as you want. You were born on a cold day. . .

**Martyn Sibley** 02:23

Exactly, you know — back in the 1920s when it all first began. Yeah, so I referenced my lived experience, and I — study-wise, I did economics and a master's in marketing, and I spent about five years straight out of uni working for a disability charity. The roots in that charity in the UK were for people with cerebral palsy, but it had expanded by the time I worked there to be pan-disability. So it was where I came into contact with the notion that there's like 1.3 billion disabled people in the world, and understanding the social model barriers and the consequences of that.   
  
And the charity did political, kind of activism, things which I've always been very interested in. But they also did other day to day, sort of supporting kids in schools and providing care, support, etc. So that was like, I guess, a lesson for me in more than my own experience of disability, sort of seeing that global scale and the nuanced conversations there and then. So Srin, who you mentioned, we met through a different charity for our disability. We've both got SMA as kids, and it was so cool, because I remember we arm wrestled age, 10 years old, because in our schools, where we weren't — very few of us had a disability — so a lot of our friends weren't disabled. It meant with Srin, we were like equals in this kind of ability and strength. So yeah, I remember having this arm wrestle with Srin when we were, like 10 years old. And so when we were both living in London, and we were hanging out a bit more, again, as adults in our 20s, we did a couple of holidays. All of this led to starting a magazine called “Disability Horizons.” So it was very much using new technology. It was back in like 2010 2011 and the notion was a sort of blogging platform with articles by the community, for the community. Was, at the time very, very innovative and quite new. And so we launched that together, and it was a lot of fun. And we got really great articles, amazing contributors, really good read — so the readership was good, but the business model was so hard. Like the idea was you sell advertising like a magazine does, but if you think back in that era, those years, there wasn't that level of understanding. About the consumer power of disabled people to big consumer brands

**Molly Lazarus** 05:06

Yeah.

**Martyn Sibley** 05:07

And then the disability brands, like wheelchair manufacturers, car adapters, care companies, they obviously did have more of a vested interest in a disability magazine, but they were still loving carrier pigeons and, like old school marketing, and it was really hard to get them to engage with guest posts, like sponsored posts and email sponsorship. And so we found the business model really hard.

And so coming back to your original question, all of that led us to say, well, what are we interested in? We love travel. What are the challenges with travel? Well, accommodation that's accessible is, to some degree, in shorter supply, but also finding information about it was the hardest part. You can't change overnight building a million more accessible holiday places. But even the ones that existed, it was hard to find them. That's essentially where it came from was, what if we had a platform that vetted accommodation for disabled people? It very much was born through mine and Srin's direct experience, so it lent more to wheelchair user accessibility, but it planned to, and it did evolve to other disabilities, other barriers, other communities.   
  
So yeah, that's kind of where the need crystallized, and we also knew what the business model could be. Essentially, if people book the accommodation, you just take a commission on that. So even then, the business model sort of stood up more clearly than we'd struggled with the mag. But then actually, when it turned it upside down with the new product or service of Accomable of the accommodation, we had a few years of a very engaged, relevant community. So we were able to sort of co-build, co-create, co-evolve what Accomable became through the community and the readership of “Disability Horizons,” and that was a big part that we didn't plan as such, but it was very powerful to have that community voice while we were starting out with that new idea.

**Molly Lazarus** 07:30

And that community makes such a difference.

**Martyn Sibley** 07:31

**Molly Lazarus** 07:33

You know, when you're talking about it, I'm thinking, wow, travel is so big, you know? And you're just two guys who are like, we like travel. How did you go about getting started?

**Martyn Sibley** 07:42

I mean, partly it was just our individual and together holidays. So because I think a Accomable properly came along, 2015 2016 but a lot of the articles on the magazine were about travel as well. But yeah, fundamentally, you know, we went together on a big trip. We're both in the UK, but we went to San Francisco. We hired a accessible vehicle that took both of us in our wheelchairs with our two care assistants that came with us, and we drove to Vegas after a few days in San Francisco, after a few more crazy nights in Vegas, we then drove to Los Angeles, and so one of the famous stories was in Vegas, and we'd done all the planning, all the research, booked everything. We got to Vegas, and one of the two accessible rooms, they'd messed up the booking, and it wasn't wheelchair accessible. And so it was again, it was us loving our travels, but just hitting those blocks and those issues that fueled us in terms of passion and energy, but gave the market research and the relevance of what would make a positive difference to other consumers like us and, you know, tourists just like us.   
  
So yeah, our own travels were a big, big part of feeding into the product and what the business would become. But yeah, definitely, like, with the articles that had been on “Disability Horizons,” there was a broader experience that was being shared, and then we were able just to do a call out for like a survey, or jump on a video call with people and learn directly from other people. Because obviously, after a while you're in the weeds, and then you start to struggle to see all of the other elements, because you're just in the product and in the business. But yeah, so we did obviously lean more and more into those other places. And in terms of sourcing the accommodation, it was very community, crowd sourced in the very beginning. For the first year or two, it was word of mouth, and it was people just say, Oh, I've been on holiday. This place was amazing. So we then get that vetted and get it onto the site. So it was a sort of one and then two, and then four, and then eight, and, you know, eventually the numbers added up.

**Molly Lazarus** 10:07

So you're traveling and you arrive at a venue. What are the things that you start looking for to say, “Yes, this is accessible”, or “no, this is not.” And is there kind of a middle ground that you found when making that recommendation?

**Martyn Sibley** 10:25

Yeah, there's interesting, sort of two timelines to that question, because for all that will come as we talk a bit more into sort of what Accomable grew into, and the exit and all that good stuff. But like even now, there's still so many challenges. I spoke originally to the supply side. I found out literally a couple of weeks ago in the United Kingdom, there's only 14 hotel rooms, so not brands, not whole hotels, but a room that has the ceiling track hoist.

**Molly Lazarus** 11:03

Wow.

**Martyn Sibley** 11:04

Which is something that I most benefit from. I need a hoist to be lifted. I have, like a foldable travel hoist, but it's very cumbersome to take to another city in England, let alone to fly with it as well. So it's better that the hotel has or the accommodation has a hoist there, but 14 rooms in the whole of the UK, for people that live and want to do a couple of nights away for work or for a short break, but for tourists, like coming from America or other parts of Europe or wherever, coming to Britain, and that's 14 rooms. There's nothing. So —

**Molly Lazarus** 11:43

So limiting.

**Martyn Sibley** 11:44

There's so many issues today, despite a lot of the positive impact that Accomable has, where it's getting big global brands not to just play the compliance game of oh, we've got an accessible room. We've got a couple of hoists in all of the country, but actually lean into like to your question, what are the absolute needs and requirements of someone like myself? So that's like a bigger framing of the market, but for me, it would be step-free, access, wide doors for the wheelchair, not have a tight corridors or tight turns, so spacious, and then in an absolute utopia is the hoist and the adjustable bed, wet room shower is another big one for me. And of course, the reality is that even other people with SMA will have some different needs to what I have, let alone people that don't have SMA are in a wheelchair, let alone people that aren't in wheelchairs but have other needs. And so there's a challenge around what is an accessible room to multiple subcommunities. But I think we were sort of chatting a bit before about there are almost themes and universal design that will sort of satisfy a lot of those needs, and invariably are better for nondisabled people. And I'm more [inclined to] throw out disabled and nondisabled. I know in Britain we say disabled people because of the social model of disability, and we can go down a whole language labyrinth as well, but whatever people's preference of wording and language is, even nondisabled, it's like you're just putting people in different camps, like we're just people, and we just want to live life, and we want to go and have a holiday and have a comfortable stay In a hotel. And I think there's just something about listening to customers and bringing people from all walks of life together to find these broader solutions. And that feels like a multiyear, decade endeavor, but that's a big kind of passion where I'm at right at the moment,

**Molly Lazarus** 14:01

I love it, and I think, you know, we're all just humans having human experiences. And

**Martyn Sibley** 14:07

Exactly right, yeah.

**Molly Lazarus** 14:08

We should ensure that everyone can have equal access to the amazing things that the world has to offer.

**Martyn Sibley** 14:13

Yeah.

**Molly Lazarus** 14:14

And so with Accomable, I know you guys were kind of starting really small and going on these wonderful trips and seeing it firsthand and kind of growing that way. What was the moment where you're like, wow, we really have something here. And how did you get there?

**Martyn Sibley** 14:32

Yeah, maybe a slight preamble to it is working, which I'll come on to. But neither Srin nor I could make websites that had the capability for hosting the vetted accommodation. So Srin taught himself to code like his background was he'd been a corporate lawyer. So when we were both living in London, prior to starting the mag and then Accomable, he'd been a corporate lawyer. And he'd studied, I believe, and I have to double check with him myself, but there was a biology, certainly very science-focused degree that he'd studied, so not coding websites, basically. And my background I already mentioned. So that was a big step. Was when we looked into other people helping, but it was so hard to engage a web agency. We need 10s of 1000s of dollars or pounds, which we didn't have. And we always quite like the bootstrap, you know, get it live prototype, that kind of vibe of entrepreneurship. And so we didn't want to go and just fundraise loads and loads of money without having that verification, which is obviously where your question is coming from. So yeah, basically Srin taught himself the code, which meant we could then do the bootstrap and the rapid prototyping. And so thereafter, I think it was both the willingness of the accommodation owners to want to get on the site, and it didn't cost them anything, but it wasn't like a resistance to providing us with images and information, and they were very happy to sort of have a marketing platform for their accommodation, whether they were almost specially built for disabled people, or whether it was like a general business that had decided to cater a bit more for disabled people. Either way, they were very happy. Obviously, consumer side was very positive that, wow, this is going to make choosing a holiday a lot safer and a lot easier. So, yeah, I guess it was once the website was live, and we just started to get accommodations live, and we started to get bookings. Fundamentally, was the big one. It's like, wow, we really got our first booking that like we knew we were really with the momentum then.

**Molly Lazarus** 17:04

And the business model you mentioned earlier, where you get a commission from each booking, is that the business model that you ended up staying with, is that the one that worked best?

**Martyn Sibley** 17:13

Yeah, I think we felt that putting any sort of additional charges to the consumer, to disabled people. I think when you look at general tech startup marketplace businesses, you know, it tends to be that the price is the price, and you bake into that the other elements that get sorted out behind the scenes. But obviously there was a double sensitivity that, you know, there are extra costs of living with a disability and even specifically with travel, like we've spoken our last call that I got married quite recently, and if I'm going away with my wife, I still need my care assistant to come, and it's probably better that she's not in the bed with us, right? So you need a second room. So there are extra cost of having a disability and traveling with a disability, so yeah, for all the above, it wasn't right to pass it on to the consumer. But in the end, the travel business has this sort of model as a general day to day business model. anyway, the entity or the organization that has helped make the sale happen, gets a commission and a slice of the pie, so the pricing just bakes all that into it really.

**Molly Lazarus** 18:29

interesting. So you got your first booking, and we know the Cinderella story in hindsight, which is that you were acquired by Airbnb.

**Martyn Sibley** 18:37

Yeah.

**Molly Lazarus** 18:38

What was the date of your first booking? What was the year?

**Martyn Sibley** 18:41

The year it's gotta be like 2016 I believe.

**Molly Lazarus** 18:43

Okay, 2016.

**Martyn Sibley** 18:45

It's really crazy how hazy those years have become. Now we're 2024 but it was sort of in evolution up to like ‘14-‘15, and it was around ’15-‘16 we had the first booking, and I think the acquisition was sort of ’17-‘18, around that period.

**Molly Lazarus** 19:06

Okay, so pretty quickly. So, yeah, kind of what happened leading up to that, and how did that acquisition come to be?

**Martyn Sibley** 19:14

Yeah. So ,I mean, if you think of people and skills, that is quite nice, something I learned to be more crystal clear on the business I started four years ago that I'm running now to see it as its own entity. It's so easy to get your own identity wrapped up in the startup. And of course, it is your everything, and it requires a lot of love and a lot of energy and blood and sweat and tears. And, you know, people say this stuff in like entrepreneurship startup chats, and it can sound just like the thing you meant to say, but it was bloody hard work to get it off the ground. So, yeah, all of that is true, definitely, for sure.   
  
But the point about that slight separation is so — Accommable needed people with certain skill sets to enable it to achieve its potential. So when Srin was able to do a bit more of that coding side that was covered, we both were very clear on the broader strategy and the business needs. And I've always been like the kind of marketing media, you know, that's my bag. So we both had a lot of it covered between the two of us in a personnel sense. But we needed funding, partly for like, tech cause, partly for marketing cause. But, you know, we needed to have some income at some point, even though it wasn't our only job at the time. You know, we wanted to go more onto it, so I'm obviously now speaking to fundraising. The first bit of money we got was a social entrepreneurship grant from the Skoll Foundation, which Srin had made connections with.   
  
And so that gave us, I can't remember exact numbers, but it was somewhere in the region of like 10 or 15,000 pounds around that. And so that was a great bit of money in and we had some options to use for that money.   
  
And then the next one was, well, we looked at more institutional investment, but it was really, really, really difficult getting angels and VCs that hadn't got any awareness of disability to both understand the actual business opportunity of which it was starkly big. And I think there has been, and still is wariness of disabled founders and like, worries about health considerations and this kind of stuff. So what ended up happening for a lot of different conversations was we did get some angel investment, but it was from a couple of people who had means. They had some wealth to invest, but they had disabled children as well.   
  
So they take that perfect kind of Venn Diagram of their investors, but they also understood disability, and they got the business. It wasn't a charitable donation. It was, you know, they wanted a return on it. In a perfect world, they understood the risk. There's all that as well. But yeah, so you get the kind of story there. So that puts some more money in. And then around that time, that was where sort of more people joined Accomable. Even though I had maybe those core competencies, there's just a lot of admin, a lot of work. So the more people joined the business. And then really, we got to a point where we even needed a massive check writing, because the biggest drain of the funding was the product, was the tech, and so to be able to do more and more with the features on the product, but even figure out stuff like global VAT and tax and it got messier, the dream hit reality, and then it's like, okay, we do need to get on top of these things.   
And really, I'm oversimplifying months, but obviously said it was relatively quick, but it was still many, many, many, many conversations as well. Was more about, what if a brand doing something very similar in the general non disability space, would want to partner or even, you know, invest or acquire, and so the long and the short, that's obviously where Airbnb played out how it did.   
  
When we launched and we were doing The original PR, we said we are like Airbnb for disabled people. So it was quite a nice closing of the circle that it was the Airbnb that actually did the acquisition. But, you know, we did speak to some other businesses and other ways of structuring it. But fundamentally it made sense that Airbnb had done all the products, all the tech, all the global tax laws, etc., etc., etc., etc., it was just to bring that disability specific part to their offering in the end.

**Molly Lazarus** 24:14

That's really exciting that it worked out the way it did. Before we kind of go into that next part, I'd love to kind of loop back on what you mentioned around the funding for disabled founders, as well as the lack of understanding on the size of the market, which you and I know is as big as China.

**Martyn Sibley** 24:33

Yeah.

**Molly Lazarus** 24:34

But I always say to people, if you want to get China —

**Martyn Sibley** 24:36

Get disability.

**Molly Lazarus** 24:38

You should care about disability. But I'm curious, has that shifted in your opinion over time, or what can we do to ensure that that is not what future founders have to face?

**Martyn Sibley** 24:52

Yeah, great question. I mean, so couple of thoughts, comments of mind. So all around that. The not reliant, but the focus, as I mentioned, on the tech side of Accomable, became more and more the crux of it, being successful or not. And as I also referenced, and I think a big point for any entrepreneurs and founders listening is know your strengths and know your weaknesses.   
  
And so I definitely wasn't as in the thick of it when we were starting to have the chats with Airbnb, because it was more about product, as I said before. I mean, just to mention, part of the acquisition was that Srin moved to Silicon Valley for a couple of years, and he was the head of accessibility in the product team for Airbnb.   
  
So when you go on the website and there's all the filters now around accessibility, that's the legacy of Accomable, that's what worked with the Airbnb team to do. And so I think that's like a huge, awesome legacy, that their product has those filters.

I will say that something I maybe was a bit frustrated about in the longer run is that there wasn't a direct engagement around disabled people that love travel the way we'd started out as Accomable, where there was that co creation, that collaboration and not every disabled person wants to engage with other disabled people.   
  
So for some parts of the market, it's better that it's a mainstream, inclusive website, and they can just look up where they're going to stay, and it's not about being disabled. I fully get that, but I think there are still nuances, even when the accommodation is ticked, like we said earlier, about hoists and about adapted vehicles to get from the airport, and about flying, which is really challenging still. So I think there's still a need in that market around community and those bits being positive and helpful. I suppose another legacy of Accomable that didn't go to Airbnb was there's a Facebook group called Accessible Travel Club, and that's got about 17,000 people in it, and so that is arguably more the community part of Accomable that just runs as a Facebook group thereafter. So I just wanted to kind of square off some of that Accomable Airbnb chapter. So off the back of around that time, and off the back of it, I first came back to the mag and tried a few more things, but ultimately landed on the thing I mentioned that started four years ago, which is a social first marketing agency. And so what you were speaking to about the numbers, the spending power, that's the thrust of what Purple Goat is going out to big brands and speaking about so we're not going in as a main thing around innovation of tech or product, but we can advise and consult, or more likely, join the dots with other people that we know, but where brands have done or do do something better, we're able to help them create awesome content and get the word out through social media, so you're basically getting the return on investment from the adaptions you've made as a business, from the training you've given your staff, whatever's gone on to become a more accessible brand. The marketing part is really important, because I remember so often hearing even like a local pub saying, Oh, we got a ramp, but no one in a wheelchair ever came. And you're like, did you ever tell anyone that you bought the ramp so that wheelchair users were now welcomed in your pub when they maybe tried to come two years ago and they couldn't get in, and that's a very simplistic way of saying the importance of communication and marketing.   
  
So obviously, we're chatting a bit more today about startups and that innovation disruption, tech, founders, all that good stuff like, Yeah, I mean, it's just ridiculously huge market. People just don't understand how big and vast it is. And I mean, we say to these global brands like this is a real growth driver. It's not just a moral — of course, it is moral and ethical to be inclusive, but it's a hard-nosed business thing that you can make current customers with a disability happier and sticking around longer and spending more money, and you can acquire loads more people that are attracted because you fundamentally listened to them and made the changes that were necessary. So whether you're a startup or an established global brand, the opportunity is just so vast.

**Molly Lazarus** 29:57

Can you think of a brand, or maybe a brand that you've worked with that you came to with this pitch, and actually you can say, we see the returns like there's proof in the pudding here.

**Martyn Sibley** 30:10

So we've worked with a couple of Challenger banks. We've worked with some fashion brands, we've worked with media, telecoms, brands, like all the industries in an economy, we've worked in one way or another with the brand. And a general proposal we would make is where we will guarantee the number of content creators, the number of pieces of content, the number of impressions, in aggregate of all the content and the engagement level, because we know we can control with X amount of budget. We can control those metrics so they're guaranteed. When we do a proposal, we can't guarantee sales, because there's so many variables in the marketplace, right? And because of that, because of the way we're running these marketing campaigns, we're not measuring direct sales, because it's not the absolute success of the marketing campaign. But then when you talk to any brand, they're the ones then tracking that on the backend. And so I think there will be data in the coming months and years as we've been going longer, as Purple Goat and other people have caught on, that will eventually show harder and fast numbers to what you're speaking to. But like, without going into absolute tracking individual consumer habits, which gets a bit dicey in terms of data privacy as well, I think the general point is that we know the numbers of disabled people. We know how to make products and services inclusive. And after the last 10 years, I would argue brands have got better and better at that, and more and more startups are playing in this space as well. And then finally, when you're doing the brand sentiment and the general awareness is just a given that you're going to end up with a significant uplift off the back of that.

**Molly Lazarus** 32:10

That makes total sense. And I know it's so tricky, as a former marketer myself, to be able to correlate this many people saw it to this future state of the world, but I do appreciate that there are more organizations like Purple Goat, who are featuring disabled creators and making these things more visible for everybody. So you did Accomable. You sold it Airbnb. You started Purple Goat. Looking back on the last decade, what are some pivotal moments, or like, Aha, moments, that you've had as a founder over these two different, or even three different because you had the media company before that. What are those moments that you kind of look back on and go, Wow, that was amazing. Or things have really changed in a meaningful way because of that?

**Martyn Sibley** 32:56

Yeah, I guess those three particular projects or businesses, I'll speak to those three from my experience, and then also from that, I'll share a few other things I'm involved in, which is kind of being at a point in my career off the back of those experiences where I am working in sort of some government advisory circles and startup incubator circles, and so it said to you able to give back and share, which is kind of part of the question you posed as well, but very, very specifically, I think “Disability Horizons” was a bigger reality of disabled people being at the center of conversations and decisions about us. So Purple Goat’s rap line is nothing about us, without us, and when we look back at the history of disability rights, there was so much going on for decades where we weren't listened to, we weren't involved in policy chats and product design chats and everything else. So I think with the rise of social media and content creation, that's all enabled horizons and obviously other similar but different entities as well. But having disabled people driving it and making decisions for ourselves really was huge. I think Accomable was Srin and I being disabled founders. And again, I'm not saying we were like the first or the only, but we were definitely of a earlier cohort of disabled founders that went more into the mainstream in terms of the Airbnb acquisition and experiencing what it was like to try and get investment and all those sort of things. Because you think, like 10-20, years ago, it was so much more charity model and charity conversations. And again, there's nuance. It's not to be negative of charities today, There's still a need for charities, and they do fantastic work. But I guess in another way, it's saying bringing some of the powers of business,and you know, market innovation and market disruption was a big part of the Accomable chapter, if you like. And then with Purple Goat, it's sort of taken both of those and then bringing it to global brands. So the scale and the impact with Purple Goat is we can work with, and we do work with, growing startups and established consumer brands, or to bring the community all into one room with the brand and then to realize the return on investment. So it is to some degree from horizons and Accomable and Purple Goat can do that at a huge scale.

**Molly Lazarus** 35:54

I love it. I will say, on behalf of disabled founders and the community that works in the space. The legacy that you and Srin have left. You know, being disabled founders who built something, who had an acquisition, who have continued on to found companies, is really meaningful. So even just your representation, I think, has made a big difference to the space.

**Martyn Sibley** 36:18

Thank you. Thank you for saying that. And I think you touch a point around kind of role models and seeing what's possible. You know, I've always loved entrepreneurship. I'll come on in a minute a little bit to some of the, I guess, more political things I've got involved in. But both those topics have always been of interest to me. But it was hard growing up to find absolute disabled role models, more so in that entrepreneurship space, I think we know of the Judy Heumanns and the sort of activists and political activists that were and still remain very inspiring for the work that I and we all do, and even with Purple Goat, the content creators and the influencers that we bring in, both through research and insight projects, as well as the more content creation, social media marketing campaigns, their representation, to use that word that you said a minute ago, is giving disabled kids this whole new framing of, I can be an influencer, I can be a YouTuber, and that wasn't even a thing when you and I grew up. And sometimes we can all, like, jokingly roll our eyes about this world, but you know, it's just whatever is cool and culturally relevant. Having that representation is so, so powerful. And I think, yeah, that's definitely something that Srin and I are now more aware of. Whereas at the time, it was just exhausting and tiring and stressful. It's nice to know it had a bigger benefit beyond the pure business side as well.

**Molly Lazarus** 37:53

Absolutely. I'm curious if you could talk to disabled founders today or kids who want to see themselves as entrepreneurs. What advice would you give them?

**Martyn Sibley** 38:06

You know, I've consumed a lot of books and watched TV and films of the inspiring entrepreneurs that aren't necessarily disabled, and I think there are so many takeaways that are universally true. And by that, I mean it's about finding your passion, you know, nurturing the skills that come naturally, but I guess, an awareness of how to improve some of those weaknesses without getting fixed on being perfect and fixed on trying to do everything and be everywhere. So there's all those kind of balance and checks and nuances around those very well-known narratives.

And the other one being, just find a problem in the world that you care about and then use entrepreneurship as the vehicle to solve it. I've never been an entrepreneur, and in entrepreneurship, because that's the thing I wanted to do. That's the word and the thing that enables me to work towards a world that's inclusive. So my mission and purpose is inclusion, and then tech and entrepreneurship and all sorts of other things. They're the tools by which to achieve that vision and that mission. So I think, yeah, most of all, find the things you care about, find the things you got the passion for and sort of trust the rest will happen.

And patience is another big one. Like we all want it today, we want it tomorrow. And I look back at all those times I got frustrated at the charity and frustrated at horizons, at Accomable, it wasn't going quick enough and big enough and well enough. And I look back and see it all happened as it was meant to happen, and get a bit philosophical there, but I genuinely do think things happen at their own pace, and it's just to like. Okay, turn up and follow your intuition. Is another bit of advice I would speak to.

I guess, just speaking to the disability side more specifically, there's definitely been times around work life balance and fluctuating energy levels, particularly like winter to summer. Winter is a lot harder on my body and have to watch I don't get chest infections and that kind of stuff. So there's definitely something about seasonality and even just being able to listen to my body on any given day and not always force myself too far. But again, if you're in entrepreneurship, it's par for the course that you are going to have to push yourself further than you might like to, and so there's a lot of balance and checks and nuances around health and well-being. But yeah, I think there's something about self-awareness of what your disability is and what that means to you psychologically, but what it means practically and more scientifically, and being able to plan the business and plan your daily routine around those sentiments is something that I've learned the hard way over a long time as well.

**Molly Lazarus** 41:15

I think that's so valuable. And I think that we often associate entrepreneurship with hustle culture. And I think if you're disabled or you're nondisabled, you still can get caught in this trap. And we talk to our founders in Remarkable all the time about it, where, if everything is important, nothing is important, and it's really hard to distinguish. And so I think you and I, you know, we're vaguely a few decades into our lives, and we can see in hindsight, but I think that knowing how to prioritize, like, what is the highest value today, given my body and my health, I think, is such an important thing for a founder.

**Martyn Sibley** 41:58

Yeah, and then when you said that, it made me, you know, think it's changed over time as well. So like me and my mid 20s was and again, disabled or not, because I think the overall point here is like you can either look at things as balance. There's always two opposing forces, and you're trying to find some balance, or some middle ground, or same thing but different is understanding paradoxes like, you know, if you go into entrepreneurship and you're overly focused on the disability part and the limitations and the fear of like burning out or getting ill, there are going to be difficulties about growing that business, because you're going to be probably leaning too much that way. But then if you go the opposite way, and you're just like oblivious to your disability and your health considerations, and you just go 12, 14, 16-hour days for weeks and months, anybody's going to feel the negative effects of that disabled or not. So it's so easy to talk on a podcast about these things, and it's harder to do it in reality, but I think it's almost always having the understanding of multiple extremities and just doing your best to find some semblance of balance, even if that sometimes is a week of one and then a week of the other.   
  
Like it's not always balanced in a morning or a day or a week. It can be over longer periods of time. But yeah, as I learned the hard way, and I burned out hard after about 18 months at Purple Goat, and it was scary, because I thought, I'm not going to get back to my health and zest that I've always cherished in myself, but I made changes, I did the right things, and I feel as good as I did before about Purple Goat now, but it was a hard, hard lesson to swallow.

**Molly Lazarus** 43:55

I'm so glad that you found your way back, because I think it's a challenging route, having similarly burned out in many ways.

**Martyn Sibley** 44:02

Yeah, it’s scary, right?

**Molly Lazarus** 44:05

And it's important to remember life is long. And you mentioned earlier that your bigger mission is inclusion, right? And I think if we can all hold our bigger mission, then the things that come up day to day, they are a part of that mission, but they are not the most important part of that mission. The biggest part is inclusion, or whatever it is.

**Martyn Sibley** 44:26

Yeah, I totally agree. Is that okay if I share a couple of things I'm up to at the moment as well?

**Molly Lazarus** 44:32

Yeah, please do.

**Martyn Sibley** 44:34

Two of them very specifically relate to what we're talking about and the great work you guys are up to as well around founders and disability startups. So there's been a government-commissioned review in the UK to remove barriers and empower disabled founders, and that coming from government is obviously speaking to you know how to help people into employment, and very often employment that’s self-employment can work better for a lot of disabled people. So I'm on the steering group. It's called the Lilac Review. And so there's a lot of interesting stuff happening on a more macro level there.

And then Creo is like an incubator for disabled founders. It's very new. It's sort of finding its feet at the moment, but I'm a judge and a mentor for them, so obviously, I've spoken a minute ago about having the chance to give back.

And then speaking to that collective voice. And not everything is solved by entrepreneurship. There are more government, whether that's local, national, international, you know, whether that's policy or law, there are some things in those areas that are important for that bigger mission we spoke to of an inclusive world. So I'm in the middle of starting a cooperative called Purple Collective, and that's very much about holding sort of public service and wheelchair services and care and health and stuff like that, more to account and more where we're as disabled people brought into that conversation, like I referenced earlier, and so I'm still running Purple Goat, that's the day job, but like when you speak to that mission, because I've got into the absolute weeds and the hustle, and I've learned all those lessons and come out the other side. And it's also meant I've got a bit more of a, like a salary, and my personal finances are a bit more, you know, in order. Whereas there was, like, a decade where it was hand to mouth figuring all this stuff out, it's given a bit of that time and energy and bandwidth for some of those macro things. And I think that's just hugely exciting, because it's not now only looking at the revenue or the business model. It very much is into that bigger, bigger thing. But one other part, when you asked me to speak to disabled founders. I wouldn't say the mission has to be as lofty as an inclusive world. The mission for another person could be creating beautiful websites for people, or whatever it is they're creating. And I just wanted to amongst what I'm up to and how interesting it is. I want everyone to realize it's not copying you and I and others. It's being inspired by what we're talking about, but finding your own mission and creativity, and it doesn't need to be as big and lofty and change the world. It can be more micro as well.

**Molly Lazarus** 47:40

Absolutely. Martyn, it's been a pleasure to have you on the podcast. If folks want to follow up with you or want to learn more about what you're doing, what would be a good place for them to go check out?

**Martyn Sibley** 47:50

Yeah. So I'm on all the social channels. I guess maybe with the more entrepreneurship side, LinkedIn is probably the easiest place, but I put similar content on all of the socials, Martyn with a y, because people often go Martyn with an i, but yeah, just search me up. I've got my blog, my website, Martynsibley.com so people can contact me through there. And Purple Goat agency's got some quite cool stuff that the team are up to that are beyond my personal journey, which has been great watching how that's evolved as well. So there's a lot of fun stuff on the Purple Goat channels.

**Molly Lazarus** 48:28

Amazing. Well, I know that our listeners will love to hear all of the insights you've shared. And as I mentioned, you guys have been a role model for many of us in the community. So thank you for joining us today, and thank you for all the work that you're doing

**Martyn Sibley** 48:43

Back at you. Thank you for the work you're doing tea and thanks for having me on the pod.

**Molly Lazarus** 48:48

Of course, and listeners, thank you for joining us as well. Please subscribe to our podcast to make sure you don't miss our upcoming episodes and leave us a rating or review to let us know what you think of the show. We look forward to connecting with you again in our next episode of Changing What's Possible.