

URL: <https://stvp.stanford.edu/clips/accessibility-is-a-cultural-enterprise>

Microsoft Chief Accessibility Officer Jenny Lay-Flurrie describes how her approach to accessibility has evolved as she moved through the company. She observes that accessibility is more than a technical issue — it's a cultural enterprise and an ecosystem that needs to be prioritized and approached strategically, all while remembering the goal of empowering people and changing social inequities.



## Transcript

- If I go back about 10 years ago, 00:00:08,703 and I was chair of the disability employee group then, so that was really how I slid into this gig from Hotmail.. How do you go from Hotmail to it was by, I went to meet people who were deaf like me, and then I meant to met people who were blind.. And then I find there's a mobility group and an autism group and ADD and mental health.. And then I was like, "Oh, we should all work together." So I built the ERG with the help of many people.. And that's kind of rule number one, it's never one person.. No one person can change a culture.. It's got to be a gang of incredible impassioned individuals.. And so I know leadership is important and we put a lot of onus on it, but I'll tell you, I don't do anything without that gang.. And that's probably one of my most proudest moments is being a part of that ERG and having a part in forming it here at the company.. But 10 years ago, I was sat there meeting with the then president of Cloud and AI, who is now the CEO, Satia Nadela, and it was my first meeting with him and I'd asked him to be sponsor, and I was horribly nervous and I'd made this amazing 45-minute presentation deck and I'd labored for hours on it..

And I sat down and, and he looked at me and he said, "No, let's not look at that.. Can you just tell me what's going on?" And I said, no, no, no, I've spent days on these slides.. You have no idea.. But it ended up being one of the best meetings of my life.. And the advice he gave me at the end is, "Jenny, you've got to go and get after hearts and minds." Hearts and minds.. And I was wallowing in this afterwards, and I wasn't in this role, you know, I was still pushing rocks uphill and, but I took it to heart because I think there is a responsibility opportunity when that comes to accessibility.. But I think there is, with any kind of leadership, particularly at the time, this was under resourced.. It didn't have a lot of prioritization in the company at the time.. And you know, I felt like we were pushing constantly, but I started building collateral.. I started working with people to turn this into something that would pull people in, in an empowering way that would help them to learn, that would educate, that would also gather their expertise and insight, that would start the flywheel that then accelerated in 2014 when Saki became CEO..

In 2015, when I was fortunate enough to move into this role along with a host of other amazing people.. When we pivoted this from just a technical discipline into thinking about accessibility as a cultural enterprise, as an ecosystem, as a maturity model, as something that you have to inch forward and be strategic and prioritizing clear and simple in what you go after and how you go after it.. And every year I sit back and I run my annual assessment and I go, "Well, they're doing really well, but woo, we gotta go focus on procurement." We gotta go figure out how to empower our sellers or how to talk about disability in

Country X.. And we come with a slim set of profiles and goals like you do with any other business.. And then you get after that, and you manage, and you measure, and you move methodically forward.. I think if there's one difference with MySpace, it's never forgetting the ground you walk on.. We are trying to, empower people around the world.. We're trying to change social demographic, social inequity that's existed for decades if not centuries.. And it's human and it's real and it's not always fun, but it's really important and there's people at the heart of it.. And so yeah, we run it like a business, but at the core it's all about hearts and minds..

And it's all about humans...