

One Knight in Product - E132 Saielle DaSilva

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SPEAKERS

Saielle DaSilva, Jason Knight



Jason Knight 00:00

Hello, and welcome to the show. I'm your host, Jason Knight. And on each episode of this podcast, I'll be having inspiring conversations with passionate product people. That That sounds like the sort of thing you want more of in your life, why not head over to <https://oneknightinproduct.com>, where you can find interviews with some of the finest minds in and around product management, binge the back catalogue, subscribe on your favourite podcast app or share it with all your friends. And if you check the show notes for this episode, you'll find a handy donation link, not for me, but for some far more deserving people instead. On tonight's episode, we talk about coming out as your true self at work and telling your employer and your colleagues about your real gender identity. We talk about planning your transition roadmap, what you might put in that letter that goes around to the entire organisation and some of the reactions you might expect to get. We also talk about how we can all be better allies both organizationally and personally for our transgender colleagues, and how to avoid that bumbling Hugh Grant style apology when we inevitably slip up and get it wrong. For All this and much more, please join us on One Knight in Product.



Jason Knight 01:07

So my guest tonight is the one the only Saielle DaSilva. Saielle's a product design leader and speaker wants to put the soft back in the software sales of d&d fan who hates hustle culture, people who don't live their values, and also once moderated a panel, I was speaking on the shoes on the other foot now style. Personally, I'm glad that middle aged, heterosexual, cisgender white guys like me finally got a turn a big in charge. We were going to spend tonight talking about the same old topics in design and leadership. And to be fair, we're probably going to do that in a future episode. But in true product fashion, we've prioritised an even more important topic to discuss the bias and prejudice directed at Transgender colleagues. And some of the difficulties you can have navigating an organisation after coming out as your true self at work. Hi, Saielle, how are you tonight?



Saielle DaSilva 01:17



Saielle DaSilva 01:47

I'm doing really well. Thanks for having me on.



Jason Knight 01:50

No worries. Good to have you here. So first things first, there are a lot of important things to talk about tonight. And we're absolutely going to talk about some of them in a minute. But I wanted to start with a an underarm flow just to warm us up. So what are you working on these days?



Saielle DaSilva 02:04

Currently, I'm the director of user experience at Cazoo, which is an online car sales company. We sell used cars to customers completely online, letting them buy and drive and return it if they don't like it within seven days.



Jason Knight 02:20

Excellent. So do you get lots of free cars out of that as well? Or do you not get those sort of perks?



Saielle DaSilva 02:25

No, nothing quite like that!



Jason Knight 02:28

Well, one day, one day. But that's interesting as well, though, because it must be pretty interesting. As a designer yourself or as a design leader yourself to be basically trying to revolutionise a very traditional industry, like buying cars is one of the most traditional industries, certainly in digital terms, it's, you could assume that it's a little bit further behind. Is that fair to say? Or do you think that it's really come on either under your stewardship, or just in general,



Saielle DaSilva 02:56

I think Cazoo has made a lot of progress in the way people think about buying cars. But there's still a lot of work to be done. It's very early days, in terms of really shifting customer expectations and behaviour in a way that would be good for customers and good for the planet.



Jason Knight 03:16

Just take all the cars away, that's the planet solver. But you've also been speaking and writing a

lot about product design ethics and the like. And that's something which, you know, obviously, it's really great to go out and support the community, but something that's been really tricky over the pandemic and to do with the closing down of all the conferences and stuff like, are you planning to get out there and take your new self out to the world and get back on the conference circuit and start to do some of that stuff again? Are you kind of keep your light under a bushel for a bit?

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Saielle DaSilva 03:47

That's a good question. I feel like I've actually done quite a few conferences, and I'm actually about to put myself under a bushel as it were. Because I'll be having facial surgery in July. Yep. And one of the things is it's going to take some recovery. So I want to make the most of things like podcasts where I can still share ideas without having to be on stage or visible to people for a little while. So thanks for helping me with that.



Jason Knight 04:15

Well, there you go. As someone who also doesn't want my face out anywhere as much as possible work and completely understand the benefits of podcasting, but what's the recovery time like from that then? Is it weeks? months?

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Saielle DaSilva 04:28

The most intense recovery is the first few weeks, but then it'll be a couple months.



Jason Knight 04:33

Okay, well, if I see anyone walking around in bandages...

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Saielle DaSilva 04:36

Yeah, say hello.



Jason Knight 04:40

But out of interest. Your LinkedIn says that you're looking to put the soft back into software. What does that mean specifically?

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Saielle DaSilva 04:48

I think it's very easy to get distracted about what software means and software is essentially a product of decisions right? It is a product of human decisions. It's a very fluid artefact, if you will. And so what we do with people and how we work with people to make sure that the

software side of things the human side of things is really accounted for is really, really important. And it's easy to overlook and go, Oh, software is just all about money, or it's all about agile, or it's all about fundamentally agile, and all the other shit comes down to like, Are people having clear communication? Are they respecting each other and actively listening to each other? And if so, how do they leverage that communication to make decisions that are clear, together, aligned and like, oriented towards an outcome? It's easy to focus on methodology and practice. And those things are certainly important. But I've never invested in people and found it to be lacking in results. The more that I've invested in people as a product leader, the more that my people have given back to me and to the company that we're working for, towards our goals. When you look after people, they look after everything else.



Jason Knight 06:16

No, absolutely. I think that thing around agile as well, and the kind of people that get addicted to the methodology, more than the actual results of what they're doing as well, I think it's just a really interesting thing, which you see a lot out and about, and definitely something that I can support trying to move away from and try to concentrate on what you're really trying to do in the world. Okay, so enough of the warming up, let's get deep and meaningful and stop flirting with each other, and talk about some really important stuff. So back in June, last year, you came out to the world, and introduced us all to sail to silver. Now, I'm going to caveat the following 20 or so minutes with the fact that I'm obviously no expert in many of the topics that we're going to talk about tonight. So even as a non expert, I'm going to assume that June was the end of a long mental and physical journey for you, and the path that you've trodden in your life. So my first question is, when did you first realise that you were or, indeed are a woman?



Saielle DaSilva 07:16

That's a good question. I've really known since childhood. And I know that that's not everyone's story. Yeah. And that's okay, too. You know, for me, personally, I've known since I was a kid, but it really wasn't safe for me to come out because of my family, and because of religion and culture, and all those other things. So I waited until I was an adult. And I transitioned in my early 20s, I started to, and then I de-transitioned because I moved and I didn't realise I have ADHD, right? Which complicated things quite a bit in terms of the Navigating paperwork, and admin and all that side of things. And so I've known for a long time, but part of me was like, oh, maybe it was just a phase. And it wasn't.



Jason Knight 08:11

Well, that's something that a lot of people, especially some of the more trans denying types out there will sit there and say that someone who is a kid who is still basically trying to work themselves out in any number of ways that is just a phase and that they're just boyish, or girlish, or whatever it is, and tomboy or whatnot. I guess you're going to disagree with that. But is there anything that we can say to people to try to help them realise that that's not the case, and that people actually do know, inherently who they are at an early age, maybe at a point where they could go through things like puberty blockers and stuff like that, to help them make an informed choice when they get to a bit of an older age where they can maybe do that?

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Saielle DaSilva 08:51

Yeah, I think there are a couple of very concrete examples where we let people self identify from a very early age that can have much more severe impacts. Dancing, for example, people who do ballet and are professionals or carry on with ballet, like beyond just childhood, fundamentally changed the physiology and shape of their body in ways that are much more irreversible and much harder to contain. And it can create lasting damage. But I saw a thread on Twitter about this and it was basically saying, I identified as a dancer at age six in ways that fundamentally changed the way that my body is structured, and nobody questioned it. But if it had been for tender people would have challenged that left, right and centre. And I think that's one of the examples right? The other is we have this very, like heteronormative culture that essentially like you know, I see this a lot with the SIS hat parents kind of going, Oh look, he's got a little girlfriend or she's got a little boyfriend, or whatever. And it's like, Oh, why are we imposing gender norms or crushes on kids, these are the same people who will then turn around and accuse trans people of like being groomers or trying to catch kids and draw them into being trans. But like, as somebody who's going through this process, there is nothing about being trans that like, I would do just for funsies, right? Like I'm doing this because it is fundamentally my identity. It's not like peer pressure to smoke weed or whatever, right? Like, it's just fundamentally different. Like, it's, it's not the kind of thing that you take on lightheartedly or easily, or wake up one day and go, Oh, you know, what, two of my friends are trans. I think I will try that and go through this whole medical ordeal, because there's nothing else available to me. And I think the other thing there is that when people are deniers, like, you know, that people can know, at a very early age, who we are and what we are, and like how we'd like to live in the world. Again, it's like the kind of thing that like, if we trust people, and we give them the respect they deserve, they can get it wrong. I did. But the thing is, as I kept going, and I kept learning, and yeah, June last year was like a very intense sort of time. But also, it was a really wonderful beginning. And I remember the day that I decided to come out at work, I was sweating bullets, and I was talking to my friend Emily Tate. And like, she helped me write my letter to my colleagues. And it was really, really stressful, in some ways to kind of put that out there. But also, it was the combination of something I'd known for such a long time.



Jason Knight 11:56

No, absolutely. And I think that that letter is something that we'll talk about in a second, because I know that there's this whole, I guess, reveal, but before the letter, I'm assuming there's some kind of, I guess, in product terms, like a release roadmap for this sort of thing, like, you've got to plan your attack, you've got to, obviously get your own staff in order from your own personal side. But you've also got to work out how you are going to come out to your friends, to your colleagues, to your family, to everyone. And of course, some of your friends and family are going to know already some of your colleagues may even know but of course, some of the colleagues are not going to know at all. So what does that no map look like? Like? What are some of the things that you have to pre plan or try to, I guess, to some extent, muster the courage for some of the steps that you have to go through to prepare yourself to basically unleash yourself your new self onto the world?

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Saielle DaSilva 12:45

Yeah. So March 2020, I had to come out to my partner who was married to right. And that was the first higgie then it you know it was working through that as a couple to figure out what

the first biggie, then it, you know, it was working through that, as a couple to figure out what was right and wrong. Were had our marriage suffered because of this massive secret I'd been keeping inside. And what were we going to do about that? And so there was a lot of like prototyping as an audience of two, if you will, before I took it to my friends. Right. And then there was quite a bit of like, okay, I'm gonna tell one friend first, I have a friend group that I played Dungeons and Dragons with. And I told our dungeon master first and I was like, Hey, you're a dungeon master, I need you to know, like, because I'm going to show up different to the game. And I just want you to know, and so I told our dungeon master and then I told Emily. And then I told Martin, Martin Eriksson. And everyone was like, way more supportive, and kind than I thought they would be. But it was still really scary. And I think it's easy to believe that most people are trans haters, and anti trans. When you read the headlines, especially like the ones manufactured by the BBC or the Daily Mail. I don't know if I'm allowed to call them out, but...



Jason Knight 14:14

You can call out whoever you want.



Saielle DaSilva 14:16

Excellent. Yeah, like I think there's like this overinflation of anti trans perspectives as like normative, especially in the UK media that really, really derides the lives of trans people and for essentially for salacious headlines and for ratings, but doesn't actually, like ever present a fair or Balanced View, treating trans rights and human rights as a debate really moves us backwards in time. Right. I think that it's really interesting to consider the ways in which we have had similar debates about the rights of people of colour in history and the rights of a people and never have those debates yielded fruit by being intentionally regressive or restrictive.



Jason Knight 15:08

Yeah, no, absolutely. And I, I guess one of the interesting things there is that there's obviously quite a cadre of high profile celebrities that are effectively coming out and kind of stoking the flames on this one as well. But like, you've got your JK Rowling's, you've got your Graham Linehans and people like that. And it seems like every week, there's another person coming out of the woodwork to just give their very ill informed opinion. I guess from a personal heroes perspective, have there have been any really disappointing ones for you like people that you would have expected to be more of an ally to you? Obviously, not that you necessarily know them, but just in general, and people that you used to look up to that you've basically realised I don't care about you, or anyone like you at all?



Saielle DaSilva 15:50

Yeah, actually, you know, one of the one of the really shocking ones, I think, was Rowan Atkinson this week,



Jason Knight 15:58

Mr. Bean!

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Saielle DaSilva 15:59

Look, Mr. Bean, was a great character. I really, I really used to like, love, actually. And that particular scene where he's got like a Mr. Bean cameo, right? I think the problem with comedy specifically is you know, you have these very wealthy well off middle aged white men. Another one was Rainn Wilson, who, you know, they're seeing something that they don't quite understand. And they're picking up essentially these straw person arguments, right? These straw man arguments about like, trans rights or whatever. And these are just like manufactured. Essentially, these these headlines, and these talking points are manufactured by the right wing outrage machine. And so for, you know, Rainn Wilson, it was what is chest feeding? Why wouldn't you call it breastfeeding? And nobody is saying that we can only use chest feeding. Now I just want to make that very clear. For anyone who's listening who saw that headline, there was some guidance in the NHS that not everyone who gives birth identifies as a woman and not everyone who gives birth and feeds a child would like to have their chest referred to as breastfeeding. Right? Yeah. So for non binary people who give birth, they might choose chest feeding, and it's not illegalized breastfeeding as a word. It's for those who are not comfortable with it, do your best to respect other ways that people might want to be referred to, especially in their body. And with Rowan Atkinson's, you know, talking points about comedy has a duty to offend. Yeah, but who, right? Punching down is not satire, that's bullying.



Jason Knight 17:49

Yes, that direction is always the most important thing. I just think that is really disappointing seeing some of the more aggressive people out there. They're basically using their bully pulpits to basically sit there and effectively accuse all trans people of being sex offenders, which is just obviously, the most ridiculous position to take in the world. But...

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Saielle DaSilva 18:06

There were more recorded cases of Catholic priests committing child abuse, then, yeah, ever drag queen. Right. And I think that's one thing, although I would like to amend that Rainn Wilson did apologise, said that he was ignorant and listened to some trans friends and was educated and deleted the tweet and summarily Shut up, which, like, Thank you for shutting the fuck up and letting other people who are experts guide you through this process of overcoming your ignorance. And it took a lot of humility to do that. But I think it's really important.



Jason Knight 18:44

Yeah, I think, again, I can, to some extent forgive people for being ignorant. But if they are presented with facts, and they just double down on their ignorance, and it feels like, there's definitely something going wrong there that needs to be addressed. But let's talk about the letter that you mentioned already. Now, I'm assuming that anyone working anywhere

ultimately has to write a letter to their colleagues, because of course, many of those people are not necessarily going to be as up to date with that person's identity that the journey that they're on because of course, some of these people are just going to be passing acquaintances. Now, I'm assuming you could have just written something along the lines of, hey, I'm a woman now. Okay, thanks. Bye. Or you could have written something more like your entire life story across multiple pages, and shared absolutely every single inner thought. And I guess I'm curious as to where on that spectrum, because I'm assuming that it wasn't either of those extremes you felt that you needed to go and how you approach the letter both, I guess, philosophically, but also practically.

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Saielle DaSilva 19:46

Yeah, that's a great question. One thing I wanted to do was just basically provide people with because I'm a designer, I wanted to provide people with the necessary affordances and understanding to engage with if me respectfully in to engage with my decision respectfully. Yeah. So what I did is I wrote a letter that was basically very functional, and very practical surprise. But it wasn't just Hi, I'm a woman here, my pronouns by it was basically like, you might not know me because we had grown a lot. You might not know me, but I'm the head of user experience. I'm writing a letter because there's no easy way to tell everyone who matters without losing track of who I've told. I'm announcing what's essentially a personal matter, but definitely impacts my life at work, which is why I'm doing this. So and then I had like a little, what does this mean for me? And I said, lots of things I haven't processed yet. Right? What does this mean for us, like you and me and our working relationship? Really not much. There's just two things. My new name is Seo, please use listening and moving forward in conversation with her about me even if it refers to the past thing, too. I'd really appreciate if you'd use she her pronouns to refer to me in conversation with her about me. I really appreciate your kindness and respect. Recognise Mistakes happen, that's totally fine. Even I have trouble with pronouns, sometimes still true. Typical strategy is to stop apologise, correct myself and move on. Nobody wants a big deal made of somebody else using the wrong pronouns. You might have lots of questions, I'd be happy to answer general things about transgender people or point you to the right resources. I don't want to discuss my medical choices, personal relationships, or life history, especially with regards to transition, because I'm processing all I think it was really, and then I included some links about further reading, right? So a guy did pronouns like Australia, and transgender terms, a transgender FAQ, those sorts of things. And the thing that was really important there was drawing that boundary, because a lot of people are like, I think from you know, decidedly from a place of ignorance, not from a place of cruelty. People are like, Oh, are you gonna, like, have the snip? Or like any other like, sort of like, oh, what does that mean? For like, your genitalia is kind of like the first question that people go to. And it's like, Well, you wouldn't ask literally any other coworker about their genitalia ever come from the non text of work. So it's not appropriate for you to ask me that, right. So like, I'm not going to discuss my medical choices, or anything else about like, whether I'm going on hormones or not. And like, I've been very forthcoming about that stuff with people who I work closely with and who I have rapport with, but I'm not here to live like, the love Island or Big Brother version of like, being trans just because now you happen to like tangentially know, a trans person, I'm not gonna like live reality TV for you. Yeah. And like, put my life on display?



Jason Knight 22:52

No, absolutely. And I think it's, there's a couple of things that occurred to me there, one of

which is going back to that thing we were talking about earlier about how, for example, you're working for a company that sells cars. And I'm assuming that there's a bunch of people in that company that have come from more of a traditional background kind of company buyers, and whether I'm being completely fair, but to say that maybe some of these people are a little less reconstructed, or maybe not as woke as we are, but like, did you feel that there was any of that energy kind of around it that some people just were almost systematically set up to not understand because of their backgrounds and the types of working cultures that they'd kind of grown up in? Or do you think that's completely unfair?

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Saielle DaSilva 23:34

Look, I think it's because you're hidden in that kind of company, I probably wouldn't have been able to come out. Yeah, I felt very supported by my leadership, and by the C suite, and by our director of people, and by lots of people, it took months to come out in June, right. It wasn't just like, I woke up in May and was like, I'm doing it, right. Yeah, it took months of like, so I had been out to Emily Tate and my d&d group for almost a year before coming out to work. Yeah. So realistically, like, I worked on it, and I worked on self advocacy for almost a year before coming out. And that process could have been streamlined. But it was a brand new company, lots of growth, lots of like, growing pains. And I think there probably are those people that I work with, but nobody has been aggressively like, in my face about it. And very few people have made mistakes, when it comes to pronouns and those that have remembered to just sorry, I mean, she just moved on, right? Rather than like, making a big deal about it, because I was talking about this the other night, when somebody gets your pronouns drawn, right, they, if they're more on the ignorant end of the spectrum, they tend to try to like, Oh, I'm so sorry. I didn't mean that. What I clearly meant was she I'm like, I'm Good person, I'm a good person, I promise I'm gonna get person really anxious about it. And they're like, I'm so sorry, I'm so sorry. And it's like the abuse of apologising only makes it worse by highlighting the fact that it happened. The best thing to do is just apologise correct and move on. I'm sorry, I meant she and just move on. Because like, it's just a conversation, stopping and pausing there gives a lot more credence to and brings a lot more anxiety to an already like, difficult situation. Whereas if you just apologise and move on, like, for me as a person like that feels much more respectful because I don't have to dwell on the misgendering I get to just move on with the conversation, which is all I want to do anyways.



Jason Knight 25:43

Yeah, absolutely. I think we were talking about this the other day as well, this concept of like the Hugh Grant apology, just sort of stumbling and tripping over or maybe even your Boris Johnson when he's dropped all these notes. And forgive me, forgive me type votes. And it's just that you say, Just shut up. Yeah, set up and move on a bit, do better. Next time,

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Saielle DaSilva 26:01

I'm trying to have a conversation, I don't want to make gender the elephant in the room. Gender is a factor of my life. But it's certainly not the only one.





Jason Knight 26:11

Absolutely. But you're in a senior leadership position there. And to me that kind of cuts, or could cut two ways. On the one hand, you've got a track record, you're presumably respected. You've also if it comes to it got kind of the the weight of the org chart behind you if you really need it. Obviously, we don't like to talk about that sort of thing. And these days are empowered teams, but it is there if you need it, right. But on the other hand, you're well known, you're very visible, and you've got nowhere to hide. So do you think either from your experience, or maybe from transgender friends that you've known that have gone through this as well, that it's harder or easier for people in senior positions to go through this at work?

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Saielle DaSilva 26:46

You think it really I'm gonna pull the product manager card and say it depends. It wouldn't be a product podcast, if we didn't get at least one. It depends, right? Here's the thing, I think it depends on the people that you work with, and the leadership that's around you. For me, personally, like I didn't really have anywhere I could hide, I didn't have a way to do this quietly, I just had to do it. And I had to do it like all at once and do it loud. And I remember before coming out, I actually did a lot more speaking as myself, or I did a lot more speaking as my old self before coming out to kind of establish that track record in the UK. So I intentionally went out there and built a lot more credibility and built a lot more of My presence in media, because I was very worried actually, that coming out would mean that I wouldn't get tapped for things like conferences or seeking, you know, that I wouldn't get highlighted for opportunities or recognised for my brain. And I really didn't want that I really wanted to just be a product person who happens to be trans. Right? Yeah. And I was really worried about that. So I went out and did a bunch of speaking to, you know, kind of cement my credibility in the industry, which is really stressful, because I know, I'm creating artefacts that like, Are my old gender and my old name and things that like, are difficult. But when it comes to like company hierarchy, I think if you have a culture of respect, it helps. And if you don't like find one, this is probably the best advice I can give. Like, if you don't feel psychologically safe at work, it's not going to improve by coming out. Probably, but like, you know, in some cases, it's unavoidable. I think, the first time I tried to come out, I changed jobs, and I was brand new, and the lack of any org structure support, and the lack of any real gravity behind my position in the company kept me in the closet. And so people were like, Oh, she's just that weird person with the big hair. And like, you know, nobody could quite make sense of me. And I couldn't make sense of myself. And I was just like, depressed and miserable. So I would say, in my personal experience, like having the gravity of the org chart behind me and accountability for a lot more in the organisation helped a lot personally, but I know that that's not the case for everyone. And lots of my friends who are engineers, for example, come out at various levels of career development, and have had, you know, a variety of experiences many good, some terrible.



Jason Knight 29:38

Yeah, and just for the record, I still consider you that weirdo with the big hair. So that's, that's absolutely fine. But you just touched on it there around the work that you did to basically build up that body of work. So via talks, articles, conference appearances, and I kind of in my head, see that as what I call the car Have Caitlyn Jenner conundrum like someone who's got a massive public profile that's been there for years decades, loads of really amazing success that has been exquisitely captured and recorded in detail and transitioned later in life. And of

course, it's absolutely fantastic that she became the person she always was. Although we should obviously call out that Caitlyn Jenner's political positions, and general ideology isn't necessarily representative of the majority of trans people. And maybe we should call out someone like Laverne Cox or Elliot Page. Slightly less popular, but better representative advocates for trans people. But in any case, I assume that all of these people are looking back at their old bodies of work and seeing their old face staring back at them. And whilst obviously you can't speak for them yourself, you are yourself in a position where you can look back at your body of work and see your old face and your old name staring back at you. So are you able to compartmentalise that to some extent? Or was it kind of sticking a knife in and twisting a little bit when you see that next to the content that you've previously put out?

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Saielle DaSilva 31:11

I think that's a great question. I mean, first thing, I would say that this isn't just Caitlyn Jenner's conundrum. And I think Eddie Izzard is a very prominent example, actually in comedy and more related to what we're talking about. But for me, personally, I find that I am very grateful for who I was. And the fact that I did that work to put myself out there was really good and helpful, because it gave me it gave me a lot of credibility, and it showed people the power of my ideas, and I have a very, I think, healthy relationship with me pre transition, you know, I don't resent that person, I don't necessarily want to erase that person is just more that like, that wasn't my full self. And this is and so I'm okay with those things. And actually, I've worked with mine the product specifically in some of the other conferences I've worked through, to capture that. And, you know, they've made post edits that change the name and that go, Hey, this is now style, but she was presenting mask, and, you know, these things, but we've amended the name to make sure that you understand that, like, she's, uh, she now and you know, she's out in the world. And like, that was really helpful and kind. And actually, like, there have been several instances where I've worked with various conference organisers on that, to like, amend prior work. But also, like, I don't resent or regret my past, I really enjoy and embrace everything that got me to here because I wouldn't be who I am today without those memories and experiences. And so I know that that's, again, for trans people who might be listening to this, like, that's a very individual journey. And like, there's no pressure for me that like, you have to do that. That's just what I found for me. And I certainly wouldn't want to coerce anybody into trying to have my experience of being trans because I don't think that's how it works.



Jason Knight 33:17

No, it is very interesting to think that, that yeah, that's what a lot of the other side of the argument, we they they kind of just see all trans people as this homogenous group of people that just all have exactly the same motivations and the same everything. And it's, again, I think, as you've touched on kind of simplifies it. But that's obviously the minor product staff, the conference staff, and that's obviously really great. And obviously, we're all good friends of mine the product. So that's good to hear that we're keeping them honest as well. But from a work perspective, you touched on it a little bit before about, for example, the support that the leadership team gave you that the some of the senior people within the organisation gave you, but in general, aside from just you and your own position, and things that have helped you, are there any general principles that you think are either lacking or just should be worked on in companies to help drive a more trans inclusive workplace? And any obvious ones at least?

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Saielle DaSilva 34:13

Yeah, like, I think, first and foremost, a culture of respect, right? Like, don't let people make like, identify as an attack helicopter jokes, right? If you do have the chokes channel, like make sure that people understand the boundaries and guidelines, which is like, jokes are for fun, not for bullying. Jokes are for helping people lighten the day. You know, I've worked a couple places that have like jokes, channels and slack. And that's been really helpful, but also like, it can very much like inflate or deflate a person if they're the butt of a joke, especially if they're already marginalised. I think, second thing that I would encourage every company to think about is like, embrace trans inclusive health care, like there is There's no reason to deny health care coverage or to limit these things as like, optional or elective surgery, like the mental health benefits that come from these things are very significant. And I think it's really interesting that companies want to talk about mental health because of the pandemic and all the other things that we've been facing, and they want more productivity from people. But there's this entire class of people vacay trans people who have very, like, concrete health care needs. And we have companies like systematically denying coverage, and saying that they won't get serious about advocating for that, and they won't get serious about pushing for more trans inclusive health care, right, like, I will be having facial surgery in July. And I had to pay for that out of pocket. And it's expensive. And I've had to save a lot to do it. And I know that getting to hear like, has felt like a lot of work. And I wish that this kind of thing had been covered by insurance or made available to me with some sort of like subsidy, because I know it has an impact on mental health. And I know it has an impact on productivity. And just having a calendar date scheduled has made me so much more comfortable with myself. And I know that something that I need is coming and again, not everyone needs surgery to feel happy in their bodies, but I do and knowing that I'm okay with this. And I wish more people saw this as mental health. And also just like body congruence, which is really what the goal of trans healthcare is about as like important factors in the mental health discussion, right? Rather than like, okay, there's like this mental health bucket over here. And then there's like, transgender stuff, and that's over there. And it's like, no, no, these two things belong together, because gender is such a part of who we are.



Jason Knight 37:05

Yeah, that's interesting, because you were talking obviously, about the support that your place gave you. And I'm sure that that support came from a good place. But also, there's an argument that many companies are really only supporting this because they feel they have to, because otherwise they're gonna get sued. And basically, they're just doing the bare minimum that they can get away with to show that they have, you know, they can take the trans acceptance box, for example. So I guess the argument there is or the hot take from that is basically put your bloody money where your mouth is, companies don't don't just don't just pay lip service.

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Saielle DaSilva 37:35

Yeah, absolutely. And then finally, you know, if I had to pick like a third principle, I would say, always be learning and like, learning, not just from salacious headlines, but learning from trans people, and from their experiences, like, talk to trans people. If you don't know any trans

people, they're out there. And like, do the work yourself. Don't come in and ask like, trans one on one questions, right.



Jason Knight 38:03

That's what I've been doing.

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Saielle DaSilva 38:04

Yeah, but no, because I know that you've done the work to understand that this isn't a debate. Right? I know that you've done the work. Like one of the things that I want to point out for the audience, because I think this is really important, is you've done the work to not come into this going. Trans rights question mark. Debate? Yeah, both sides, like you're not doing that you treat me like a person and you understand that there's work to be done. And I think that that's commendable. And also the bare minimum.



Jason Knight 38:33

Oh, yeah. No, I'm not at all claiming to be in any way special. But I do think that there are just some unarguable truths you have to stand up for. But on that idea, then about doing the work and to completely shoot myself in the face here and stop looking like I've done the work. Like if you were going to say one thing to people like me, or maybe people like people like me. So the cisgender white, heterosexual men traditionally have the vast majority of the power within an organisation. How can they we or I be better advocates better allies and helped to make things better for you and for other trans colleagues?

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Saielle DaSilva 39:08

That's a great question. I think it goes back to what I just said, which is talk to trans people check in on them, ask them, Are they getting their needs met? Platform women, platform trans women, I've noticed that there are a lot of things that are just taken for granted by men in terms of like, respect at work and talking over women or parroting a woman's idea or point and it gets passed over by her. But recognise the minute a man echoes it without saying, oh, And his point was right, and we should blah blah, blah, blah. Right. And so I think there's like there's a lot of just basic allyship and for the SIS white hat needs listening, I would say being a good ally starts with being willing to give away credit and to make yourself a safe person to trust. And that trust comes from knowing that you know how to like platform other people, and you know how to give room in a conversation to other people. And so the people I trust the most are people who go out of their way to make sure that the women around them all the women, not just the trans women, not just the SIS women, all the women around them are getting airtime in a conversation and in being able to contribute productively to collaboration and ideas. Because that kind of inclusive culture, it literally benefits everyone, right? There's, there's this really good talk by Kat Holmes on design for one design for 7 billion. And it's about accessibility. But when you think about inclusion, culture, and like respect as this kind of like spectrum of accessibility, the more you increase accessibility for your marginalised people, the safer it is for everyone, the better quality of ideas that you'll get. And what you want from

psychological safety is ultimately challenger safety. It's when people feel safe to challenge ideas and to bring strong contention to the board. And so making room for that is really, really important. And you're not going to get there if marginalised people, people of colour, and women don't feel safe contributing to a conversation.



Jason Knight 41:31

No, absolutely. But talking about conversations. And with the obvious caveat that you're far too humbled to be a solo spokeswoman for the entire trans experience. If you were to be having a conversation right now, with a trans woman, or trans man pondering how to come out of work, what advice would you give that person? Or sort of some guidelines that you might give them to try and help them on that journey?



Saielle DaSilva 41:58

Yeah, that's a great question. I've actually done this for a couple people since I came out. So my first thing is, who at work knows? And how much do you trust them? And what position are they in? Right? Because having strong allies in the org chart, like you do have to play the game to like, understand who with some clout or authority in an organisation is going to back you or support you visibly. And that could be a really well liked manager, it could be somebody at the director level or above, but like you, you need, like your own immediate circle, you need some help from your people team if they're good. And then you really want like, at least one executive sponsor somebody who's willing to put their clout on the line to help you find your place. So for the people that I've talked to, you know, one of the big things has been, okay, you know, here's the letter, but also, here's other things to think about, like social media, you know, there was a roadmap, he asked me about the roadmap earlier and I kind of glossed over it but like, I made a plan, I product managed my coming out



Jason Knight 43:09

Project managed, surely? Project managed!



Saielle DaSilva 43:11

Well I'm the product. But yes, I did project management coming out and had to treat things in phases. And I was like, Okay, first things first, I'm gonna like cement, a gender neutral identity. So I shifted from a different Twitter handle to intention on as part of that, and like found something more gender neutral, I found something more gender neutral across like, the spectrum and was like, Okay, I'm just gonna like softly rebrand there. And there were other things that I did along the way. But I think the number one thing is find allies and or accomplices who are going to make you feel safe.



Jason Knight 43:49

Absolutely. An excellent advice, hopefully inspirational to someone listening to this out there right now. And where can people find you after this, if they want to have a chat about any trans

right now. And where can people find you after this, if they want to have a chat about any trans issues that they might want to talk about? Or maybe dig a little bit into product and design or maybe even get you to show them your dice collection?

S

Saielle DaSilva 44:07

Yeah, I love my dice collection. So I'm on Twitter at @intentionaut, you'll put it in the show description I'm sure. And then I write a blog at <https://www.blossomat.work/>. And then if you really really can't get enough like, there is a contact form on my website, and if you want to talk to me about speaking gigs or other engagements, I would be happy to support heads up. I am out recovering from surgery for the month of July and 2022. So I will probably be slow to respond to your emails until at least August.



Jason Knight 44:53

That's fine. Everyone can get a bit of sun and then come back and have a go at you in the autumn or the fall depending on Yeah, which side of the pond Do you want to be talking about? Well, I'll make sure as you say, to link that all into the show notes, and hopefully your fan base will ever burgeon. But yeah, obviously really great. We could find some time to talk about some really important issues and hopefully, help someone somewhere with some of the stuff they may be going through. Obviously, we'll be back for that design Episode One day, but until then we'll stay in touch and yeah, as for now, thanks for taking the time.

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Saielle DaSilva 45:24

Thank you so much for having me. It's been really great. And thank you to the audience for listening.



Jason Knight 45:32

As always, thanks for listening. I hope you found the episode inspiring and insightful. If you did again, I can only encourage you to pop over to <https://oneknightinproduct.com>, check out some of my other fantastic guests, sign up to the mailing list or subscribe on your favourite podcast app and make sure you share your friends so you and they can never miss another episode again. I'll be back soon with another inspiring guest but as for now, thanks and good night.