**Transcript of Podcast episode:**

**[Narration]:** Hi, this is Carey Scheer and you're listening to the Purple Orange Podcast. And today we're talking about employment with Daniella Biagi. She  works as a manager at BDO. And last year, she won the Wellness Advocate category for 30 under 30. It's Australia's largest independent awards program for rising stars in the accounting industry. But when Daniella graduated from her accounting degree, she really struggled to get her first job.

**[Daniella]**: I actually used to be quite embarrassed about it to be very real. You know, nobody likes to be rejected, and then let alone talking about it. But I look back and I just kind of think it adds a bit character to the journey.

**[Narration]:**Daniella said she had no problem getting to the interview stage, but she just couldn't land the job.

**[Daniella]:** I'd get a lot of interviews. On paper, I think I look great [laughs], you know. I'd get phone interviews, but I'd find that you'd get into a face to face interview, and there was that real elephant in the room that nobody wants to talk about. As a human being you're quite intuitive, you can sense when there's a bit of a vibe about it.

**[Narration]:** And so what was that elephant always in the room?

**[Daniella]:** I was born with a disability that my arms and legs didn't form properly. So they just didn't- I've got really short arms and legs and lacking hands, or I don't even know how to describe it, to be honest with you. But I'm a lot shorter and yeah, make up for it in personality.

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*(Photo of Daniella Biagi)*

**[Narration]:** As the awkward job interviews started to pile on, she started to question, did she need to revise her strategy?

**[Daniella]:** You start second guessing, you go right, do I need to disclose this up front? Do I need to have that conversation? Go, hey, just a heads up before we get into the interview process. I've got no arms. [Laughs] Is that cool with you?

**[Narration]:** But in the end, Daniela decided not to put it in her application because it was just totally irrelevant to whether she could do the job or not.

**[Carey]:** So when you got an interview, but you didn't get the job, did you ask for feedback?

**[Daniella]:** Yeah, I would. It would be very basic around the feedback and going okay, yeah, just wasn't the right fit or whatever it may be, but, again, quite an intuitive person too. So you know when people are uncomfortable about the situation, and it doesn't take a rocket scientist to read that, it just takes a human being.

**[Carey]:** What do you think holds employers back from hiring somebody with a disability?

**[Daniella]:** The unknown. When people haven't been exposed to certain things, from my experience, you see that people go, okay, I'm not sure, and I don't know how to address this.

**[Carey]:** So it's the unknown, but what is it that they're afraid of?

**[Daniella]:** I had spoken to a recruiter that I had used, and I'd asked him out of curiosity down the track when I bumped into him, 'What kind of questions did you get?' He told me that he would get questions around how does she answer the phone. How does she type? It's all very basic questions.

**[Narration]:** And so it's those basic questions that usually go unasked that create the elephant in the interview.

**[Daniella]:** That is an element of red tape around all of this where employers don't want to talk about it because employers don't want to say, hey, I'm discriminating by asking you a question. So it kind of becomes a stalemate where the person being interviewed doesn't know whether they should be bringing it up or not, and drawing attention to it, whether it's relevant and the employer or potential employer is sitting there going, I don't want to ask a question because I don’t want to get done for discrimination. But I'm curious. So what do we do guys? Okay, this is too hard. Let's walk away and say you're not the right fit. It's easy as that. We'll go for the next person.

**[Carey]:** They might not even realise that they're being discriminatory because this applicant looks pretty good too. So they just convince themselves that's the one that they're most interested in.

**[Daniella]:** Yeah.

**[Carey]:** When it could have been either, but it's like, Oh, we don't have to worry about how does this person answer the phone?

**[Daniella]:** Yeah.

**[Carey]:** I think that we have to address that really loud and clear. Like, if that's what is holding them back, what should the employer do?

**[Daniella]:** I really do think it all comes back down to framing questions. There are so many different ways you can you can frame it to discuss the elephant in the room without being undignifying or offensive or making somebody feel uncomfortable. Is there anything that you need help with? What's your strengths? What's your weaknesses? Is there an area that you can improve? Is there an area that you need assistance with? That's a pretty normal question to ask somebody and that's disability or no disability.

**[Narration]**: It's also really important for employers to realise that while they may be curious about how a person living with disability does a certain task, like type or answer the phone, that person doesn't need the employer to teach them or show them how to do these things. They've already got these things figured out. The person can tell their employer exactly how they do it, and what they need, if they need anything at all.

**[Daniella]:** It's also looking at logic and going well, if this person has just done a three and a half year degree, surely they've gotten around typing. Or surely they've gotten around answering the phone if they can do the degree. They've obviously done it somehow, like they've had to come up with the solution to do it. We're in such a fortunate place from a technology point of view. There's so much out there if there were some challenges and barriers to be able to use a keyboard or answer a phone. There's a million different things you can do. And you'll find that there's government funding to even do things like that. So it's not even employers are out of pocket. It's a case of going right. Okay. There's resources available to make these kind of changes to accommodate other people that may have different challenges.

**[Narration]:** We'll come back to Daniella in just a moment. But since she raised the point that there are funding and resources available, I want to quickly bring in somebody who can tell us more about that.

**[Daniel]:** My name is Daniel Valiente Riedl, and I'm the general manager of a government funded program called Job Access. Job Access is an enabler. It is a free service that exists to remove barriers to employment in the easiest way possible for people with disabilities, employers and service providers.

**[Carey]:** So coming from an employer's perspective, if somebody interviews somebody who lives with disability and they want to hire them. But they're thinking, am I going to need to make some workplace modifications? Is this going to cost me a lot of money and time? You know, how can Job Access help in that position?

**[Daniel]:** Yeah, look, employers can contact Job Access to apply for funding for workplace adjustments and modifications to Employment Assistance Fund. The fund is available to eligible people with disabilities who are about to start a job, are self-employed or who are currently working. It is also available for people with disabilities who need an Auslan assistant, or special work equipment. A free workplace assessment is also available through the Employment Assistant Fund to help work out what modifications or equipment will best meet the needs of the employee and help them do the job.

**[Carey]:** And do you know how quickly that can get organised?

**[Daniel]:** Usually within five working days that can all be organised.

**[Narration]:**Job access also provides a whole range of other services all aimed at increasing employment opportunities for people living with disability. We don't have time to go into them all here, but they do work directly with people seeking jobs, with employers, and also with disability support providers. So please visit their website, [www.jobaccess.gov.au](http://www.jobaccess.gov.au). And we'll put a link to that in our show notes.

Now back to Daniella.

**[Carey]** What do you think the best way to get employers to realise it's not so difficult to hire people with disability? It's actually no different than hiring anybody.

**[Daniella]:**I think a few case studies don't hurt. People are more open to fact, especially in industries like accounting and legal and all of that. So if you go hey, there's this person. This is this person's story. This is what this person's done. To kind of backup the fact that it is all achievable and it's all not that hard.

**[Narration]:** Speaking of cases studies, Daniella makes a great one because she's been working in the accounting industry for seven years now. And she said that once she finally broke through the interview process, her disability, it just hasn't been a thing.

**[Daniella]:**The partner I work with is really cool. Even with client meetings and things like that. So I know when I first started one of the first client meetings I went to I thought it was just really cool that he didn't- he went okay, right? Well obviously if she's here and she's doing her thing, she's not going to need me to sit there and question, how is she going to you know get to a client meeting or do whatever. He just kind of went yep cool, you do you type thing. I would struggle if I had somebody who was overbearingly, are you okay with this? You going to be okay with that? You're going to be alright with that?- all the time. I'd go, this is pretty full on. So I'm fortunate that I've just got somebody that kind of has enough trust that knows if I needed something I'd yell out and say, hey, I'm going to have an issue with this.

Everything's just gone really well. There's no horror stories to tell or anything like that. Which, again goes to show how easy it is being in these type of situations, where okay yeah cool, there is a disability on the surface, but you can still do all of this and have a very healthy and prosperous career.

**[Narration]:** And so I had one last question for Daniella. Now that she's got seven years experience behind her. She's a manager and a national award winner. What advice would she give to other young people living with disability who are maybe just starting out on their job hunting journey.

**[Daniella]:** Be confident about who you are, I can't stress it enough. Just being confident about how far you have come and what you can do. If there is a bit of an ambiguous situation, sometimes it's just easier to just shout out the elephant in the room and go look hey, I can do X, Y, Z, and if I do need help with X, Y, Z as well, that's cool, but let's just talk about it and get it on the table straight off.

And this is my philosophy with everything. Where we lack in one area we always make up for in another and that's balance. That's the balance of being you know a human being.

**[Narration]:** So to employers out there, don't overlook a great employee because of some fear of the unknown.

This is Carey Scheer, and you've been listening to the Purple Orange Podcast where we bring you a mix of first person stories, discussions, and explorations into issues relevant to the disability community.

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