ADA Live!
EPISODE 39: UNIVERSAL DESIGN, ACCESSIBILITY, AND THE ADA

Event Date: December 7, 2015
Presenters: Michael Rotella, Associate Director, Global Universal Design Commission (GUDC)
Diana Foote, Executive Director, GUDC and Director of Operations & Business Manager, Burton Blatt Institute at Syracuse University
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VOICE-OVER ANNOUNCER: (Music) Welcome to WADA ADA Live! Talk radio. Brought to you by the Southeast ADA Center, your leader for information, training and guidance on the Americans with Disabilities Act. And here’s your host.

CELESTIA OHRAZDA: Good afternoon, and welcome to WADA ADA Live. On behalf of the Southeast ADA Center, the Burton Blatt Institute at Syracuse University and the ADA National Network, welcome to the 39th episode of ADA Live. My name is Celestia Ohrazda. I am the Information Technology Consultant for the Southeast ADA Center and today's host. The topic of today's show is “Universal Design, Accessibility, and the ADA”

I would like to introduce our speakers, Michael Rotella and Diana Foote.

Diana is Executive Director of the Global Universal Design Commission, an organization that promotes the understanding and use of Universal Design (UD) in the development of buildings, products and environments. She is also Director of Operations and Business Manager for the Burton Blatt Institute (BBI) at Syracuse University.

Michael is the Associate Director of the Global Universal Design Commission. As Associate Director, Michael is responsible for Universal Design related outreach, working directly with developers, providing tours and lectures, creating access related
content, and working to increase awareness of inclusion. Michael uses his own experience with disability to inform his role at GUDC.

ADA listening audience, you can submit your questions about guardianship and supported decision making at any time on ADAlive.org. Michael and Diana, welcome to our show.

DIANA FOOTE: We appreciate this opportunity to be on your show and the opportunity to increase awareness of the goals of Universal Design.

MICHAEL ROTELLA: Thanks for having us.

CELESTIA OHRAZDA: It's great that you're here. Let's start out here. We e have been hearing a lot about accessibility, inclusiveness and universal design. The first question I have for you is what is universal design and how is it different from accessibility or inclusion and are they the same thing and just labeled differently?

DIANA FOOTE: The three concepts are related, however accessibility and inclusion are actually two potential goals of using Universal Design, but they aren't the only goals. The idea is that Universal Design allows a specific item to be used by everyone within that set of potential end users. A website can be Universally Designed if it empowers all potential end users to access it. The same goes for a building. Universal Design is about planning and it’s aspirational, beyond compliance in nature.

MICHAEL ROTELLA: The universal design is essentially the overarching design process that allows for all people regardless of their ability. So there’s 7 principles it’s based upon and those principles are by Ron Mace from the center of universal design and I'll go over the principles now.

Principle number one is equitable use. That's creating designs useful for people with diversity.

Principle two is flexibility in use.

Principle three is Simple and Intuitive Use. It's easy understand to and a number of other things.

So principle number four is Perceptible Information. That means that the design should communicate the necessary information effectively regardless of conditions or the user's sensory ability.

Principle five is Tolerance for Error.
Principle six Low Physical Effort. That means that the design should be usable and efficient in a comfortable way with a minimum of fatigue to the user and the final one,

Principle 7 is Size and Space for Approach and Use. So this means that a design provides appropriate space for approach, reach, manipulation and use regardless of the user's body size, posture or mobility.

CELESTIA OHRAZDA: Michael, thank you for providing and describing the 7 principles of universal design. I believe that the breaking the concept down into some basic principles, it makes it easier for us to understand what universal design is all about. Let's move on to the next question I have for you. The case for making our society more universally accessible and usable is very compelling. Can you describe some of the benefits of universal design?

MICHAEL ROTELLA: Yes, when you design something with just the most able groups and individuals in mind, often what you end up with is exclusion for people who don't meet the level of that. So while we have building codes, it leads to exclusion. Universal design, when it approaches something, it asks the question, how do we solve a problem with respect to all ability levels and deliver something functional, esthetically pleasing and universally accessible. It's kind of about aspiration as Diana said and innovation and while it's rooted in solving problems for the least able, it's meant to solve it all at once. Universal design doesn't guarantee that but helps us develop a guide and strategies to achieve it.

DIANA FOOTE: Yes, universal design looks at ability as fluid and on a broad spectrum. They can be at different stages in life, temporary reasons or due to a permanent disability. Universal design helps us to plan and create in a way that maximizes exclusive use for as many people as possible. Instead of creating one design and altering it or retro fitting it to be accessible, the universal design creates one design for many ways to be used by many users to the greatest extent as possible.

For example, a clear benefit to a restaurant owner who build the restaurant incorporate rating as many strategies as possible would have an increase number of potential customers. When a restaurant is inaccessible to a person with a disable, it's not only that person as a customer but also that person's friends and family members too.

CELESTIA OHRAZDA: I appreciate the concept of a strategy. You provided the example of a very broad example of a restaurant using the strategy of universal design. Can you give some specific examples of Universal Design?
MICHAEL ROTELLA: Sure, I can provide three for you. So the first one is an automatic eye door opener in the supermarket. It's essentially the door that opens as you're approaching with your cart. As far as universal design goes, that's a system that allows anybody of any level of ability to independently enter the supermarket. It's easier to come in and it activates the door and opens.

So like the person at a normal door, somebody with any sort of disability, they might have trouble getting in the building but with automated eye door like that, they're able to just enter and it also provides equal benefit for everyone else as far as convenience. Another example that's some what related is, you know, there's automated entry systems for parking lots. So formally a parking lot or parking garage has a gate and you just pull up your car and as you try to enter, you need to put your window down and reach out. You need to punch a code or swipe a card to make the gate function but there's a system that relies on an FRID scanner and if you have it affixed in your vehicle, you would be granted access and you wouldn't need to reach out your window.

So when you talk about ability levels, while people with all sorts of levels of ability can drive, there's things they can't do like reaching out the window and putting in the code. So having a system where there's no input, it's not specifically made to be universal design but it ends up achieving that goal.

Another one I like to give that's kind of a more specific universal design example because it's a planning that goes into it, is an on grade flat entry to a building. So when you design a building, there are choices of how you design an entry way. So there could be an entry way that might have a step and that means that you need to build at entry way that's accessible. You know, universal design says, why don't we just not have a step at all so that everybody can go in the same door. As far as the planning point of view, that's really a pretty good example of universal design and something that achieves all of those goals of inclusion and lets everybody enter the same door no matter their ability level.

CELESTIA OHRAZDA: I appreciate all of those conveniences. Like the easy pass system on the thruway where you're not punching numbers, but you just slow right through where the curb stops and it gives me a better understanding of what you mean by a universal design for everyone. ADA Live listening audience, if you have a question about universal design, please submit it at any time at our online forum at ADAlive.org. Now a word from our sponsors.

VOICE-OVER ANNOUNCER: Global Universal Design Commission, Inc. a not-for-profit corporation, was established to develop Universal Design standards for buildings, products and services. Global Universal Design Commission is currently
developing Universal Design voluntary consensus standards for commercial buildings, which will expand access to buildings for all people, regardless of physical stature and varying abilities. The approved Universal Design standards will guide corporations and government entities in the creation of barrier-free facilities, providing diverse users with access to commerce, public services, entertainment, and employment opportunities. To learn more visit their website at globaluniversaldesign.org

CELESTIA OHRAZDA: Welcome back to our show. We're talking with Michael Rotella and Diana Foote from the Global Universal Design Commission, we're discussing Universal Design, Accessibility, and the ADA. Before the break you provided some examples of Universal Design. Can you give an example of a Universal Designed building and explain some specific UD feature?

DIANA FOOTE: Here in Syracuse New York, the Global Universal Design Commission is involved on a 62-unit apartment complex opening soon called Destiny Arms. It features a lengthy list of accessible and Universal Design strategies to achieve a high level of access. It's an upscale living option meant for anyone, very livable for people with disabilities.

MICHAEL ROTELLA: One of the strategies in place to achieve universal design is the entry system for the front entrance of the building. That functions with an FRD carried on the person and it will unlock, unlatch and open. It will stay open for a set amount of time depending on your specification and your need.

So someone on foot might take, you know, five to ten seconds to get through that door and that system allows for that but when it comes to someone with less ability or a higher level of need, perhaps they need 45 second to get through and the system could specify to that. It's a great system that kind of provides this tailored access based on the individual's need and that kind of illustrates another point of universal design.

We plan and we do all of these steps to figure out how to include the most people. There's some that go to the elevator as you're entering. So the idea there is that someone with a disability can easily get in and do it independently and everybody else is having a high level of amenity and convenience as they enter.

Just to give a little bit more background on why this is universal design. Now, I would like to talk about three potential renders at destiny arms. Someone with a disability using a mobility device, can get into the building independently and easily with no real input. So whether or not they can reach and hit the accessible button to open the door, doesn't matter because the door does it itself.
The second thing is someone just walking in caring the groceries, they’re conveniently able to get in the building. They don’t have to put the groceries down and spin around and prop the door open. It helps them a lot and then the third person is, you know, someone pushing a child in a stroller, they can approach it and it opens and there’s no pushing the stroller aside or moving around with that. Everyone gets in the same way easily and customized.

CELESTIA OHRAZDA: That sounds like a great place to live, Destiny Arms in Syracuse, New York. Let’s shift gears here and talk about codes and standards. Does Universal Design have a set of Standards or a checklist to follow and how do these standards compare to ADA standards?

DIANA FOOTE: Universal design is voluntary in comparison to government established codes or the ADA standards. The universal design commission has a certification system for commercial buildings. We’re developing them for our residential buildings. It does not have specific codes but instead, relies on a set of strategies to achieve greater access. The more strategies that a building system uses, the higher it scores. There’s extra points for special innovations as well. It’s applied on a project specific basis and can with scaled as necessary depending on the project.

MICHAEL ROTELLA: So the ADA standards provides the codes and specification and universal design begins essentially anywhere beyond that. Both the ADA standards and the universal design as a design philosophy and process intend to achieve accessibility and inclusion

CELESTIA OHRAZDA: Thank you for that clarification there. So universal design doesn’t have set standards but it's going above and beyond what is required. ADA live listening audience, if you have a question about universal design, please submit it at any time at our online forum at ADAlive.ORG. Before we continue, here is a word from our sponsors.

VOICE-OVER ANNOUNCER: The Southeast ADA Center is your leader in providing information, training and guidance on the Americans with Disabilities Act and disability access tailored to the needs of business, government and individuals at local, state and regional levels. The Southeast ADA Center, located in Atlanta, Georgia, is a member of the ADA National Network and serves eight states in the Southeast region. For answers to your ADA questions, contact the ADA National Network at 1 800 949 4232.

CELESTIA OHRAZDA: Welcome back to our show. We’re talking with Michael and Diana Foot from the global universal design commission. We’re discussing universal
design, accessibility and the ADA. We have talked about the benefits and examples of
universal design. I was wondering if universal design can be applied to existing
structures or if this should be too cost prohibitive and only considered for new
structures?

MICHAEL ROTELLA: Universal design can be applied to any structure whether it’s a
complete build or a renovation. It can also be applied to indoor and outdoor
environments and just about anywhere else.

DIANA FOOTE: Cost depends greatly on the project. So the cost of renovating
existing structures varies depending on the age, size, and condition of the structure.
There’s no real rules in terms of cost. Universal can be applied anywhere and has
been. It’s much more important to keep in mind the benefits when thinking about the
additional cost to integrate UD strategies. Two of the universal design commissions
were done on preexisting buildings. It’s actually over 100 years old and there’s brand
new buildings that are not up to par with the accessibility of what destiny arms has.

MICHAEL ROTELLA: As Diana said, there’s few rules in universal design and the cost
really depends on what one is trying to achieve so it can be very little and it goes up
from there. It really just depends on the objective and the level of accessible that
someone is trying to achieve and also the type of application.

CELESTIA OHRAZDA: As the Directors of the Global Universal Design Commission,
can you explain what it is and its role?

DIANA FOOTE: Well, as mentioned on the top of the show, GUDC is a not for profit
corporation. It was established to develop universal design standards for building
products and services. We’re involved in all aspects of expanding knowledge about
universal design, developing a body of universal design research, working with
builders, architects and developers and working to increase the option of the universal
design concept.

MICHAEL ROTELLA: Just think of an example of some specific things that I’m
working on. So right now I’m working on two parallel studies in universal design. One
is on the Mary three bed YMCA in grand Rapids, Michigan and also one in Syracuse.
Both of them have a high level of universal design but we need to use them to see how
it plays out and what sort of data it brings back to us about how people are using the
building, what groups of people are using the building and all those sorts of things and
finding it and trying to demonstrate and looking at the value in using the universal
design. It’s kind of a study of the net benefits to determine the impact of universal
design. The individual community and as I said, the business value and the economic
value of choosing universal design.
CELESTIA OHRAZDA: We have talked a little bit about the benefits of universal design. Can you talk about the impact it has had on the communities?

MICHAEL ROTELLA: One of our projects in Michigan with the YMCA which I talked a little bit about in this conversation. We’re in the process of studying those impacts in Grand Rapids based on the fact that universal design was chosen for the YMCA. We’re leading data for further studies but we do have access to a lot of early stage information that’s kind of giving us a profile of some of the impacts and one of those is who is using the facility so user data information like that.

As of right now, the YMCA helps with the adaptive sports related events and athletes with all different ability levels using the facility. That’s one of the goals is to try to create a space for wellness and health which is traditionally kind of like an environment where people with say, someone with a disability or someone with any other ability issue traditionally may not find themselves in that space. So this is kind of changing that. That’s kind of a settle thing but the fact that you see people there working out next to people with disabilities also working out, and using this space and just some of the programming that you see there, that includes people of all abilities. I think you know, that’s sort of an impact that we’re seeing already.

So more specifically, so we’re seeing how the greater diversity of ability at the YMCA and like I said, a gym is kind of a space traditionally less used by people with disabilities or lower abilities or any sort of ability issue and we’re seeing it become usable for everyone. It’s meeting the unmet need.

So building something with a universal design is to try to see if you can reach more people and reach a broader potential user base and I think that’s happening there as we see people using wheelchairs or different devices or people, elderly people, anybody who has a different sort of need are using this space.

So obviously there’s an unmet need there that the YMCA is starting to fill.

The last point about this, it’s important I think for universal design in general in kind of showing how I spoke about it a little bit earlier in the conversation about demonstrating the economic and business value.

So right there, the fact that you’re seeing a group that didn't traditionally use a gym is now using it is an example of meeting an unmet meet which means you're accessing a new market.
From the business standpoint, what better philosophy. So those are to me, without speculating too much, those are some of the early benefits we're seeing at least in the community of Grand Rapids.

**CELESTIA OHRAZDA:** That's exciting! What do you see as the future of universal design?

**MICHAEL ROTELLA:** Several things and some of these are kind of through my role at the universal design commission and others are kind of personal hopes, I guess you could say for universal design.

So number one, I think we're going to see the adoption with new buildings in both commercial and residential applications for universal design. So you can see more destiny arms type buildings and more YMCA type buildings. I think that's a trend as the value of universal design is demonstrated more and more and that's part of our role at GUDC. Secondly, I would like to see city and municipalities starting to aim for beyond compliance commitments to access. So not necessarily that we expect the government to come in and say that universal design you have to do it, but we just want to demonstrate the value and we want to see that value demonstrated enough where they can say, okay, universal design seems like a great idea. It will benefit everybody. Why don't we just voluntarily do that.

Another thing is hopefully is the utilization of universal design across more industries. So we're seeing Apple and Nike and numerous very large corporations starting to adopt universal design principles in all sorts of environments so digital environment, product design, those sorts of things so I think you'll see a lot more growth there because you know, going back to the numbers and the economic thing, if Nike and Apple are seeing a reason to do it from a financial and business point of view, beyond just the image and the social good, then there's something that needs to be said for universal design on multiple levels. I have two more and these are along the lines of my own personal hopes for universal design.

A big one for me, since ability is a universal issue by definition, so it's something that affects us all at different points in our lives through disability or injury, sense ability is a universal issue. I would like to see it becoming universally recognized as an issue. That happens when designs start to, you know, kind of reflect how ability really works.

Finally, my real big picture goal and kind of the vision for the future is, just basically to see a world design, to represent the realities of ability and the human condition versus just kind of the more short sited things of, I guess, trying to accommodate the best able society versus trying to build a world around the fact that all of us at different points are
in different levels of ability. For me right now, those are some of my future visions of universal design.

CELESTIA OHRAZDA: What an exciting opportunity to be involved in this. What are the one or two key points you want listeners to take away from this program?

MICHAEL ROTELLA: Okay, so there’s obviously numerous points but if I have to narrow it down. The number one for me that I would like to kind of let people know about and given your audience and the connection with ADA and all of that, I’m sure it isn’t the first time people have heard this idea but to really understand it and to start really applying it in the ways they can. Society isn’t able bodied and disabled but able is part of the human condition is the ability changes and it’s on a spectrum and it’s constantly moving for all of us and any of us can become lesser abled at any moment and that to me, like, universal design works to solve the issues that develop from that reality. So there’s an inherent value there for universal design.

Secondly, that the universal design, you know, some of my conversations of people about universal design involve you know, well, why is it the right thing to do? Why is it the right thing for society and those sorts of goals.

You know, universal design isn’t just about doing the right thing and it’s not just the right thing for designers. But you know, it makes economic and business sense because it opens access to these unmet communities that have unmet needs and you know, if we can demonstrate and prove that universal design makes business sense and we think it does, that will further aid the adoption of universal design across many different industries and environments.

CELESTIA OHRAZDA: This is a very interesting topic and I’m sure our audience would like to learn more about universal design. We’re almost out of time. I have one more question for you. Where can I find out more about universal design?

DIANA FOOTE: Three places I can think of right offhand are North Carolina Center for Universal Design website, the website for Global Universal Design Commission and the website for the Burton Blatt Institute at Syracuse University. All three web sites can be found on the resource list of the ADAlive.org website.

CELESTIA OHRAZDA: I would like to thank Michael Rotella and Diana Foote from the Global Universal Design Commission and Burton Blatt Institute

Definitely going to check it out. These three resources and additional resources can be found on ADA live.ORG under resources. I would like to thank Michael and Diana
from the Global Universal Design Commission and the Burton Blatt Institute at Syracuse university and thank you also to our ADA live listening audience. Remember, this show will be archived and available on our website at ADA.live.ORG. We’re grateful for your support and participation and this series of ADA live broadcasts. You may submit questions about any of our ADA live topics by going to ADA live.ORG. Please join us again next month on January 4th, 2017 for another episode of ADA live.

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