

# PODCAST Episode 442

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS


Assistive technology, disability community, inclusion, entrepreneurship, AI accessibility, blindness awareness, corporate culture, mentorship, education, innovation, motivational speaking, societal attitudes, accessibility solutions, blind visionary, Pneuma Solutions.


## SPEAKERS


Ryan Fleury, Rob Mineault, Mike Calvo, Steve Barclay


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 **Rob Mineault 00:14**  
Hey, welcome to another episode of AT Banter.

 **Steve Barclay 00:18**  
Banter banter.

 **Rob Mineault 00:23**  
Hey, this is, of course, the podcast where we talk with advocates and members of the disability community to educate and inspire better conversation about disability. Hey, my name is Rob Mineault, and joining me today this fine day, Mr. Ryan Fleury.

 **Ryan Fleury 00:41**  
And I'm gonna spoil the fun. Mike, yours did not come through what so I did turn original audio.

 **Steve Barclay 00:52**  
Oh, man, yeah, we heard nothing.

- M** Mike Calvo 00:57  
So sad. I brought a bell and everything. Am I supposed to be educational or inspirational?
- R** Rob Mineault 01:04  
It's a technological failure. Hey, look who else it is. It's a Steve Barclay.
- S** Steve Barclay 01:15  
Where? Yeah, oh, that's me, yeah, okay.
- R** Rob Mineault 01:19  
Hey, how are you guys doing on this momentous day.
- R** Ryan Fleury 01:21  
It's cold out...
- M** Mike Calvo 01:25  
But you guys just got through Thanksgiving, right?
- R** Ryan Fleury 01:27  
We did yummy, yesterday.
- M** Mike Calvo 01:30  
What'd you have? Turkey? You guys eat turkey? Also, we don't eat turkey any other time of year because it's nasty.

S

Steve Barclay 01:38

What? Oh yeah, Turkey's fantastic. You think it's nasty, you're doing it wrong.

M

Mike Calvo 01:44

Yeah? Maybe. Well, I've smoked them, I've fried them, I've done the the only thing I like is the like doing a turkey breast. There's a company out here that does them that sells you these huge turkey breasts. I'm not even kidding. They must weigh about eight pounds each, and they're just absolutely amazing to smoke.

S

Steve Barclay 02:05

Yeah, I like the dark meat, like the legs and the thighs.

M

Mike Calvo 02:10

Yeah, those are good. I like turkey legs walking around the fair like a caveman.

R

Rob Mineault 02:15

Yeah, yeah. Well, did you Okay, so ... should we just, oh, should we just bring on Mike?

S

Steve Barclay 02:24

Mike's already on. He's already on.

M

Mike Calvo 02:26

I'm here. I missed it up when I got here.

R

Rob Mineault 02:30

We're breaking from the format, just for Mike. Hey. But so who's Ryan? Tell people who the hell this Mike guy is.

R

Ryan Fleury 02:38

Oh, we have Mike. Mike's back on the show. He's been on the show many, many times before. If you've heard of Serotek, Pneuma Solutions, Scribe for Documents, Scribe for Meetings, Docuscan Plus and all that fun stuff. You've heard of Mike Calvo, Mike, welcome to the show.

M

Mike Calvo 02:55

Yeah, it's awesome to be back guys. I always love coming here, and I love listening to you guys. You're you're fun to listen to.

R

Rob Mineault 03:10

Well, listen, we're excited to have you back. You know, I'm interested to hear a little bit of updates about some of the business stuff, some of the at that we love to talk about. But I also wanted to kind of dig into who this Mike Calvo guy is, a little bit of your background, your personal story, and, you know, maybe talk a little bit about just this stuff in general. So why don't we start with just assuming that whoever's listening today aren't familiar with your your past appearances, maybe give us a little bit of a snapshot of just who you are, a little bit of your background.

M

Mike Calvo 03:50

Why not break out my sordid past? No, I am. My name is Mike Calvo. I've been in the AT industry for many, many, many years. Years ago, I grew up in Miami. I'm I'm Cuban by descent. My parents are Cuban immigrants. They came here in the 60s. And I don't sound Latino at all, but I am, I promise. And I speak fluent Spanish. But ironically enough, I used to go to when I used to do voiceovers and stuff, and when I was growing up, we all were taught to sound Caucasian. I'm not even kidding. We were told to be like that. You know, the that we couldn't sound regional, so like not sounding regional made you into like a white guy from the Midwest, which I thought was absolutely hilarious, but, you know, as as you can see, I pretty much picked it up because from Miami, we're like, more like 'yo dog was sup', you know, it's more, a little bit more of a patois Spanglish, whatever. Lot more, lot more street. If you will. Anybody who's heard Pit Bull, or any of these, any of the folks from from Miami, knows, knows what I'm what I'd be talking about. But, but I digress. I went to school here in Dade County in Miami, and did not do well in school. School wasn't, wasn't my game. I didn't understand bureaucracy. I didn't understand that we were expected, as blind people, to advocate for ourselves. I never met any other blind people growing up. I'll never forget the first time I saw a blind person smoking a cigarette. And I smoked cigarettes at the time I do not now. I quit many, many, many years ago, and I'm like, they smoke? Do they smoke weed? Do they do anything? And it was like, yeah, they do. I was like, Oh my God, you know, but did a lot of crazy stuff. Grew up in the 80s, and anybody who's seen Miami Vice can imagine what my life was like, and it was kind of like that. Got my my girlfriend pregnant when I was 21 I was, at that time, I was doing music. I owned a recording studio, and, you know, and doing a little hustling, you know, I tell people and and I'll, you'll hear me say, you'll hear me say some some spiritual stuff as I talk, because

it's truly what I believe. I'm not a religious person. There was a moment in a good moment in life where I identified much more with Christian values these days, I identify much more with deism. You know, I don't know who's out there. Obviously, from the condition of this world, they're not paying much attention, whoever they are, in my opinion. But you know, then again, you know, we have free will. So with my purpose, which I really believe that I was sent here to do, you know, I focus on leading teams to change people's lives, you know. And I'm just an old guy who's been around the block a few times and not afraid to share my past, because if you learn about my past and what a challenge it was, it just might change your future. You know, I want blind kid who grew up with no mentorship except for dopers and mob guys and that kind of stuff my parents, God bless them. They're beautiful people, hard working immigrants that didn't have time, you know. And that's just, that's one of the challenges that you face when you come to a new country. You know, it's either raise my family or put food on the table for them, you know. And we always had food, but we didn't have much of dad around. And Mom, mom did the best she could. But, you know, it's hard, man. So, you know, so we were a handful, and I especially was so, you know, when I was 21 I went and I got a job. I dropped out of high school, by the way, because in my 12th grade year, they didn't order my books, and I was not going to go through all the BS of finding readers and all that stuff, because I just, I was making too much money, you know, doing dope and, you know, and doing music, you know, so and they tell me, like, Hey, if you don't work hard, you're never going to make any money. I'm like, Dude, I'm not working hard now and I'm making money. What's wrong with you people you know, obviously the short, short thoughts of a 17 year old, but grew up in that craziness, and when, when I found my my my fiance, in a family way, we sped up the process. We got married, and I went to go work at a bank, and that was my introduction to computers. I'd never my I lie. I had been involved in computers. I'd been in computers for two things. One, we were hacking. I was working with a group of guys that were hacking. Remember back in the day, anybody here do phone freaking? Ryan or any, any of that kind of stuff? That's where you would get that, you'd call this number and you'd punch in card numbers, and you'd be able to make long distance calls. And those of us who were really good with numbers could make up the numbers and find the patterns. Others who didn't, we'd get hackers like I did, to get to write software that would go and figure out the numbers and and that. And between that and Voyatra, which was a product that I used to use for recording audio, for recording MIDI stuff back in the day, that's the only exposure I had to computers. So when I got to the bank, I went to the Lighthouse. They trained me on on TSI stuff, on Convert Plus at the time, and trained me how to use the system at the bank. And I went to. There and found that I had a as my was my first real mentor in life, Greg Luther said, you know, you got a knack for this stuff. And he told me, you know, behind that keyboard, Calvo, you're an equal. And I really took that to heart. And Greg was from Iowa, so I'd be remiss if I didn't use one of his Iowa-isms, and he told me, 'You're going to take like a duck to water to this'. And Greg's a great man, and I love him dearly, and I can honestly say that there that that was one of the key people in my life that made a huge difference and believed in me and told me they did, and followed it up with, not just BS, you know, but but actual time. So went to work, and I had, you know, when you're an immigrant kid, you you know, you learn to hustle. You learn to, you know, the joke. The joke is, you know, how many jobs you got, you know? And I grew up, you know, hustling, not just DJ parties. I did tapes, I worked at clubs. I went to school too, and it was crazy. But, you know, I came from an entrepreneurial background, and when I, when I got into the bank, you get a picture of this? I'm, I'm, I'm about five foot seven at the time. I weighed about 125 pounds. I've got long hair down past my shoulders in a perm. I'm in a suit, and I'm like, so what am I to be the president of this bitch, you know? And, and, my manager was like, well, 'we don't know what to do with you people'. What do you mean us people? Who are what? What people are you talking about? 'We don't know what to do with blind people.' Somebody trained you on how to use the computer and, you know, and I was doing collections at the time. I was doing

collections in the morning and customer service in the afternoon at a bank, and I learned so much about communication at that bank, but I learned one thing real fast, and that is that it the world of working for someone else was not going to work for me. We unfortunately have an 85% unemployment rate amongst our community, and it's because of ignorance when I got into developing software 25 years ago, I thought naively that the issue was technological. And unfortunately, it's heartbreaking to realize after 25 years that the unemployment rate is still 85% it was then and it is today. You know, we're on a new era now of AI, and hopefully that'll give us a little bit more independence. DEI, as much as our current administration hates it, um, did a lot to raise awareness, to get the dialog going, to get people to not be embarrassed, to say, this is who I am, and this is how I do stuff. So I'm sorry I've just kept talking and talking and not let anybody say anything.

R

Rob Mineault 03:50

Oh, that's great. That's perfect. I went and got a coffee. It was great.

M

Mike Calvo 03:50

Let's let this guy ramble on.

R

Rob Mineault 12:11

No, you're our dream guest. I want to go back a little bit and talk about your your childhood, because it really seems to me that part of part of that experience growing up informed your attitude later on, and helped inform this entrepreneurial spirit that you seem to have had very young.

M

Mike Calvo 13:43

So I grew up in Miami, like I said. I mean, my parents, my parents and I realized this later, you know, after I talked to my dad, and my mom and dad are blue collar, blue collar folks. My mom was a waitress, a server, and my dad was a carpenter, slash handyman, as we grew up. So as you can imagine, you know, my mom worked when my dad worked, when he had it, you know, when he could work. You know, as a blind kid, and I don't know Ryan, if you dealt with this, but nobody held me accountable, man. Nobody said, you've got to do this. I believe in this. I believe in that. In fact, if anything, I was told that to not shoot my aspirations too high to quote, be normal, end quote, to try and just fit in. You know that I was gonna have to work three times as hard as everybody else, and my attitude was like, that's BS. I'm not gonna, you know? No, you know, I want to be successful in my life. I want to be I don't know how I'm going to be successful, you know, but I don't want to be mediocre. I don't want to aspire to mediocre. I wanted to be a lawyer, you know, now, you know, after one day I was, I was sitting true story. I'm sitting in therapy. I'd gone, I'd gone through a divorce, and I was like, man, my head's all fucked up. My head's all messed up and I got to get some therapy. So I'm sitting with my therapist, and I'm talking to anyone like, Dude, you know this and that I wanted to be a lawyer. And it's like, really? He said, Well, you sat here and told me how you used to deal drugs and used to be DJs, where was lawyering and all of that? And I was like, yeah, you're right. You're right, you're right. I wasn't on that path, but I wanted to be. And to me, that was kind of like the moment I could get out of the game, the moment I could get off the streets, and I had a purpose that I really found it. I was like, I got this because, let me tell you something, you don't make money in AT ...

S

Steve Barclay 15:58

Tell me about it.

M

Mike Calvo 16:00

Yeah, there's not a shitload of money here, but you know what? There's a hell of a lot of just people that live for what you do. The teams I've led, have changed the lives of hundreds of 1000s of blind people. SA To Go was one of our most amazing creations. It was the world's first screen reader that you could literally walk up to any computer anywhere on the planet, go to a website and make that thing freaking talk. I had people in Africa. I had people all over the world, and we made it free. What a what an accomplishment. Did it mean a lot of money? Hell no. But you know what? It changed the freaking world, man, for some people, you know, and that's, that's what makes me tick. I want this fucking place to be different when I leave it than when I got here. And I want to be responsible for making it different. You know, I am loud mouth, I'm opinionated, I'm foul mouthed, and I'm too old to freaking change today, okay, you know, and I don't give a shit. I don't want to change. You know, it's when I was in my 20s, I swore I knew it all, and when I got into my 30s, I started to suspect that I don't know as much as I thought I did when I got into my 40s, I was like, shit, man. I'm here to learn. I'm not, you know. And when I got to my 50s, I don't give a fuck anymore. I'm gonna say what I got to say, think what I've got to think, and make my opinions known. And whoever likes it great. And if you don't, hey, you're welcome to your opinion, you know. But I don't you know my life growing up was tumultuous because and I had to learn to inspire myself, because nobody else that I

met early on in my life found me inspirational unless I was just that I was blind and I could tie my shoes. I mean, Ryan, you run into that, right? 'You're amazing. You got dressed all by yourself. You have a wife and kids. How'd you do that?' You know? I mean, you know, and it's insane to me, you know, because, and this is why at Numa, at Sarah Tech, we take diamonds in the rough. We've never hired outside of the community. The first, the first two people I ever hired outside of the community were my assistant, and my son David Calvo, which just joined our team in January. Only sighted people that I've ever hired outside of, outside of everybody else has come through us, through voc rehab or whatever. And in fact, in 2010 I was interviewed for Business Week, and I said, if you're blind, you've got a better chance of getting a job than if you're sighted. And she said, That's reverse discrimination. I said, sue me, you know. And you can look that up on Google, but it's, you know, it's one of those things where I refuse, I refuse to just be a number, you know, love me or hate me, you're going to remember my ass one way or the other. And that's, that's what I live for, you know? I'm here. I have an opinion, I have a view, I have and I'm open. I'm not dogmatic, you know. I'm truly here to listen, you know, but I'm also here to speak, and I'm also here to inspire and to motivate. You know, not with a bunch of platitudes and BS, but with real you know, what blind people you can do this. We've got a community, you know, if you know when I when I was growing up, when, when Cubans came to Miami. We. We were not welcome here. We were given the lowliest, crappiest place that we could have, and we were on our own. So Pepe opened up a gas station, and Lupita opened up a coffee shop, and Juanito opened up a restaurant, and we another one opened up a laundromat, and everybody started working for everybody, and we started helping each other. Did we make the same as money as the gringos? No. But one day, one day, the gringos came knocking at the door. Oh, my God, these people got money, and they put a McDonald's in the middle of the Cuban neighborhood, you know. And all of a sudden we assimilated, because we were a financial and a political pawn. And unfortunately, that's just the way the world works in the United States, you know? And that's why the Latino community built this city, but we didn't build it because anybody you know we we built it ourselves. And I took that and I saw it when I saw blind people who've been so disenfranchised. The internet is the most amazing creation for our community ever. I mean, I don't know about you, but I only met like, three blind people, four blind people that when I was growing up, and, and they were, they were, you know, folks with multiple handicaps. So it's like, what, what's wrong with me? I'm a fish out of water, you know? I don't, I don't fit here, you know? And, and then, when I got into this community, when I started, when I started after, after '95 after I got involved in the in the church and all that stuff, and I got, I got out of the game, and really was looking around for figuring out I met some of the most amazing blind people. I started getting on the internet. I started listening to this guy, Jonathan Mosen. Jonathan has truly been one of my, my, my, my quiet mentors. He never knew he was mentoring me, but just a person that I I looked up to so much and continue to today because Jonathan was a person who went through a lot as a kid, and instead of getting pissed off at society the way I did, and rebelling and whatever, he got involved in politics. He took the smart way out. He did something about it, and I respect that. Now this year, we're doing stuff with corporates. We're doing stuff accessibility in AI and all of that stuff has just really changed the trajectory of where our community can go. What it means for entrepreneurship in our community. Tools have gotten more accessible. We've got to be. We've gotten more connected as a community. Hopefully, the young ones that are coming up now, they don't do what folks in poor neighborhoods have done. And, you know, I've seen this all my life, where somebody gets out, you know, they get a couple of bucks, and they get out the hood and they just, you know, they just leave it behind. That was the old me. No man, you know, you need to, you need to serve. You need to, you need to be a part of the change for the future, you know, and that, that, that's, that's kind of what I've I've dedicated my life to. We, you know, we mentor, we have, we have, we have people that intern with us, you know, we've got people on staff that are, that are on the on the spectrum, and they're doing software



development with us, you know, because we believe that everybody has a value, you know, and we're going to find that value. And if we got to work with you a little harder, and we've got to work with a voc rehab agency to get you the proper tools and to get that's why I was a re I was a rehab engineer for years. I know how to write the best justification you ever seen. You know, I played the game, and we've been we, you know. And have I become a millionaire? No, you know, I don't care.

R

**Rob Mineault 24:15**

So I want to step back and because I'm really curious about something you're talking about earlier, and that's the idea of the corporate culture and inclusion. I feel like you're in a fairly you've got a fairly unique viewpoint, because you do have this you are really an entrepreneur at heart, and you've had this experience of working in sort of mainstream and building your own assistive technology company and being involved in that. Can you talk a little bit about the differences that you use you notice in the culture of organizations that include people with disabilities in both in their staff or even in their leadership, and those that don't?

M

**Mike Calvo 24:59**

There's three types, I think this is my opinion. This is not fact. This is just my my opinion, based on on what I've observed. There's three types. There's the companies that don't give a damn. Then there's the companies that are kind of like, Oh, we're gonna hire people with disabilities because it's the right thing. Is kind of patronizing. And then there's the people that really care, that are really and and I've seen them all. I've worked with them all. I've done, I've done some, you know, some, some talking to executives. Again, under NDA, I'm not allowed to talk about who I've gone to mentor to talk to, but I've talked to higher level executives where it's like so what do we do with with our people with disabilities? What if they're late every day? Well, you fire their ass. They got to get to work like everybody else, you know? Blindness or wheelchairs or that's not a damn excuse. No, get your ass to work on time if you need to leave two hours early. Well, that's your problem, you know? But I really, I found that companies, when even the even kind of the patronizing ones that are like, well, you know, we like giving people with special needs opportunities. You know, even they ultimately change their tunes, because what we need is a community. What we need is folks with disabilities is an opportunity for you to see that we do what you do. We may just do it a little different, but we do what you do, and sometimes we do it better.

R

Rob Mineault 26:30

Well, speaking of that, I mean, how do you think inclusion affects things like innovation? Because, you know, it's often been said that, you know, hey, you know, folks with disabilities, they're, they're the world's greatest hackers, because they're constantly, you know, hacking life. Life Hacks, yeah, every day. So on a corporate level, do you think that including folks from the disability community, really sort of supercharges this sense of innovation within a company?

M

Mike Calvo 27:02

I do. I think that it's a two way street, though. We have to have an open mind. We have to be willing. I mean, it's frustrating as a blind person man to tell the fifth person today how I lost my sight. You know, it's really hard when I'm on a date with my significant other, and the 10th person comes along and tells me about their freaking dog, because I got a dog laying down next to me. But you've got to. You've got to. It's not your obligation. It's not like you got to do this. It's just if you really, if you really want the world that you live in to be a better place, then help be that change and help people understand there's a difference between ignorance and stupidity. And you know, my cure for stupidity would land me in jail for the rest of my life. So I don't deal with stupid people, but ignorance, it's just through communication. It's through, you know, I see you have a job opening, and just, you know, talking about the elephant in the room. I know you're wondering, how the hell is a blind guy do that? Well, let me tell you, you know. Let me show you, you know. Let me show you how, how I do this thing, you know. And you know. And the first thing I tell any, any leadership, any people in leadership is listen, folks, we empathy is a seriously double edged sword, because, yes, we're supposed to be, you know, compassionate and understanding about the needs of others, but there's a place where your shoes will never fit on my feet and mine will never fit on yours. I've been doing this blind thing for a long ass time. And Rob, you're the sighted guy, Steve, you're the sighted guy. You know, so you know, you saying, Well, I don't know if Mike or Ryan can do that, because if I lost my sight tomorrow, you lost me right there, bro. Because if you lost your sight tomorrow, it would be a freaking tragedy. You'd survive, you know, and you know, being blind is a big old pain in the butt. You know, it's inconvenient, but it's over. You can overcome it. Do you believe that there's people rather have stage four cancer than be blind? Amazing.

S

Steve Barclay 29:30

Yeah, I've heard, I've heard people make statements like that, and, you know, I think they're largely centered in ignorance. But, you know, people have opinions, yeah?

M

Mike Calvo 29:40

Yeah but, you know, empathy goes a certain degree. I literally sat in a job interview at one of the moments in my crazy life in 2004 where Serotek was was not doing very well right, right before System Access came out, and I actually went to go look for a job with a company that shall remain nameless. And the guy kept me there for an hour talking to me about this and about that. I'm like, dude, we're having a great conversation. If we're having a beer, it'd be great. But when am I going to be able to know what I'm going to do in this place? Well, I don't think you can do the job. Like, Well, why is that? He said, well, you know, I mean, I know our systems here. And I said, Oh, I see, so in your great wisdom, I knew it was done anyway. I said, So in your great wisdom, I said, you believe that if you went blind tomorrow, you wouldn't possibly do it. So there's no way that a father of three kids at that time has been doing this for 40 some odd years, or whatever could possibly do it. I get it, you know, and, and that's, that's the way it is. I mean, we're here. We need to educate, we need to be patient. And I know it's hard. I'm, you know, I've learned patience as I've gotten older, and it may still not sound like it, you know, but we do need to be patient. I think that, like I said earlier, the world is much more open to diversity, you know, and and I think that the people are much more willing to accept us with our differences today and put their own stereotypes of what a blind person is, what a person on the spectrum is, what a person you know, what you know, just different, different disabilities right deals with. And I think that that we've you know, all of that has to do with media, has to do with I mean, we've got great people out there. Like Molly Burke, for example, who I you know, she's a she's a millennial, so she's pain in the ass, like, but I love her. I love her because she's real, dude. She keeps it real, right? And she's not my cup of tea, because I'm not a freaking millennial, right? But, or a Gen Z or whatever. But, you know, whichever one she fits into, I think she's a millennial these days. I think she's I think so, but, you know, but she's up there. How does a blind girl put on makeup? How does a blind girl kiss her boyfriend? How does it, I mean? And these are honest questions that people ask. And she'll go up there, and you'll see her. I'm so pissed off because I was trying to do this and that, and somebody came and grabbed my arm and drag me across the street, don't, you know, to ask me first, you know. And all that stuff works, man, we just needed a platform, and we got one. So, you know, I mean, that did I answer your question?

R

Rob Mineault 32:46

Absolutely for sure, you know. And because, you know, I guess that's the sense that we get. We've been doing this, this podcast, for many years, and talked to many people. And, you know, the conversation that that always seems to come up is just, yeah, education. There are these barriers that just prevent, you know, if we're talking about companies and inclusive hiring and all these things, you know, there are these barriers that that are preventing companies from seeing folks in the disability community as assets, as opposed to accommodations or check boxes to check for their own sort of, sort of brand. I think that we've been asking for years, you know, how do we, how do we educate? How do we, supercharge this, you know, how do how do we, how do we make traction on this?

M

Mike Calvo 33:33

I think the other part, and I dealt with this a lot, in 2007 I started a a non for profit called the AIR Foundation. The Accessibility is a Right Foundation. And the goal of the AIR Foundation is to raise social awareness of the capabilities of the visually impaired in developing countries, with a particular focus on Latin America, which is, of course, you know, where my people be from. You know, actually, my people are from the Caribbean, but whatever Latin America.

S

Steve Barclay 34:09

That down there in the Gulf of America?

M

Mike Calvo 34:16

I still call it the Gulf of Mexico, bro, but, but, yeah, it's funny. I hadn't even thought about that. But yeah, I mean in and and I've seen even like I did, I worked in Colombia for years, for a couple years, and worked with a group out there of blind folks that literally between us all and the folks at Freedom Scientific. Freedom Scientific, the first, the first countrywide license for Jaws was in Colombia, and I was part of that, the the group that was trying to get blindness awareness happening in Colombia that year. That was the 2014 and what ended up happening is, because of our advocacy and the, you know, working with the government and educating blind children from the moment they got into first grade, were given a fully accessible laptop now in Colombia by law, you know, and there's and again, it was just, it's education. It's all about education. I I met my wife, and my current wife, number three, thirds charm, I hope, knock on wood, and she puts up with me. Thank and bless her heart. And but I met her in Cuba, and I went to Cuba to study how blind people were trained there. Because, ironically enough, whether you agree with Cuba's political system or not, which I do not, however, you got to give the devil is due. And blind people in Cuba, if they don't have a job, it's because they don't want one. If they don't want an education, if they don't have an education, it's because they don't want one. You know, most blind people in Cuba are bilingual. You know, in fact, one of the things I wanted to go and do in Cuba was to set up an off, you know, an off, an off, an offshore call center, you know, with blind people working from home. Unfortunately, the regime hasn't changed there, and things have gotten worse to do business in Cuba. But, you know, the only people that, in my opinion, that benefited from, quote, unquote, the revolution in Cuba were people with disabilities. Because, for whatever reason, Fidel Castro had a soft spot for people with disabilities, and believed that if you could lift a finger, you could work. And he treated people with respect. You know, as much as that regime treats anybody with respect, but treated people with respect and dignity, as far as being a human and being capable and and I saw that if I go, if I'm here in the United States, I will be standing on the edge. And Ryan, hasn't this happened to you where you're standing on the edge and you're about to cross a couple lanes of traffic, and some very well meaning sighted person runs up to you and grabs your arms. Stop. You're about to cross the street like no shit. Do you think I just dropped out of the sky? You know? I've got a dog or I've got a cane. I didn't just drop out of the sky, you know. Please don't do that. Don't grab me like that anymore. In Cuba, on the other hand, I'll be walking down the street, and I'll ask somebody, Hey, how do I get to such and such a place? And they'll be like, they'll put their hand on my shoulder. They'll be like, All right, go down the street over there. Listen. You hear that you have the College of passing over there. Okay, you turn left, over there, and then you go, and you listen. And there'll be music playing across the street. That's where you want to go. You need me to go with you. No, I'm good. Okay, cool, see you later. That's the end of that. Nobody's trying to help the poor blind guy. Nobody's trying. It's you're just another person. And wouldn't that, isn't that freaking paradise?

S

Steve Barclay 38:17

Yeah.

M

Mike Calvo 38:18

You know, I and, you know, like I said, you know, I want to say it over and over, because I do not agree with the politics in that country. But let me tell you something, I've never seen a better blindness system than there. And that's weird. It doesn't make any sense.

S

Steve Barclay 38:39

What makes that system stand out for you?

**M****Mike Calvo 38:42**

It's the respect of the society around it. It's the fact that, you know, and who knows, maybe it's that we're all fucked up together. So you know, we're all in the same shit hole. So who knows, or you know, so we're all trying to, we're just all squirrels trying to get a nut as he's say, you know, who knows? But for whatever reason, nobody looks at me in Cuba and says, Oh, poor decito. Oh, poor blind guy, let me help you. It's like, oh, you're blind and you need, you need help to cross street or whatever. Naw I'm good, all right. You know, no well meaning person breaks my personal space, you know, asks inappropriate questions, you know, that are embarrassing for them to ask and for me to answer. You know, um, it just, it really has made it made an impact on my life that just changed it, and that's interesting, and it gives me a hope, and I'll tell you why. In 1953 my father was going to his mom's house, and he was 13 years old, and his parents were divorced, and he was going to his mom's house, and she she had a blind guy there, and she. Is like, Carlos, come in and watch the blind guy play guitar, play the guitar. And the My dad told me, he said the blind guy had no shoes on, and, you know, and he was all dragged out, and his pants didn't fit right. And he's like, Mom, why do you have this blind guy in your house? If I ever had a blind child, I drowned it like a cat. Wow, you know? Yeah, that was bad. My poor father. I mean, my heart broke when he told me that story. Because, you know, when I was born, 14 years later, he's like, God's punishing me. I'm like, No man, God didn't have you in mind when He created me, you know, hopefully, I like to believe that that God had a bigger purpose in my life than just to show you for talking shit when you were 13, you know, for saying stupid 13 year old things. But that was a reflection of society back in that time. That's what blind people would do. Man, they play guitar. They you know, they'd collect pennies, you know, whatever. And now, you know, you've got blind lawyers. I saw, I met a blind MD in Cuba. Can you imagine that? Ryan, wow, a blind MD. I'm like, How the hell do you do that? He's like, What do you mean? I went to school. I know, he said, I just tell I tell you, you got a pain in your throat. He said, tell you, open your mouth, and I tell my nurse, look in there. What do you see? Yeah, I see it's red. Is it red over towards the right hand side? Yeah, okay. You got a problem your tonsils. You need to gargle with water. You need to do this. You need to do that, right? You know, yet, as much as, as much as my country frustrates me these days, you know, I would have loved to serve my country, but I can't. I can't answer the fucking phone at the Army or the Navy or the Marines or whatever. You know, why? Why can I be less than a patriot, you know, and that that these are the kinds of things that that we need to overcome, you know, in society. So when I, when I meet a blind MD, when I see the, you know, the trajectory that socially, that that that that country's gone on, gives me hope as a blind person, and it says, you know, there's an opportunity here. You know, when you know there's an opportunity for change, and that's what, that's what wakes me up every morning.

**R****Rob Mineault 42:33**

It kind of makes me think too it's, you know, if you take this, the notion of these societal changes that this, these societal attitudes that need to shift, and if you sort of transpose that onto the advice that you would give an organization or a business in terms of a policy or a mindset that they need to shift in order to really, you know, be authentically inclusive. I don't know, like, do you think that there's some similarities there, that, that you can adapt one from to the other?

M

Mike Calvo 43:06

I do. I think that. I think the candid conversation, you know, I'm not. I don't deal with, well i i In particular, do deal with sight loss, because I could see when I was, you know, till I was, till I was 18, and then I have detached retina, so I didn't see that much, but, you know, but my vision, I had sight until I was about 18. I could see shadows and colors and that kind of thing. So I did deal with sight loss. But not all of us deal with sight loss. We're blind, damn it. We're blind. The eyes don't freaking work, and that's it. And if you have a problem with somebody calling you blind, then that's your freaking problem. That's not society's problem. That's your problem. You need to learn to deal with it, and if that means you need to go to a therapist, or you need to get around more blind people. So we can say blind, blind, blind, blind all the time, then that's what it takes. But don't blame the world for your sensitivity. You know, because I'd rather have someone asked me an ignorant question than not ask me anything. So political correctness has been, has become our enemy, and that's where the fine line is between include, you know, the part of dei that kind of bothered me some, because we, we all had to learn a special language. It's like, really, man, you know, I'm just a person that does things a little different than you, you know, and if we can get past the BS language that we need to use for me to get that across to you, I can just talk to you when you can understand and and if I, and if you you don't know exactly the words to say to me, did you see that movie on television? Did you hear that movie on television? Did you go to the movies the other How did you go to the movies the other day? I'm not offended when somebody asks if I go to the movies or how I saw a movie on television. I've met blind people who are, you know, but because they're uncomfortable with their blindness, not because the person. And ask the wrong question, and if you're the only blind person that person's ever met, do you think they're gonna ever ask another blind person again? Yeah, you know, so as much as I hate being an ambassador for our community, it sucks, but it's real.

R

Rob Mineault 45:17

Yeah? Well, we often say that, you know, when you're a member of the disability community, I mean it like it, or lump it the you're kind of an advocate, 24/7, just by default, and there isn't any getting around that. And it is unfair, and it does suck, but there it is.



M

Mike Calvo 45:33

Yeah. I mean, listen, we all got crosses to bear, bro. I mean, you know, you know, too bad, you know. But, but which, which one would you rather have? Would you rather have an educated society that understands and isn't afraid to ask if you need something, or would you rather have somebody who wants to do everything for you doesn't let you ever do anything? Yeah. You know, I trained hundreds of blind people in my life, and I'll tell you something training a blind person, and maybe I'm biased, but training a blind person is probably one of the hardest things, one of the hardest groups of people to train. Ryan, I know you've trained blind folks, and we're all different. It's not just, can we get our hands on a computer and take to it, it's, do we believe in ourselves? Do we do we have, you know, do we have that, that that curiosity was it instilled in us? Did people let us do things and make mistakes and recover from them? There's so many different things that make a blind person do stuff or not that has nothing to do with ability only. It has to do with social conditioning. It has to do with life conditioning. So we need we need more mentoring in our community. We need more open dialog. We need more people staying here and staying here to serve this community and to and to be a part of it, and to raise tomorrow's kids. Because they know how to use an iPhone doesn't mean they've arrived. They need to learn braille. They need to learn to communicate. They need to learn mobility. You know, it's it's disturbing to me when I go and I see some of these blind kids these days, they have a freaking person that walks with them all day with a little cart taking their stuff shit. My ass had to carry a cane in one hand, trailer in the other, and a tape recorder under my arm when I was freaking in school, you know, and figure out how the hell to get around. You know, I didn't have a TV. I drag that could drag me around, you know, when, when I didn't understand, do the work for me, you know? So there's, there's a lot to it, but I think we're, I think we're still better today than we were yesterday. And I believe and I and I, and I pray and I hope and and I'm trying to be a part of being a better tomorrow, you know, for our community.

R

Rob Mineault 48:04

Is that where the motivational speaking gig sort of comes in?

M

Mike Calvo 48:08

It is, um, I think I, you know, I am one of my, one of my popular pitches or talks is, is a is called 'No Excuses', and it's, you know, society doesn't expect much from blind people. If we sat at home, collected a government check and did nothing with our lives, nobody would be surprised. You know, so and I refuse to accept that. I refuse to be that person, you know. I've got plenty of excuses, but very few reasons that I can't do something, you know. So if that's the case, what's your excuse? Why aren't you doing what beats in your heart to do? Why aren't you doing what you feel your calling in life is, you know, if you can dream it, you can do it. You know, I believe we have a creator that gave us the ability to dream and dream big and with enough time and resources. I think that what the mind conceives the body can achieve. I believe that implicitly. I mean, we've never, we had some investors in serotek, a couple of, you know, for a couple years. But serotek was built on a lot of talk to our community. It was built on sweat. It was built on people. Matt Campbell is not only one of my best friends and my business partner today, but truly a person that has made a huge, huge contribution to our community, because that man, you know, he's given his life to our community. And Matt doesn't make tons

of money. None of us do you know, but we believe in our community. We love our community, and we and we don't believe that there's any excuse that we you know, excuses are easy. You know, I mean, if I, if you know, if you want me to fly a plane, it's not an excuse for me to tell you I can't do that, you know. But if you tell me, hey, you know you should go to school and learn to be whatever you know, lawyer or an accountant or whatever you whatever beats you know, whatever beats your heart, you know, whatever you want to do. And I just said, Nah, that's an excuse. I don't like that. I don't that's an excuse. And why are we going to do that? You know? So to me, it's like I have 100 different excuses to not do anything, and I still get up every day and I go do something. So what's yours for not doing what you want to do? You know? And that's kind of a it's very confrontative to folks, but in a positive way. I mean, I don't, I don't, I don't browse people. But yeah, so these these days, these days, Pneuma is pneuma. Sarah tech closed down in 2017 my business partner passed away. The legal folks just thought it would be easier for us, just to, you know, to move on and to do something else. We we still have, we basically have the Cerro network, which is, you know, the old freedom box and all that. Do you know? We have people that have been with that thing for 25 years. The only it's like the Hotel California, they never leave, you know. And most people you know, they tap out, they die. And we that that system, Matt and I have committed to just keeping it on. We don't make much money, whatever. It just keeps its lights on, but the people that use it, that's their lifeline, you know. And I just talked to Art Schreiber. Art Schreiber is a Sero customer, and Art was the reporter for The Beatles. When the Beatles would tour, he was the audio reporter for them, and he would travel with them, and he lost his sight later, and he got real popular here in the NFB and stuff. But Art's 98 years old and still uses Sero and and all that stuff. So I mean, you know, we do that, but Pneuma was built to do, you know, accessible cloud stuff, and we do RIM. And the new product that we have now is a product that's for, you know, companies that have large libraries that are trying to meet different accessibility mandates, like Title Two and Canadian Accessibility Act and that kind of thing that have a time limit, and they're just trying to figure out how they're going to make \$1 out of 15 cents and spend so much, so much money on remediation, and we're trying to resolve that. So, you know, I don't want to bore anybody with the details, but you know, if, if any listener is interested in hearing about, you know, making a large digital library of content accessible for pennies. Reach out to us. We, you know, we want to hear from you. Like I said, we're working with one of the largest content providers on the planet right now, and we've just signed a three year deal with them, so we must be doing something, right?

R

Rob Mineault 48:08

Yeah, hey, listen. And I know, I know we're running late and time is short, but just out of curiosity, and hopefully this isn't open up a whole can of worms, but I'm really curious, because, you know, as as AI and machine learning, and, you know, mixed reality and all of these things are evolving fields. Where do you see the biggest opportunities, and maybe even some of the bigger hurdles or dangers when it comes to assistive technology?

M

Mike Calvo 48:08

I think the biggest challenge we're having right now is in the development tools. I'm encouraged by watching the Meta folks you know, and they're, you know, their their realization that blind people spend money you know, and and the way and the impact and that our community has had with the glasses, with, you know, with the with the meta glasses, the technology is getting more inexpensive. It's getting more reachable for people. I think that everybody, everybody, whether you're in the blindness community. Whether just anybody that is doing anything entrepreneurial right now is kind of sitting back and waiting to see what's going to happen with this new AI thing, because and that that that problem has happened to us, where we make up for some inconsistency of AI, we spend 10s of 1000s of dollars programming around a problem, and then, you know, open AI puts out an update, and boom, it's gone. And you just lost \$30,000 of development money because they just solved your problem. And it's free, you know? So, yeah, so, I mean, I think that the biggest challenge right now, I have never felt that technology move too fast, but I can honestly say that right now, technology is moving too fast. And the irony is that it's moving fast and it's still developing. So it's kind of like you're building the car as you're driving it, right, you know? And, and, you know, the cool thing is that, um, I saw, I saw a post. There's a great, a great list, and I'm sure you guys know of it, but maybe your listeners do not. It's called AI for the blind. It's on Facebook, run by a guy named Sean Keane, and it's got like, 6000 members, huge list, and you see blind people using AI to do music production and all kinds of stuff, and there's some drama there and all that stuff. But I love it. I love watching what our community has been able to do with these tools. And I think it's going to give people, you know, with AI. AI is just a big lever, man. It gives us the opportunity to, you know, to write better, to do more with less. I'm hoping that it's going to get out of the hands of a few big companies, and it's going to be something that the little guy can do. Because, you know, like right now, we're with our technology. We use large language models, but we're looking to, you know, to get money in the door to be able to train our own, our own models that we can, that we can stand up and use our own instead of having to use the llms, because the cost of large language models is just so huge, and their impact on the environment, nobody knows what that's going to be yet. And you know, I, as you know, I don't want to contribute to that, you know. But at the same time, AI, I saw a post once that supposedly written by AI, and it says, You know what, I'm your best advocate, because I've heard everything you've said, and that that struck a nerve with me, because buried in all of that AI stuff, buried in all that training, is every bit if you ask, if you ask an LLM properly to give you an accessible version of whatever it will without you having to, you know, all you got to do is tell it to make it WCAG compliant or whatever. And the AI has already learned. It's already been trained with all that stuff. So it's, is it bias? Maybe? I mean, sure, you know, I guess. But it has gotten all, all of our writings in the past, all of our pod podcasts, all of our advocacy, everything has been memorized. So I got to believe that that's going to be used somewhere. It's going to change the future somehow, you know, so it wasn't just done in vain. So I'm very optimistic. I don't know about finances and how that's going to do for business. I think that we're going to go through a tough time, right? But, you know, humanity's resilient. We'll figure it out. You know, we've dealt with with technology before, whether it be, you know, when, when we were industrialized, or when, you know, with the cars came in and the buggies were out and, you know, listen, the guy had made buggy whips, you know, didn't make them. Got tires, you know, make tire room sold tires, you know, but we'll figure it out. But I'm really, I'm really hopeful and optimistic about the future.

R

Rob Mineault 48:11

I like it. I see. I like optimism. I like to hear that.

M

Mike Calvo 48:11

Yeah, I think, I think it's I think it's great. I don't know. I don't know what it's going to do for us as as blind folks. I think that we're going to start to see a lot more accessibility built into stuff. Because I tell people, what's, what's a what's a necessity for us as a luxury for them. And, and I've found that sighted people love their talking GPSs. You know, sighted people love their audio books.

S

Steve Barclay 1:00:12

Sure, you know.

M

Mike Calvo 1:00:15

And sighted people all of a sudden realizing that, oh, geez, having a verbal interface to something is amazing, you know. So if we can get the guardrails gone to stop telling me that it's a person, but I can't tell you anything else about them, you know, those kind of things gone. I think that we're getting to, we're getting to a good place. I'm looking forward to the new envision glasses, than the low cost ones. I've got a pair on order. I want to see how they, how they do, and the gig of glasses also they do. So there's, there's some new players. It's cool. It's, it's interesting. And I look at like, what Aira is doing with AI, how they're all training, they're training all of these models, you know, for AI and, and sooner or later, it's going to work its way down to us, and it's going to be in your glasses or in your phone or in whatever that new thing Johnny Ives is making, you know, and, we're, you know, really excited about the future and about the future for us as blind folks. You know, I wish there was something that we could give society, but the only way we could do it is one person at a time.

R

Rob Mineault 1:01:36

That's right, one podcast at a time. Well, listen, speaking of thank you so much for taking some time out and stopping by and chatting. This was delightful, and it was great to catch up. You know, we we barely scratched the surface of what's on my notes to talk to you about, and so we'll certainly have to have you back, but before we let you go, please, sir, plug away. Where can people find you? What you're up to? Use this opportunity to just share anything you like with the audience.

M

Mike Calvo 1:02:13

So technology wise, pneumasolutions.com. We put the P there to piss off blind people. Not true. Pneuma. Pneuma actually is a Greek word. There you can read about our various accessibility solutions. mikecalvo.com that is my, the blind visionary. It's a tongue in cheek thing, the name of the company that it's because it's an homage to my, my late business partner, Michael Fox, who used to call me the blind visionary, which I thought was hilarious. We do corporate, corporate workshops. We do motivational speaking training, all kinds of stuff. You can read all about it at mikecalvo.com. And that's about it.

R

Rob Mineault 1:03:18

Excellent.

M

Mike Calvo 1:03:18

Well, thank you again, sir and gentlemen.

R

Rob Mineault 1:03:21

Yeah, please come back anytime you want to chat.

M

Mike Calvo 1:03:25

For sure. Thanks for inviting me.

R


Ryan Fleury 1:03:27


All right, sir. All right, Mike, have a great evening.


R


Ryan Fleury 1:03:29


Later. You too.

 Rob Mineault 1:03:30  
Take care.


 Mike Calvo 1:03:31  
All right.


 Rob Mineault 1:03:33  
Well, there you go.

 Ryan Fleury 1:03:33  
There you go.

 Rob Mineault 1:03:35  
What a talker. I love it.

 Steve Barclay 1:03:37  
Yeah, you don't have to throw a lot at him.

 Rob Mineault 1:03:42  
What a life. That guy's gonna his memoir is gonna be really interesting.

 Ryan Fleury 1:03:45  
Go read it.

R

Rob Mineault 1:03:45

What does he already have one?

R

Ryan Fleury 1:03:45

It's great. Street Kid to CEO.

M

Mike Calvo 1:03:51

Oh, Jesus, okay, well, he's already, he's, he already been there, done that.

S

Steve Barclay 1:04:13

Yeah, he's definitely one of those guys that you wish lived in your local neighborhood so that you could grow old and smoke pot with the guy.

R

Rob Mineault 1:04:19

Yeah. No kidding, yeah.

S

Steve Barclay 1:04:24

Bitch about the young folk sons of bitches don't know nothing.

R

Rob Mineault 1:04:27

Literally. I had, like, I had like, seven or eight sort of talking points and questions for him, and we got through like two. So great guy, I will, I know I say this all the time, but we definitely do have to have him up back on again and maybe talk about something specific. I was really fascinated to hear about his thoughts about AI as a developer, because I think that's really interesting.

R

Rob Mineault 1:04:52

Yeah, that'd be cool.

R

Ryan Fleury 1:04:52

Oh, we should bring Matt on to talk about that? Matt, his partner. Because Matt actually went spent some time over at Microsoft as well. Because he's the main developer, anyway, programmer, he would probably have some insight into AI and what his opinions are.

R

Ryan Fleury 1:04:56

Maybe we, maybe we'll do that. Maybe we'll put that on the list. January. Yeah, there you go. Well, anyways, we got to get out of here. Ryan?

R

Ryan Fleury 1:05:19

Yeah, Rob?

R

Rob Mineault 1:05:20

Where can people find us?

R

Ryan Fleury 1:05:21

I don't know. Steve, where can people find us?

S

Steve Barclay 1:05:24

Oh, I don't know. They could probably find us at home or or they could find us at the office, yep, or they could find us online. They could, they could email us [cowbell@atbanter.com](mailto:cowbell@atbanter.com). They could go [www.atbanter.com](http://www.atbanter.com) they'd find us there. They could go to [canasstech.com](http://canasstech.com) if they wanted to actually see the stuff that we're representing. They could even email us Steve or Ryan or Rob at [canasstech.com](http://canasstech.com) or [atbanter.com](http://atbanter.com) for that matter. Yeah, they could go on to Facebook. They could go on to Instagram, where can they not find us? I think is a bigger question.



R

Rob Mineault 1:06:05

That's true. We're everywhere, yeah.

S

Steve Barclay 1:06:09

We're ubiquitous.

R

Rob Mineault 1:06:16

Wow, man, Steve. Steve, working overtime on that, on that, man, I have nothing to add, no notes. All right. Well, with that, I think we can get the hell out of here. So big thanks, of course, to Mr. Mike Calvo for joining us, and we'll see everybody next week.

S

Steve Barclay 1:06:37

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