

[Philip Dallmann:](#)

Hello inclusion believers and welcome to the Access Champions podcast. I'm your host, Phil Dallmann for this week's journey into the galaxies of accessibility, diversity, and inclusion. Uh, we're continuing our organizational buy-in series this week, uh, with TDF. We have two great interviews for you this week. Um, we head over to, uh, the, uh, development department and fundraising with, uh, Anne Trites, TDF's director of development. Um, and also the technology department with Tymand Staggs, their technology director. Two very interesting conversations and two very interesting people.

[Philip Dallmann:](#)

You know, we've talked a lot on this podcast about ethics in fundraising, um, especially when it comes to things like, you know, savior syndrome and inspiration porn. Uh, and I think Anne has a lot of great thoughts on that. And I think for me she was always a great example while I was at TDF of- of how to navigate that, um, without necessarily making a big deal about the fact that- that there were- that they were doing that, um, that they were navigating those things well.

[Philip Dallmann:](#)

And, you know, uh, and I'll let the interview speak for itself but I- I think Anne is, uh, such an interesting person and a great person for- to look at, um, not only in the world of fundraising but office culture. Um, definitely someone who- who, you know, expects a lot of her team. Um, but also, uh, is an incredible force of positivity and encouragement, um, a-and definitely feels like she lifts, uh, her team up, um, rather than- than, you know, necessarily beating them down with the- the high expectations that they- that are given to them.

[Philip Dallmann:](#)

And, you know, fundraising in the nonprofit sector is hard. It's hard. Um, it's why there's a tremendous amount of turnover in that field. Um, but when you have a leader like Anne, I think it's a lot easier to pick yourself back up on the hard days, right? Um, and if you have folks like Tory and Mike that you're also working for as we spoke over the last couple weeks, again, I think that- that sort of culture of- of positivity, even if expectations are high and- and at times, you know, they're- you know, if you don't meet expectations, that's- it's, you know, obviously there are repercussions.

[Philip Dallmann:](#)

But it's still though that idea of we're gonna get there and we're gonna accomplish this mission, uh, of overall access and access in a variety of ways. Uh, a-and I think that's tremendous. Um, and, uh, I always, uh, enjoyed the high fives that went around from the development department at TDF, you know, when a big grant or a big donation came in or a benchmark was met. Um, so, uh, again, I- I just think, um, if you're if you're looking to learn about how to- to motivate a team through positivity, uh, I think Anne is a tremendous resource.

[Philip Dallmann:](#)

Uh, and then Ty Staggs, who I think is really a underappreciated- uh, I don't want to say underappreciated because I think everyone within those, uh, four walls o-of TDF appreciates, uh, the work that he does. Um, but not necessarily a known, um, commodity to those who interact with TDF. Um, but, you know, TDF



doesn't operate without him and I'm excited to share his conversation, um, because he- he was there, um, sort of at the transition to the internet from a- a mail based, um, organization to- to an online based one, and now just completing a huge transition to Tessitura, um, that I know he was a huge part of, um, and it affected a lot of their processes there.

[Philip Dallmann:](#)

Um, I worked with Ty pretty closely at times with TDF's autism friendly performances and the custom ticket saling- ticket selling platform that he created for those performances, um, and I'm- I'm excited for you guys to hear a little bit about what his thought process went in to, uh, the different dynamics of that program and how he tweaked it over the years and- and, um- and how hands on he was. Again, you know, we talked a little bit last week, um, about Mike Naumann, uh, being incredibly present, um, at programs.

[Philip Dallmann:](#)

Uh, Ty's another one that was just never afraid to hop on the phone with a patron, with a customer, um, who was in need, uh, and to listen to them and to listen to their needs and whether he could help them or not, uh, he was going to- to listen to them and be a caring voice on the other side of the phone.

[Philip Dallmann:](#)

And again, you know, it sounds like, uh, you know, something like, oh, yeah, you should absolutely do, but this is the director of technology. This isn't, you know, customer service that's taking this call. So I think that's- I think that's unique. I think that's important. And I think that speaks to why, uh, a program like the autism friendly performances can grow from, you know, was- I think it was 200 names that they cold called to start and- and now it's a list well above 10,000 repeat customers that sell out so quickly and there's demand and, um, we have an interview with, um, my replacement actually, uh, coming up in the next couple weeks, Colleen [Mullins 00:05:25], uh, a-and, you know, breaking down a-and she give- or gives a good example of like why the need is so high.

[Philip Dallmann:](#)

But again like that- those- tha- that growth, that trust in that community doesn't happen if it's just the programmatic people, um, providing that kind of customer service, providing that kind of care. It happens because people like Ty who it's not their job - it's not in his job description to take those calls - but he does it anyway because it's important and he believes in the mission.

[Philip Dallmann:](#)

Um, and when you have that kind of organizational buy in, uh, you- you find greater success. So, um, I'm excited for you guys to hear that interview, um, as well, and, um, you know, I think they're- they're both just A plus humans over there at, uh- at TDF.

[Philip Dallmann:](#)

A couple bits of news I actually want to note first, uh, a somber note with the passing of Carrie Ann Lucas, um, who was a tremendous, um, disability lawyer eventually but also an advocate and, um, her passing right now, uh, go ahead and Google her, I don't want to run down all of her accomplishments, but she- she's tremendous and, um, you know, I don't think as known as she should be, I-

and- and really I'm disappointed that I- I won't have the opportunity to have her on the show. Uh, but her passing, though, also is highlighting a little bit of the issues in a world of health insurance and what they can, um, decline to do, um, when certain services are needed but there are adjacent services which aren't quite as good, um, as it goes to illnesses, long term illnesses and- and disability, uh, focused things and- and, you know, her- her, you know, somewhat rapid deterioration in health, um, can be pretty clearly traced back to one of the decisions, um, made by an insurance company.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) So, uh, do yourself a favor, uh, I'm not going to- to break down health insurance companies on this episode. Um, I've had my own experiences there, uh, where I've had to get loud a-and fight for- for what I- I believed was, uh, deserved.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) I think it's worth looking and and evaluating and thinking about, you know, we have a laundry list of things we want to- to march for and advocate for in this country and, you know, healthcare is- is- is one of them. Um, and I think, uh, disproportionately this affects many in the disability community.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) So, uh, do yourself a favor: Learn about all the manny- many, many, many accomplishments of Carrie Ann Lucas but also then, uh, take, you know, take five, 10 minutes a-and look into that, uh, how things are operating right now in the health insurance industry.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Uh, on a more positive not, um, uh, there was in a very, uh, personal to me, uh, uh, exciting thing was that all elite wrestling just announced that they're gonna be doing the first sensory inclusive wrestling show, uh, this year, um, in collaboration with KultureCity, um, spelled with a K. Um, and I'm just so excited about that. One, I've been following All Elite Wrestling and their formation in the last year and, um, they are formed by some independent wrestlers, um, including, uh, Cody Rhodes, who's the son of a great wrestler named Dusty Rhodes, um, and he left WWE to- to pursue these things. Um, and I think it's really great what they're doing and they have this big show in Vegas coming up on May 25th, uh, and the- the partnership and collaboration to make themselves inclusive, uh, to many with sensory sensitivities and- and PTSD is how they put it out there, uh, is- is, uh, tremendous at providing access to, uh, wrestling which, for those of you who know me, know that I'm a huge fan, um, and I- I think of it as the- the most physical form of theater.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Uh, I'm so excited for this. And wrestling has a long history of partnering in different ways with- with the developmental and cognitive disability communities, uh, generally through things like the Special Olympics, um, and- and partnerships like that. Uh, they also have a history of- of not the best, um, depictions of- of individuals with disabilities. So I think, you know, the movement this way, uh, is- is wonderful and, uh, I wish I could be there. Um, really on almost any other day I would have figured out how to fly to Vegas, um, but my fiancée would be quite mad because at approximately the time that that

first match would start, I should be saying, "I do," and be getting married that day. So I won't be there. Uh, but I, uh, hope to have some folks on from All Elite Wrestling, uh, soon, to- and- and KultureCity to talk about this partnership and this event and what- and what it means. You know, just very, very excited for that. And again, like I said, I hopefully will have somebody on soon, uh, to chat about it, because again, I think it's huge.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) And, uh, that's that for this week, but before we go in I do always want to remind folks, uh, give us a follow on social media. We're @AccessChampion on Instagram and Twitter. Uh, The Access Champion Podcast on Facebook. Wherever you're listening to this podcast, go ahead and give us a follow, subscribe, um, and if you listen to us on Google Play or iTunes, go ahead, uh, and give us a review if you're digging what you're listening to and you enjoy us. Um, we are always incredibly appreciative for that and it only takes a few seconds to put a star rating through or write a- a- a quick message. Um, I promise, uh, it- it is incredibly appreciated by our team over here at Access Champions.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Now without further or do, Access Champion: Anne Trites.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) All right, and we are here with TDF's director of development, Anne Trites. Thanks for joining us, Anne.

[Anne Trites:](#) My pleasure.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Uh, so I always like to kind of dive into, uh, a bit of origin story, um, because I find it fascinating, everyone has these really, incredibly unique journeys how they end up in nonprofit arts. So I'd love to hear a little bit about your journey.

[Anne Trites:](#) Uh, well because I'm not young it's a long one-

[Philip Dallmann:](#) (laughs)-

[Anne Trites:](#) So I'll do a brief version.

[Anne Trites:](#) Uh, I fell into the theater by accident.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Okay. Love it.

[Anne Trites:](#) As I grew up and my father was a book seller and I ended up- I started working in publishing but then ended up in Stratford, Ontario, I'm from Canada originally-

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative).

[Anne Trites:](#) And my first job was production secretary at the Stratford Festival. And from there I just flew. I fell in love with it. It was a- it was an immediate passion. I had- I'd had no experience before then in theater.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative).

[Anne Trites:](#) So I, um, ended up working, uh, moved away from production and- and largely- largely marketing and development across Canada, many theaters including Shaw and Stratford Festivals. And then Yale School of Drama came calling and I came to this country. [crosstalk 00:12:42]-

[Philip Dallmann:](#) That's a call that you pick up?

[Anne Trites:](#) Well yeah-

[Philip Dallmann:](#) (laughs)-

[Anne Trites:](#) I think I framed the email I got. The first one.

[Anne Trites:](#) Uh, and I ended up coming to this country to work at Yale, uh, and I stayed there for 12 years. I was a professor of theater- of, uh, theater management with a specialty in marketing.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative).

[Anne Trites:](#) And, uh, ended up missing my husband, who's also in this crazy business. He was at Julliard.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative).

[Anne Trites:](#) Uh, and we just were tired of being apart. So I left-

[Philip Dallmann:](#) That's fair.

[Anne Trites:](#) In a bundle of tears.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) If you- seems like you like him.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) (laughs)-

[Anne Trites:](#) I do.

[Anne Trites:](#) (laughs)-

[Anne Trites:](#) I love that love- love wins out always.



[Philip Dallmann:](#) Yeah.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) (laughs)-

[Anne Trites:](#) So I found TDF and to be honest, I thought TDF was all about the ticket booth and the membership.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) So does almost everyone.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) (laughs)-

[Anne Trites:](#) It's something we're working on.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Yeah.

[Anne Trites:](#) Yeah.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) But, uh, it's so much more. Um, and, uh, I'll say I- I- I remember I was here when you- when you came- came in, um, and you were such a- a breath of fresh air. Very dynamic, um, in- in how you, uh, approach the position and kind of hit the ground running. Um, tell is a little bit about your- your role here.

[Anne Trites:](#) Well first of all that's really kind of you.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Oh.

[Anne Trites:](#) Um, I don't know whether it's a blessing or a curse, but I do not like complacency.

[Anne Trites:](#) (laughs)-

[Philip Dallmann:](#) No, that's fair.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) (laughs)-

[Anne Trites:](#) And I think I get excited when there's opportunity and what was exciting when I first got here is how much opportunity there was. This is an organization that really didn't have to worry too much about raising funds through contributed-through fundraising-

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative).

[Anne Trites:](#) Contributed income because of the success of the booth where we- we get part of the handling charge, much to everybody's surprise we do not get all that money but we get the handling charge and the same thing through our membership program. But it's gone- it's become very competitive-

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative).

[Anne Trites:](#) In the discount ticket market and we have a desire to grow, uh, we're nowhere near meeting the demand for our programs. And there's certainly room for huge growth in the contributed area and we're seeing it-

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Well there's-

[Anne Trites:](#) Already.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) So many communities, uh, that TDF serves, whether it's, uh, socioec- economic access, um, or physical access or- or, uh, in the realm of the autism friendly performances as well and- and kind of that family access as well. Um, that a lot of people would look at this and- and I found myself often saying when I was here, it's like, "These programs should sell themselves." Uh, people should just want to give us all their money.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Uh, but- but tell me a little bit about sort of what that's like when you have these amazing programs and- and have to, uh, head out into the world or- or, you know, uh, oversee grants and things like that and to find- to find this money?

[Anne Trites:](#) Well, you're actually right. The programs sell themselves. The hard part, the challenging part, not impossible, but the challenging part is getting people to- in to see the programs. And the minute they do, they're- they're blown away because our programs, as- as you know as someone who's- who's had a long history with TDF, uh, our programs are robust. They're not a pass through. And- and the people that we're appealing to are- are people who- or surveying, are people who wouldn't be able to come to the theater without the programs.

[Anne Trites:](#) So when potential funders and individuals see that and experience it, we don't say- we don't have to say a word. They want to know how much- how much support we need and how much they can- how much can they offer? It's not feasible like many other producing theater companies where you can bring people in all the time. We're everywhere.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative).

[Anne Trites:](#) And yet we're nowhere. You know, we're kind of ethereal that way.

[Anne Trites:](#) Uh, so finding ways to tell people about our programs without their eyes glazing over because it's a lot-

[Philip Dallmann:](#) (laughs)-

[Anne Trites:](#) Uh, remains one of the challenges. So our approach is different depending on the constituency. It's different for individuals than it is for a foundation, obviously.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Um, one of the things we've talked a lot about on this podcast, um, and I think a lot of service organizations, um, and folks in the realm of fundraising, um, really struggle with is in sort of the realm of ethics.

[Anne Trites:](#) Hmm.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) So, um, it's very- it- it would be easy, um, to lean on a program like, uh, the autism friendly performances and- and kind of fall into that inspiration porn realm or with, um, like the Wendy Wasserstein program, um, that sort of savior- you know, often white savior syn- syndrome. Um, and to- to facilitate those funds.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) How do you- how do you navigate those lines?

[Anne Trites:](#) Well, I'll tell you a little story (laughs). I- we took our honoree, our gala honoree to see an autism friendly performance of The Lion King.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative).

[Anne Trites:](#) Um, his name is Reggie van [Lee 00:17:25]. Reginald van Lee.

[Anne Trites:](#) Reggie has seen The Lion King I think probably many, many times. But it's the first time he's seen it in- in that way. And when it was over he- he got- got up. I knew the person behind us. Introduced her to Reggie and her son who's on the spectrum and he looked at the sun and said, "I know what it's like to be different." He was Af- he's African American. "I know what it's like to grow up being different." And this is really important for all of us.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) A-and that's perfect. You didn't have to say anything.

[Anne Trites:](#) No.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) You just facilitate the actual experience and let the programs speak for themselves. And, uh, that [crosstalk 00:18:01]-

[Anne Trites:](#) I think it's more about acknowledging differences.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative).

[Anne Trites:](#) It's not that someone's lesser than.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative).

ACP Episode 45 - 3_3_19, 10 (Completed 03/04/19)

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[Anne Trites:](#) They have just different needs. So to be ab- to be in a position to help facilitate that ability to go to the theater and have that thing that we're so passionate about, uh, you know, I've been in the theater for almost 40 years and I have a huge passion for what this organization does. I love the theater. But to now be in a position where I can raise money to make sure everybody who wants to come to the theater - that's idealistic, we can never raise enough money for that, although we're gonna try-

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Oh absolutely.

[Anne Trites:](#) (laughs)-

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Just keep running through that brick wall.

[Anne Trites:](#) But, uh, that there's no greater joy-

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Yeah.

[Anne Trites:](#) Than knowing that you're making- you're helping to make that possible. And there's no greater joy than looking at the faces. The families in an autism friendly performance who are in tears because they're experiencing this as a family and they're - you know, quote-unquote - normal, because, you know what, they are.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Yeah.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) A-anyone walking into the theater is normal.

[Anne Trites:](#) Yeah.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) And- and we- yeah, I love it. Obviously I love that program specifically.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) For those who- who maybe not be familiar, um, 'cause we- we do have kind of a broad span of listeners out there, um, what is- what does your sort of day to day look like?

[Anne Trites:](#) Oh this is the best part.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Okay.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) (laughs)-

[Anne Trites:](#) (laughs)-

[Anne Trites:](#) It's never the same twice.



[Philip Dallmann:](#) Oh I love it.

[Anne Trites:](#) And there's always something new, uh, that's a new opportunity. Uh, so if there- if every day was exactly the same, I- I- I th- I think I would go crazy.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative).

[Anne Trites:](#) It isn't here. And I think part of that is I'm surrounded by people that are also driven by the same thing. They are- their soul is fed by the same results. And, um, they like to work as a team. I work with a wonderful group of people.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) I was gonna say you have a really tremendous team. You've assembled a- I- you know, people say for theater it's like 98% casting. Uh, you've have just a discerning eye when it comes to the hiring process.

[Anne Trites:](#) Well thank you.

[Anne Trites:](#) Not always.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) (laughs)-

[Anne Trites:](#) That's too great a compliment than is deserved, but- but- but I will admit that we have an extraordinary team right now. They are so driven. Uh, they work really, really hard, um, they laugh really, really hard, and, uh-

[Philip Dallmann:](#) That's important in- in fundraising in general and also nonprofit arts because if you're not laughing you're crying.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) (laughs)-

[Anne Trites:](#) Exactly.

[Anne Trites:](#) They are passionate about not only the theater and dance but they're passionate about the audiences. And- and they work- they're so- they feed off each other.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative).

[Anne Trites:](#) You know, they feed it off each other and they're people, they like being with people. They're not all extroverts. We're all very different. Um, I'm certainly not an extrovert. Um, but, uh, it's a team that works brilliantly together. I'm really proud of it.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Uh, as you should be. I- and I think the, uh- the proof is in the pudding. It's the impact that your department and your team is able to have on this organization and, um, in every facet, you know, it's- every facet needs funding. Um, and- and,



uh, I don't envy you and I always respect, um, how you guys navigate the different needs and wants of each department here. You know? Access is- is, you know, craving funding for one thing and education is craving funding for another thing and, you know, you guys just did test- uh, a conversion to Tessitura and that needs tremendous funding and, uh, I think it's amazing how you guys balance that, uh, with smiles on your faces. Um-

[Anne Trites:](#) Well that's- it's- it's just part of the job.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Yeah.

[Anne Trites:](#) It's an essential.

[Anne Trites:](#) What is interesting is I think one of the tricky things about doing this is sometimes finding funders or a funding source that would fund our program, one of our programs, with a bit of a twist to it.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative).

[Anne Trites:](#) Uh, that may a- and that might be exciting to us because we might be bringing in more money to be spent on the programs but we have to be careful that we don't have funding driving programming.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative).

[Anne Trites:](#) The programmers know what the- the needs are in the various constituents, various communities.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Absolutely. And I- and I can remember a couple of instances where emails came in from different funders and it was, you know, they wanted this and it just didn't line up with-

[Anne Trites:](#) Yeah.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) The mission of the program.

[Anne Trites:](#) Right.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Um, and those are really tough conversations I'm sure.

[Anne Trites:](#) Well yes and no.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative).

[Anne Trites:](#) When it's not right-



[Philip Dallmann:](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative).

[Anne Trites:](#) When they want something that doesn't make any sense, it's really not hard to say no. We just have to try harder to find the money somewhere else to support the programs.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) That's amazing. Well, uh, uh, I always like to sort m- I'm a dreamer-

[Anne Trites:](#) (laughs)-

[Anne Trites:](#) I- I know.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) (laughs)-

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Of the many things that I came into Anne's office and I was like, "I'd like to do this. It costs this many moneys."

[Anne Trites:](#) (laughs)-

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Uh, please say yes! Please say we can find it!

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Uh, I, uh, I- I liked and I- I'm very, uh, obviously a very positive person, but I- and- and this podcast likes to look towards the future in hopes and dreams. Um, for you, what- what are your hopes and dreams for- for your department and- and for the organization as a whole, um, going forward?

[Anne Trites:](#) Actually, you know, I- I like to dream too.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative).

[Anne Trites:](#) I always think, "What's the next big thing we can- where's the next big step gonna come from?" But every now and then in life it's handed to you and it's that be c- that whole be careful what you wish for thing.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) (laughs)-

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Yeah.

[Anne Trites:](#) Well it's happened.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Hmm.

[Anne Trites:](#) We are honoring three people in this gala but one, the honoree I mentioned earlier, Reggie van Lee, has introduced us to many of his friends and colleagues and the network has just expanded and expanded and expanded.



[Anne Trites:](#) We used to have a gala committee of one person. It's now 26. Made up of people that didn't know TDF even existed. They're coming- they're coming from finance, fashion, uh, from v- you know, very disparate worlds, and they are- they immediately fall in love with our mission and they like being around us, they think we're fun to work with. We work with people. What's better than that? So all of the sudden many, many doors are opening and many, many more people are coming in. People that maybe have been involved in hel- they- they're in fashion, but they're focus on philanthropy is health. But they- they understand that there's a healing power of theater as well.

[Anne Trites:](#) So we're attracting a whole lot of people, which means that, um, my days are long and I'm running to keep up and I am so excited that there's this much potential just sitting there, this many people that are in love with what we're doing and want- and are and want to do more to work towards bigger goals.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) That's amazing.

[Anne Trites:](#) Yeah it is. It's kinda cool.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) (laughs)-

[Anne Trites:](#) (laughs)-

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Well thank you so much, Anne, for taking the time to- to chat with us and, um, thank you so much for being, uh, an Access Champion.

[Anne Trites:](#) Thank you.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Thank you Anne. Uh, just a- again, a really fun conversation, um, and a- uh, incredibly appreciative for, uh, taking the time to chat and- and share your journey and- and your wisdom as it were, uh, in this field of fundraising.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Before we move on to, uh, Tymand Staggs, uh, I have to mention that, uh, this episode is sponsored by CO/LAB Theater Group. Uh, CO/LAB Theater Group is a nonprofit theater organization that provides individuals with developmental disabilities a creative and social outlet through theater arts. They offer free weekly classes and workshops that encourage actors to collaborate as an ensemble and discover their individual voices.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Tickets are now on sale for their annual benefit, CO/LAB Live, a celebration of inclusion in the arts where you'll enjoy drinks and light bites, mingle with the CO/LAB actors, and get an inside look at CO/LAB class in action.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) For more information, visit colabtheatergroup.com.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Uh, and again, as mentioned last week, uh, at CO/LAB Live, they are honoring Katie [Sweeney 00:25:36], um, who is a dear friend of mine, um, also on the board at CO/LAB and also a, uh, tremendous advocate for TDF's, uh, autism friendly performances and has a TED talk, uh, online that you can watch, uh, about her journey with theater and her son Dusty, um, who is on the autism spectrum. And, uh, uh, it's a great watch. In fact, we'll link to it in this episode, um, 'cause I- I think it's good for everyone to watch.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Now that we took care of that business, we're gonna move right along to the technology director of TDF and Access Champion Tymand Staggs.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) All right, and we are here with Tymand Staggs, uh, affectionately known as Ty, uh, the director of IT at TDF. Thanks for, uh, taking the time to chat.

[Tymand Staggs:](#) It is my pleasure.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Um, so, uh, we were actually just talking a little bit before I hit record. Um, and, you know, uh, as opposed to many other folks who- who we've chatted with, uh, today here at TDF, uh, you don't come from an arts background and I find that fascinating. Uh, tell me a little bit about how you ended up at TDF.

[Tymand Staggs:](#) Well, I had, um- I had been working in- in Tokyo at a, um, internet services provider and I got an offer for a job at a publishing company here in New York-

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative).

[Tymand Staggs:](#) And I was with them for a very short period of time. Working for a commercial company rather than a not for profit, of course, is very different.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative).

[Tymand Staggs:](#) And my father at the time was having, uh, severe heart issues and I decided I wanted to move into the not for profit sector.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Hey, and- and, uh, uh, isn't it funny how things just kind of open up when you make those kinds of decisions?

[Tymand Staggs:](#) Yeah, sometimes they- the decisions are made for you somehow.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Yes.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) (laughs)-

[Tymand Staggs:](#) Yeah.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Exactly. Gotta love that universe.

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[Philip Dallmann:](#) Uh, well that's great. So what was- when you got here to TDF, what did the, uh, sort of IT landscape look like?

[Tymand Staggs:](#) Well, we did not have an internet entity whatsoever, so it was completely mail order.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Okay.

[Tymand Staggs:](#) And it was, um, right after 9/11-

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative).

[Tymand Staggs:](#) Uh, there were, uh, the- what was that white powder?

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Oh, yeah, um, oh, anthrax.

[Tymand Staggs:](#) Anthrax, thank you.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) (laughs)-

[Tymand Staggs:](#) And the anthrax scare was, um, impacting our- our mail.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Okay.

[Tymand Staggs:](#) Folks wanted to iron their envelopes and the tickets in the envelope would turn black. And so not only were our orders dropping but we were having such issues of getting the tickets out. So we made the- a very quick move to move some of our services at least at that point online.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative).

[Tymand Staggs:](#) So that was the biggest transition upon starting here at TDF.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) And this is when you guys were down at 1501, right?

[Tymand Staggs:](#) That's correct.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Okay.

[Tymand Staggs:](#) Yes.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Yeah.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) That's- uh, that's not a small transition, either.



[Tymand Staggs:](#) That was a major transition for everyone.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) (laughs)-

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Yeah.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Um, and- and what was the staff size like when you guys made that transition?

[Tymand Staggs:](#) Uh, there were only two of us in IT at the time. Ticketing was much larger because they were filling paper orders.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative).

[Tymand Staggs:](#) So, yeah, the- the staffing moved from ticketing to more IT-based.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) I can imagine.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Um, so, uh, for those of, uh, listening to the podcast that kind of like, they know IT, they call IT when they can't, uh, their computer's not turning on, the email's not working, what have you. Uh, but I know it- it's so much more than that. Uh, give us a little bit of an insight into, you know, what your day to day looks like.

[Tymand Staggs:](#) Well of course we have the TKTS booths.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Right.

[Tymand Staggs:](#) And, uh, the connectivity issues and of course or TKTS app.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative).

[Tymand Staggs:](#) And all of our- our operations are based here in this office with our- our own server room. Um, so that- our Cloud is really internal.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Oh, that's amazing.

[Tymand Staggs:](#) And so, um, there's a lot of running around.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) (laughs)-

[Tymand Staggs:](#) And also the costume collection as well.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Oh right, and that's in Queens, so it's-

[Tymand Staggs:](#) Yes.



[Philip Dallmann:](#) We- we're going to, uh, additional boroughs.

[Tymand Staggs:](#) Yes.

[Tymand Staggs:](#) We don't give them enough attention actually because they are so far out. But there's a lot of running.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative).

[Tymand Staggs:](#) Yeah. But day to day it's really database management and-

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Okay.

[Tymand Staggs:](#) Of course there's the work station issues, printer issues, that happen.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Yeah.

[Tymand Staggs:](#) We also do a lot of internal development.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative).

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Uh, talk- talk- talk to us a little bit about that. What- what does the internal development look like?

[Tymand Staggs:](#) Well for instance all of the booths, uh, the treasurers post what is available to the shows and a lot of folks, um, have the misconception that somehow that's automated, that the percentages and the prices for the tickets that are up for sale at each of the booths is somehow automatically dropped in. There're actually multiple systems on which we're selling the tickets-

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative).

[Tymand Staggs:](#) And all of that is entered by hand. So there is a portal for the treasurers to log into and we're constantly improving that. And the app actually pulls from that same data.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Oh that's awesome.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Um, one of the things, uh, that I was incredibly impressed with and you and I worked, uh, a lot on together, um, was, uh, how you, uh- you essentially custom designed a, uh, ticketing system, uh, specifically for, uh, the autism friendly performances. Uh, talk to us a little bit what that process was like.

[Tymand Staggs:](#) That was definitely a unique challenge in that, uh, I- I guess typically you would say the best available seats-



[Philip Dallmann:](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative).

[Tymand Staggs:](#) Are close to the front, maybe near the aisle. But in- with this special group of theater goers, this special population, obviously the- the conventional best seats available are not necessarily the best seats available. So we had to come up with a system in which we would have hundreds of people purchasing virtually all the seats in the same 10 minute period-

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative).

[Tymand Staggs:](#) And be able to give them the choices that they would need, not just want.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative).

[Tymand Staggs:](#) And so that- that was a unique challenge and we're still learning.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Yeah, I- I know we- we navigated things like, uh, single seats and avoiding single seats because especially for this community, single seats weren't particularly, um, enticing.

[Tymand Staggs:](#) Yeah, absolutely true. Yes.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Uh, or viable really. Um, but- a-and then, you know, well one of the- the things that I think people don't realize, um, when they look at TDF autism friendly performances, um, is the demand and I know as an organization you guys drive that home that there is such a huge demand but I don't think it's any more evident than, um, the- the demand at the minute the tickets go on sale that gets put on your servers.

[Tymand Staggs:](#) Oh yeah, yes.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Uh-

[Tymand Staggs:](#) Yes.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) So it's- it's- you know, uh, I know early on, uh, we had issues, uh-

[Tymand Staggs:](#) Yes.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Navigating that, a-and talk to us a little bit about like what that was like to- to figure out how to grow.

[Tymand Staggs:](#) It's just the sheer number of- of shopping carts at the same time.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative).



[Tymand Staggs:](#) And, um, it's just learning step by step, experience by experience.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Uh, a- one of the things I- I- I really appreciate about you and your entire team, um, was, you know, we've talked a lot with folks today about listening to the community. You don't necessarily think about that, again, with IT, but you guys do and, again, that program I think is such a good example of it as- as you evolved it and- and, uh, bless you heart, I- I'd come into your office and be like, "Well, we really need this." And, uh, I rarely heard the word "no".

[Philip Dallmann:](#) (laughs)-

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Talk to me a little bit about, um, 'cause we've ha- I mentioned, uh, you ha- th- the staff has grown from two. Uh, talk to me about some of the folks on your team a- and- or some of the different roles that exist in your department.

[Tymand Staggs:](#) Well we now have a lead developer and he's a full-time, just-

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Amazing.

[Tymand Staggs:](#) Handles all of our various solutions and projects and, uh, that- that has been an enormous weight off of my shoulders.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative).

[Tymand Staggs:](#) 'Cause I was pretty much writing all of the code. Um, and then we have two support folks who are constantly running from booth to booth and all over the place, including right here at the office at 520.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Yeah. Oh. Yeah, I'm sure. There's a- again-

[Tymand Staggs:](#) Full time support, yes.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) That's fantastic.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Um, w- and I think that kind of growth is- is so good. This past few years you guys have made another transition, um, in services to, um, something that many of my nonprofit listeners will- will recognize and remember, um, in, uh, moving to Tessitura.

[Tymand Staggs:](#) Yes. Yes. That- um, it's been exciting and challenging at the same time.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative).

[Tymand Staggs:](#) Um-



[Tymand Staggs:](#) You probably know of course about our membership programs, our- the listeners would know. Um, since our members of course- there are eligibility requirements, uh, and also for the accessibility programs, accessibility requirements. And those are not necessarily built into Tessitura so there's a lot of customization.

[Tymand Staggs:](#) And, um, you know, I think one of the unique aspects about TDF's IT department is that we do actually talk to the customers. We- we take calls and we do hear the unique needs and individual needs and we really do our best to- to try to accommodate those needs.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) That's- yeah. And I think that that makes, uh, so much sense based off of, again, every aspect of the organization is like that, uh, and it trickles out-

[Tymand Staggs:](#) Indeed, that's true.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Uh, and- and-

[Tymand Staggs:](#) Yes.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) You know, by, uh, uh, we were speaking to Colleen earlier and I was saying, um, you know, I became better at customer service by listening to Franny. Uh-

[Tymand Staggs:](#) [crosstalk 00:35:27]-

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Just hearing that, and- and honestly you're another great example of it because when those autism friendly performances would go on sale and if things were a little bit slow or what have you as we were figuring things out, it was you and I on the phones-

[Tymand Staggs:](#) Yes.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) And I'd come into your office and you were on the phone with a customer and- and we know that there was a need and there tends to be a high anxiety in those moments and-

[Tymand Staggs:](#) Absolutely true, yes.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Uh, you a-and your entire department shows such care. You know? Um, understanding the- the need.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Um, I- uh, I'm a very positive person. I love to- to dream a little bit. Um, dreamers are gonna dream. Uh, and I want to g- give you the opportunity, uh, to dream a little bit. Uh, what would you love to see for the future of- of technology here at TDF?

[Tymand Staggs:](#) Wow. What would I love to see? Certainly more app based solutions. Um, clearly everyone is on their phone constantly and bringing our services to their mobile devices-

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative).

[Tymand Staggs:](#) Is definitely one of my top priorities.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) I- I think that would make a huge impact.

[Tymand Staggs:](#) It absolutely would.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) And, uh, needed in today's society.

[Tymand Staggs:](#) I'm a commuter, so-

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Yeah.

[Tymand Staggs:](#) I'm- I'm on the bus for an hour from New Jersey, central New Jersey, and- and I can't help but look around and see everyone for the entire trip, we no longer communicate with one another-

[Philip Dallmann:](#) (laughs)-

[Tymand Staggs:](#) We're on our phones. So we really have to go-

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Absolutely.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Well thank you so much, Ty, for taking the time to chat-

[Tymand Staggs:](#) Thank you.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) And- and thank you for all the work you do. Um, again, I don't- I don't think it gets said enough, um, anywhere-

[Tymand Staggs:](#) [crosstalk 00:36:57]-

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Um, but, uh, you are, uh, you make a tremendous impact here and- and if the members don't know it, hopefully they're listening here. You are on the main things that makes this operation go. So, uh, thank you for that and thank you for being an Access Champion.

[Tymand Staggs:](#) Thank you my friend.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Thanks again to Ty, uh, for taking time to chat and thank you for all that you do, uh, there at TDF and with your team and- and I would be remiss, again, uh, you



know, last week, uh, and the week before we always make a- a point to note that, you know, these things don't happen on their own. The- these- these folks who are Access Champions have also tremendous teams. Uh, so, you know, with Ty, um, I'm- I'm, uh, very familiar with, uh, uh, [Kostas Mikhaelopolis 00:37:45], um, their associate director who- who is, uh, a- again an A plus human with an adorable dog, uh, who just does so much there.

Philip Dallmann: Uh, Kyle [McNee 00:37:54], um, who I don't know very well, uh, but if you do come across him, uh, he might just be my clone. Um, so in the world of Highlander, uh, get ready Kyle.

Philip Dallmann: And [Cheryl 00:38:07], uh, [Schoenmacher 00:38:08], [Skudinmakker 00:38:08]? You know, Cheryl, I don't know that I ever heard your name - last name - spoken out loud and, uh, uh, I believe your email was like [cheryls 00:38:17]. So, um, Cheryl, who is also an A plus human and a beacon of positivity.

Philip Dallmann: Uh, Michelle St. Hill, uh, another tremendous, uh, person. A-and also has an adorable dog.

Philip Dallmann: And, uh, the Michael Buffer, uh, who, uh, introduced me to my soon to be wife, so, um, you know, always indebted to him for that.

Philip Dallmann: Uh, and then over in development under Anne Trites, uh, her team includes, uh, Whitney- uh, Whitney [Estrin 00:38:44], uh, her deputy director over there, Whitney, a, uh, fellow Philadelphian, I, you know, said- those of us from South Jersey kind of associate with Philadelphia. Um, and also A plus human and tremendous, um, development professional, um, overall.

Philip Dallmann: Um, [Montez 00:39:03] [Brown 00:39:04], uh, who I don't know at all. Um, but I hear wonderful things and it same- sounds like you're pretty great at your job.

Philip Dallmann: Uh, Natalie King, who I do know, uh, over at institutional giving, um, who just, uh, actually I was speaking to somebody earlier today about Natalie, um, her style made me always want to dress better. Um, so obviously that's not a reflection on her job at all. Um, she's also a tremendous grant writer and- and- in the world of institutional giving, um, but she also just dresses amazing and- and, uh, kills the game that way.

Philip Dallmann: [Katherine 00:39:39] [Walzak 00:39:39], um, over in individual giving who's also amazing and- and does tremendous work, especially I know with the gala over there.

Philip Dallmann: And, uh, [Nikeel 00:39:50] Mahopa- [Mahapatra 00:39:52], um, who I don't know- who I also don't know at all, but I assume is wonderful because, again, you're part of that team and, uh, um, everyone on that team, uh, is- is, uh, tremendous.



[Philip Dallmann:](#) If you are interested in the TDF gala, either learning more about it, making a donation, uh, buying a ticket, um, it's always a really fun event. Um, you can learn more at tdfgala.tdf.org. Again, that's tdfgala.tdf.org.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Uh, thank you again to David [LeShay 00:40:26] for coordinating all the interviews in this series. Uh, really appreciative. Again, I know it's a busy time over there. Um, so the time that everyone gave and the time that you gave, David, uh, to coordinating these interviews is, uh, tremendously appreciated.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) As always, thank you to our producer, Matt [Kirstadter 00:40:42] for making us sound great each and every single week. Uh, this show does not happen without him. So, uh, thank you. Thank you to our champion intern Ms. Kelsey Rose Brown, um, who, uh, again, if you don't follow us on social media you should. She's putting out amazing content, uh, and doing so much more for us all the while, uh, she's killing the game in grad school.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Um, and thank you to Eric Walton for that dope theme song. It never gets old.

[Philip Dallmann:](#) Uh, we'll be back again next week. And remember inclusion believers, never stop running through that brick wall.