



Episode 69- Lauren Martin

October 23, 2026

(Music playing)

Mindy Henderson: [00:02](#)

Welcome to the Quest Podcast, proudly presented by the Muscular Dystrophy Association as part of the Quest family of content. I'm your host, Mindy Henderson. Together, we are here to bring thoughtful conversation to the neuromuscular disease community and beyond about issues affecting those with neuromuscular disease and other disabilities and those who love them. We are here for you to educate and inform, to demystify, to inspire, and to entertain. We are here shining a light on all that makes you, you. Whether you are one of us, love someone who is, or are on another journey altogether. Thanks for joining. Now let's get started.

[00:48](#)

October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month, a time to recognize the contributions of people with disabilities in the workforce and explore what true inclusion really looks like. Today, I'm joined by Lauren Martin, a member of the neuromuscular disease community who also works at CITGO, a longtime MDA partner. Today, we're talking about workplace inclusion and talking with Lauren about her experience building a career with a disability, including the barriers that still exist, what employers get right, and what may still need to change. Lauren, thank you so much for being here.

Lauren Martin: [01:34](#)

Thank you, Mindy. I appreciate it. I'm excited for this.

Mindy Henderson: [01:38](#) I am too. So, I would love to start by just getting to know you a little bit better. Do you want to just tell us a bit about yourself, your neuromuscular condition, and what you do at CITGO?

Lauren Martin: [01:51](#) Absolutely, yes. So, going back to the beginning, I was born in the early '90s. My mom was so excited to have me. I was the first daughter and everything. When I was born, I was hitting all my main milestones. The doctors, there was no concerns or anything, but then as I was continuing to get a little bit older, my mom noticed I wasn't hitting that walking milestone. I was having a lot of trips and falls. I would need to hold onto things as I was trying to walk around or get around.

[02:22](#) And so, she brought it up to our pediatrician at the time. They just wanted to monitor it, see if maybe I was just a late bloomer. So, they continued to monitor me. It was not changing. I was not moving forward with my walking like I should be. So, at about 18 months old, I went in for a biopsy, a muscle biopsy, and they were able to confirm that I did in fact have a neuromuscular disorder of spinal muscular atrophy or SMA. This is the first instance of it in both sides of my family. So, it was a complete shock. My parents really didn't know what to do. They didn't know who to go to. They had so many questions and weren't quite sure where they could get those answers.

[03:06](#) And so, it was quite a scary experience for them at first, and that's really how MDA came into our lives. They were such a great resource to be able to answer my parents' questions, tell them, "Your child is going to have a good quality of life. Your child is going to have a career. She's going to enjoy things just like other kids her age, and we're here to help you. We're here with treatment options, with community support," all that kind of stuff. And they were just such a blessing to my parents. I know they really would've been so lost without MDA and their help.

[03:45](#) Then throughout my life, my disability, it's a progressive disease, so I get weaker as I age. As I've gotten older, my needs have changed. I used to be able to crawl around. Now I'm not able to. I use a power wheelchair full-time, but it's all I've known. Since this was something I was born with, this is my life. I just experience it how I experience it. I just try to take on things as they come and speak up when I need help in certain areas and stuff. So, that's my early journey. Right now, I do work for CITGO, as you mentioned. I'm a communications specialist. I've been with the company since 2015 now.

Mindy Henderson: [04:31](#) Oh wow, that's great.

Lauren Martin:	04:32	It's been such a fun run. I really enjoy my coworkers. I really enjoy the work. It's just so much fun. And then I have a wonderful husband, Landon, and we have a three-year-old daughter named Maverick.
Mindy Henderson:	04:46	Oh, I love that name.
Lauren Martin:	04:48	Thank you. I wanted something strong for her. So, I had heard that and I had to convince my husband, but he jumped on board eventually.
Mindy Henderson:	04:57	Oh, they usually do. They usually realize that we're right and we know what we're doing.
Lauren Martin:	05:02	Absolutely.
Mindy Henderson:	05:04	I've got to say the folks at CITGO are some of the nicest people I've met. I think they've been a partner of MDAs for about 40 years now.
Lauren Martin:	05:13	Yes.
Mindy Henderson:	05:14	Yeah. And I actually, you and I were chatting a little bit before this, and I also live with SMA type 2. And are you type 2, type 3?
Lauren Martin:	05:25	So, when I was first diagnosed, depending on the type of doctor, they said I was either a type 2 or a type 3, and I know there's been additional advancements and I've never gotten retested or officially put into a category. So, I say type 2, type 3.
Mindy Henderson:	05:47	Okay, gotcha. I mean, why do we need labels anyway?
Lauren Martin:	05:50	Exactly.
Mindy Henderson:	05:53	Yeah. So, yeah, I had the opportunity, I think it was three years ago to go to the annual CITGO Gala and speak and share my story and just some of the kindest people I've ever come into contact with. So, I can only imagine how much you must enjoy working there, particularly having been there for so long. That's really wonderful.
	06:20	So, you alluded a little bit to your early beginnings with MDA and how you got connected with them. You also served as MDA National Ambassador, which is really cool when you were younger. When you think back to that time in your life, what did you imagine that a future would look like? Did you have a clear

picture as a kid of what you wanted to grow into and do and know what you wanted your life to look like always?

Lauren Martin: [06:58](#)

So, at the time I probably was still thinking that I was going to be the next Britney Spears.

Mindy Henderson: [07:04](#)

Oh, yes. Okay.

Lauren Martin: [07:06](#)

That was my career path.

Mindy Henderson: [07:07](#)

Wait, do you sing?

Lauren Martin: [07:09](#)

So, funnily, no. But when I went to MDA summer camp, I did participate in the talent show and my talent was singing.

Mindy Henderson: [07:20](#)

Okay, love it.

Lauren Martin: [07:22](#)

So, I have not done that in a hot minute. Maybe there's been some karaoke nights out with my husband and friends and stuff that I've participated in, but I'm not professionally trained and I do not have a good voice at all. But in my mind, I was going to be the next Britney Spears, for sure.

Mindy Henderson: [07:40](#)

Totally. Love it.

Lauren Martin: [07:41](#)

So, I did not really have an idea of what I was going to be. I knew that I really wanted to go to college. College was something very important to me, continuing my education. My parents were very good about that, making me understand the value of education and pursuing it as much as I can. I went through so many different career possibilities in middle school and high school. It wasn't really until I got to my senior year of high school that I decided I enjoyed the communications field.

[08:22](#)

I originally thought that I wanted to do something like broadcast journalism, and I took a media course in my senior year of high school, and I learned very quickly that I do not like being on camera. So, that rolled out my broadcast journalism career. But then through other classes I took and stuff, I found I liked public relations and general corporate communications. And so, that's what I ended up pursuing in college. I did a public relations degree and you always hope that what you go for, for your degree is what you get a job in the field, and I've just been lucky that I have. I've been able to put my education to good use here at CITGO.

Mindy Henderson:	<u>09:10</u>	It's so funny. I feel like we have so much in common. We're both in Texas. You're in the Houston area, right?
Lauren Martin:	<u>09:17</u>	Yeah.
Mindy Henderson:	<u>09:18</u>	Okay. And I'm in Austin, so relatively close. I also got my degree in public relations.
Lauren Martin:	<u>09:27</u>	So funny.
Mindy Henderson:	<u>09:29</u>	So funny, yes. And we both love leopard print, which we also discussed before this interview. I'm obsessed with your sweater. If you're listening to the audio and you can't see Lauren, she's got a gorgeous leopard print sweater on.
Lauren Martin:	<u>09:46</u>	Thank you. Yes. Leopard print is a neutral. It can go with anything. I love it. It's so funny to meet people within not only the neuromuscular community, but also the MDA community and everything and just see how similar and different our paths are. I find a lot of people with SMA or other neuromuscular diseases, they are in the communications field. And I think it's just because we've had to talk so much about ourselves, our struggles, speak up for what we need, what we think would be good for others who are also struggling that it just naturally leads to a communications.
Mindy Henderson:	<u>10:29</u>	I think you're so right. Honestly, I never thought about it before this, but I've also met a number of people in our community with communications kind of professions and educations. And you're right, I think over the course of our lives, the advocacy and the communicating with caregiver, I think that we do have to become pretty effective communicators.
Lauren Martin:	<u>10:56</u>	Absolutely.
Mindy Henderson:	<u>10:56</u>	So, thinking about growing up with a disability, for anyone who might be listening, whether it's a parent whose child may have just been diagnosed or a young person who might be listening, what for you was maybe one of the hardest things or a couple of the hardest things about growing up? I get this question personally a lot about what were the hardest things about growing up with a disability and how did you combat those things or approach them in your childhood to make them a little less hard?
Lauren Martin:	<u>11:42</u>	Yeah. So, I think for me, the biggest concern was I wouldn't be able to be like my friends. I wouldn't be able to be like the rest

of the kids in my class. I wouldn't have the same experiences or be able to participate in the same things because I had a disability. Between the community that we had with MDA and our other doctors and then my mom being an absolute force of a woman, they advocated for me so quickly and so early in things that I was very lucky I got to experience the same things as everybody else.

[12:20](#)

My mom, when I started school, she would go in and she would say, "This is what she needs. This is what she needs to be able to fit in with the rest of her class. I expect nothing less and I need you to make sure she receives this assistance." And it worked. I think sometimes people are scared to speak up and say what they need, especially if it's a new disability, you don't know quite who to talk to, where to go, but use your voice and absolutely tell people what you need, tell people the assistance, the services, all those things.

[12:59](#)

I was in Girl Scouts. I went to all the field trips. We went camping. I participated in that. I went to summer camp. I went to MDA summer camp. I went on field trips. There was no one thing that I was not able to participate in. And I definitely think it's because of my mom speaking up and using her voice for that. And I got to see her do that and now I'm able to do that as an adult.

Mindy Henderson:

[13:28](#)

Yeah. And I love that we're talking about this because holy cow, the moms that I have met in this community, my mom included, was a force like you say with your own mom. And she really modeled advocacy and speaking up and all of those things. I have a few years on you. I started elementary school in 1978, but-

Lauren Martin:

[13:56](#)

Are you sure? You do not look like that's true.

Mindy Henderson:

[13:59](#)

Thank you. Your check will be in the mail. I appreciate you saying that, but it's true. And back then, things like 504 and IDA and all of the things that became such important pieces of legislation and regulation for people with disabilities to get educations, those things were really, really new. My mom had to fight just for me to go to mainstream public schools. Like I said, I've met a lot of people in the community whose moms are just amazing, but I also know that there are people in our community who may not have those kinds of support systems. And if you don't have someone in your life who models that for you and shows you from an early age how to get things done and how to speak up for yourself, what kinds of things would

you say to those kids who could potentially be listening and not have maybe quite the same support systems that we had?

Lauren Martin: [15:16](#)

I think that in this day and age, social media is so powerful. I know it can be a very scary space, but when used in a good way, it's such an amazing resource. I know I'm part of several disability groups on Facebook, on Instagram. Those communities are so available and ready to help out. If you're a younger person and maybe you don't have a parent who's able to speak up for you, and so you're having to figure it out on your own, I really encourage you to go on Facebook, go on Instagram, find these groups. There's some really good people out there and they would be more than happy to share their experiences and give you the tools to know how to speak up for yourselves. I think really relying on the disability community is a huge plus, and now we're able to communicate with people across the globe because of social media and everybody's just a Facebook message away nowadays.

Mindy Henderson: [16:23](#)

It's so true. The world is so much more connected today than it was when I was growing up. It's really amazing. And I'll also say just the power of the neuromuscular disease community is, it's the most incredible community I have ever had the privilege to be a part of, which it feels funny to say on the one hand because nobody wishes for this, but I think that one of the real bright lights to life with a neuromuscular disease is the incredible people. And honestly, I've never had a situation where there wasn't somebody who was ready to just jump into action for me if I was trying to figure something out. So, I agree with you. I think getting connected to your community is one of the best things that you can do.

[17:25](#)

Let's talk a little more about your professional journey. This is National Disability Employment Awareness Month, and so I'd really love to hear about what it's been like for you. How did you get into your field and what have been some of the most meaningful accomplishments along the way?

Lauren Martin: [17:46](#)

I earned my degree in public relations. I went to the University of Houston and I graduated in 2013. I took a little bit of a break in between then, getting out on the job market and seeing what was out there. It was very scary at first because I didn't know who I wanted to work for, where I wanted to go, and not just because of regular fears, like what is the company values? What do they stand for? What would my job entail? What would I be required to do? But things like, are they accessible? Would they understand my disability? If I needed breaks throughout the

day, would they understand that? If I needed special equipment, could I get that?

[18:35](#)

And that was very scary at first to navigate and decide, okay, what is a company that will be able to meet all of my needs? At the time, my dad was actually working for CITGO. We met them through the MDA and he was working here at CITGO and he suggested I apply. He's like, "The worst they can do is say no." And so, I did, and I went through the interview process and they hired me in the corporate communications department, and I've been here ever since.

[19:10](#)

I'm very happy with my career path. I proudly say I've had one and only job and I love it here. I love what I get to do. I love the growth that I've been able to experience. It's such a weird experience because of all the connections and everything throughout my life with MDA and all of that, but then to also be forging my own path here at CITGO is very nice.

Mindy Henderson:

[19:36](#)

That's wonderful. I love hearing about that. Let's talk about the realities of building a career while living with a disability. And you mentioned some of the fears, if we want to call them that, that you may have had initially. Have you encountered barriers, whether during the hiring process or in the workplace, or maybe even things that you've heard from other community members that they've struggled with that our non-disabled colleagues may never have to think about? And how have those things shaped your experience?

Lauren Martin:

[20:19](#)

I have definitely heard things from friends and such who have either similar or completely different disabilities than my own, and their job searches and how when they would apply for a job and go to interview, they couldn't get in the building because it wasn't accessible, or it really seemed like they were being interviewed because they had a disability, not because they were looking for the skillset that person had. And those are the things that I always had in the back of my mind when I started my career journey and interviewing and applying places. Is the company going to see me for me or are they just going to see the wheelchair and think, "What are we going to need to do to help her?" And that's terrifying.

[21:11](#)

Luckily, my experience, my one and only experience here at CITGO has been the complete opposite of that. It was a wonderful hiring experience. And I really do think that is because of the connection, the 40-year connection they've had with MDA. This company, they are very well aware of disabilities and people living with disabilities and the needs and

value that we bring. I've been very lucky. I have not experienced anything that was off-putting, but I've definitely heard some things, and I count myself as lucky for not having had to experience those.

Mindy Henderson: [21:49](#)

Yeah, it's interesting. Did you do a lot of interviewing before landing ultimately at CITGO?

Lauren Martin: [21:57](#)

I did a few interviews and they were all very accommodating. I'm trying to remember if I would ... I don't think I always disclosed in my application or anything that I was in a wheelchair. Sometimes it would be a surprise when I would meet them in person and stuff, and they were always very gracious. Usually interviews would be conducted in conference rooms and stuff, and so they would help me if I needed things moved or whatever. And I did not have a moment where I felt like they were looking at my disability and not me. And so, I definitely count myself as someone lucky that they were really looking at Lauren, the professional, and not the disability that she has.

Mindy Henderson: [22:46](#)

That's really great. What I was going to say a minute ago is I actually found myself ... I had a 20-year career in high-tech before what I'm doing now, which I love, this is my dream job. I've never been happier. After when I left the high-tech world, there was a company that I was working for was acquired and jobs were eliminated and all of that. And I found myself for the first time in a really long time job hunting, and with 20 years of experience, I thought, no problem, I'm going to be onto my next job in a month or whatever.

[23:29](#)

And I had this ridiculous spreadsheet where I tracked every ... Because I was casting a really wide net and I was trying to stay organized, and I think it was something like 365 jobs that I applied for in 10 months, and it was a very mixed bag of experiences. And I got to the point where I really likened job hunting to dating. It felt very, very similar. It was interesting because you mentioned disclosing, and I got to the point where I would find, and everybody has to decide for themselves, you certainly don't have to disclose a disability, but I got to the point where almost like dating and the dating profiles where do you put your wheelchair in the photo or not on your profile?

[24:29](#)

And I would look for opportunities to either ask about accessible parking or something just to tip them off, because I got to the point where I was no longer interested in having my time wasted. And so, I tried personally to let people know, but it's such a sticky wicket. It's so hard to know how to handle it.

And for anybody out there that's going through this right now, I just want people to know that we see you because-

Lauren Martin: [25:09](#)

Absolutely.

Mindy Henderson: [25:10](#)

... the things that we have to consider and worry about, you worry enough just looking for a job, but there's so much additional stuff on top of it. On the flip side though, it sounds like you've had an amazing experience at CITGO. Can you share any experiences when CITGO as a company, your manager or a colleague really got inclusion right, and what did they do that made a meaningful difference to you? Because I know there are so many employers out there that want to be more inclusive, but they just don't know what to do.

Lauren Martin: [25:52](#)

I have a great example for this, and it's usually because I get asked this quite often, "Have you experienced any barriers at your workplace? If so, how have they met your needs and stuff?" At our office here in Houston, we have a parking garage connected to our building, our office building, and to go from the parking garage to the building, there was these two sets of really heavy doors to go through, and they were manual doors. You had to pull them open. When I first got here, that's how the setup was.

[26:24](#)

Between my dad who was still working here, he's since retired, he retired this year from CITGO, we brought that up to management and HR and said, "Hey, these doors, they're not the best. They're hard for me to get through. They're even hard for the average person. If you have a lot of bags in your hand, it's difficult to navigate these doors. Is there a possibility that we could get them changed out?" We were just asking to see what options we had were. And within the next few months, they were changed out to automatic doors. And then about a year or so later, several other doors throughout the building that I didn't necessarily use were changed to automatic or button push doors.

[27:14](#)

And they have found that a huge improvement, not just for me, but everybody, because like I said, you may have a lot of bags in your arms, you don't have to worry about pulling open the door anymore. We have people who will have event supplies and stuff, and so they'll be taking them back and forth, and they don't have to worry about that. CITGO is an oil and gas company, so safety is a really big thing for us. It's our number one thing. We want to make sure everybody's really safe, and this has just been another way to not only meet that goal, but also be inclusive.

[27:47](#)

I really appreciated that because there's always that fear when you see something that maybe isn't quite right yet of going to management or going to HR and saying, "Hey, this doesn't work for me. Can we change it?" There's always in the back of your head, "Are they going to say no? Are they going to think I'm asking too much? Are they going to think this is just another expense?" Any one of those things that could happen.

[28:12](#)

And so, I think obviously building modifications really apply to the whole company as a whole. It's not just people with disabilities. They can be such a benefit for everybody. Just being aware of how in other ways that they could be inclusive. I know there are professionals out there who teach classes on inclusivity and will come into a business and give suggestions and stuff. I think that's a really good option for places that maybe aren't quite sure how they can upgrade their environment. I really suggest that.

Mindy Henderson:

[28:49](#)

We talked about the hiring process. Beyond hiring and going through that process, once you get the job, there's this whole idea of belonging and really feeling valued and safe to be who you are every day, which I think is such a critical thing in encouraging people to bring their whole self to work because anytime you feel safe to be your real, your authentic self, you're going to be a stronger performer and bring the pieces of you into your work that make you unique and give you different perspective than your coworkers might have and all of that. Are there things that come to mind that CITGO's done from the belonging perspective to make you feel safe and welcome day in and day out?

Lauren Martin:

[29:58](#)

From day one, I have really felt, and I think I mentioned this earlier, that they have seen Lauren the professional and not Lauren with the disability. And that's been so important because when you meet someone and they're in a wheelchair or something, it's very easy to see that wheelchair and just see them through that lens then, see them through the disability lens. And I have not felt that way. I've really been able to grow my professional skills, experience different things professionally. They meet my needs. They're very aware of what I need. And so, I've been here long enough, we've gotten into a good habit of they know what I need to go to an event or go to a meeting or something like that.

[30:47](#)

And it's already taken care of those needs, which is something that's built over time and it's great. And I wish that for everybody, but that does take time. And it took lots of communication. It took me speaking up for myself and letting

them know what I needed and just going through different experiences. And I think too, the partnership that CITGO and MDA have, it's not just a professional one. We have so many employees here who have children or nieces and nephews with disabilities. It's such a close to home thing. And so, it's almost like a little community of people who understand the disability world. And I think that's really helped with the belonging is there are people here who know what I go through. They experience it or they have family members who experience it. And so, it's really easy to relate on that level. And that's been a great opportunity to have.

Mindy Henderson: [31:54](#)

That's really beautiful. And what's coming to mind for me in listening to you talk about this is it's a two-way street because I think it's unfair to look at an employer and point out what they're doing wrong if we are not communicating our needs, if that makes sense, because nobody's a mind reader. And so, it takes a person being a bit brave and speaking up for themselves and saying what they need, but then it's also the employer who needs to receive that and make good on it so that next time either the same person or somebody else who observed it will feel safe to speak up and know that it's going to be met with compassion. And so, it's a really delicate dance, I think, that both people have to be invested and involved in.

[33:02](#)

When we talk about disability in the workplace, the conversation so often centers around accommodations and accessibility. True inclusion can go deeper than that. If you were going to paint the picture of a genuinely inclusive workplace, what would that look like and feel like to you? Maybe it's CITGO, but what would you describe?

Lauren Martin: [33:34](#)

I think a truly inclusive workplace would be one in which the professional's skills and abilities are what's focused and what's championed and what is the main piece, the main thing, and not maybe what they're not able to do or what they're ... I don't want to say what they're lacking because it's not that you're lacking anything, but what makes you different from somebody else. When I first started here, I didn't know what to expect. I didn't know if they were going to have these expectations that because I have a physical disability, I wouldn't be able to do things. Would they be scared to include me in meetings, conversations, things like that? And that came to be a fear that never came true.

[34:32](#)

I've had wonderful managers at my time here and they have always seen Lauren, the communication specialist. They have always felt comfortable to come to me and ask me about how

should we tackle this press release or how should we tackle this company report? I've never felt left out of any conversations at all because of my disability, which I think is a really important thing. Don't just assume because they have a disability or something, they can't take part in the conversation. But that's really the thing. It's focusing on the skills and what that person can bring to the table professionally and not focusing on maybe how they're different physically.

Mindy Henderson: [35:19](#)

Yeah, I love that. And I would add to that, I think I get that business is business.

Lauren Martin: [35:19](#)

Of course.

Mindy Henderson: [35:28](#)

And a company exists to make a profit and that's great. There's nothing wrong with that. But I think any time a company, an employer can see the human people behind the work that everyone's doing all day every day, I think that's what creates the safety and the environment that allows people to say what they need to be able to do their work to the best of their ability. If an employer is willing to listen and provide what a person says they need, I think that's when things like loyalty start to arise. For someone with a neuromuscular condition who's maybe just beginning to think about college or employment, their next step in their career, what advice would you offer? Is there something that you wish you had known when you were starting out?

Lauren Martin: [36:44](#)

High school students who are disabled or not, apply for every scholarship you absolutely can. College, if you decide to pursue it is a very expensive thing.

Mindy Henderson: [36:44](#)

So expensive.

Lauren Martin: [36:57](#)

There's a lot of value in it. I loved my college experience. I wouldn't trade it for the world, but any way that you can lessen that burden, apply for every scholarship. There's so many out there, even if you think you might not be the right fit for it, apply for it. The worst they can do is tell you no. That's always something that I absolutely promote. I was able to apply for enough scholarships to cover my entire college degree, and I wish that for everybody, you've got to follow your own path.

[NEW_PARAGRAPH]I think a lot of students nowadays just automatically assume, "Oh, I have to go to college. I have to earn this degree and then I'll get the entry level job and then I'll work my way up." Maybe not. Everybody's path is different. You may want to go to a trade school or you may want to get on-the-job experience. Don't try to fit yourself

into any one type of mold or any one type of path. You have to figure out what's best for you. Is that going to college? Is that getting a job?

[38:00](#)

And you know what? You're going to make mistakes along the way and that's absolutely okay. You should make mistakes. That is what makes you into the person you're going to be. My company, I would call us mid-sized or so. We have between 3,000 and 4,000 employees total. So, for an oil and gas company, that's on the smaller side to some of the other ones who have thousands and thousands worldwide. But I've really seen that as a benefit. We've been talking about community and belonging and stuff. I think because of the size we are, it's allowed everyone to be really approachable. Our leadership, our CEO, he sits down in the lunchroom and has lunch with everybody.

[38:42](#)

And that is what builds that community is having that accessibility to people and being able to talk to them like a human being and not just the CEO or something of a company is so important. So, as you're searching for a job, I would definitely pay attention to the size of the company. I think if you can find one that's on the smaller side, I think I recommend that. I have had good experience with that. I think that's a good way to go to get your feet wet. And it would be a good opportunity to learn how to use your voice and learn how to speak up for yourself because they're going to be much more family oriented. The community's going to be more tight-knit. You're not just going to be a number at the company.

Mindy Henderson:

[39:35](#)

So true, so true. And I'm going to say it one more time for the people in the back because I loved what you said, particularly about forging your own path. My journey has been my journey and it's been great, but one thing that I don't think I had ever been told was that my path didn't have to look like anybody else's, and I don't have to necessarily be a carbon copy of anyone else's career, education, any of it. There are so many ways to get what you want in life and to land a career that you love and you're proud of and all of that. So, I really loved that you said that especially.

Lauren Martin:

[40:28](#)

If someone who's listening takes just one piece of advice away, it would be that. I think between the media, between your school, even sometimes parents, you have so many forces of kids or young professionals have so many voices coming at them and telling them how they should be, what they should do, what their career path should look like. And it's really no one's decision but your own. And it's tough. I'm not saying it's

not tough. There's going to be times where you may question, did I make the right decision? Did I do the right thing? But that's when you know you're doing the right thing is when you're questioning it because you're trying something that's maybe a little scary or you're doing something different from the rest of your friend group. And so, just don't compare yourself to anybody else. It's so important.

Mindy Henderson: [41:27](#)

Yeah, I love it, I love it. And that was great advice. I'd love to close by looking at the bigger picture and offering one final piece of advice. If you could change one thing about the way employers approach hiring, supporting, or advancing employees with disabilities, what would it be and why?

Lauren Martin: [41:57](#)

Don't be reactive. It's very easy to be a company who maybe has never had an employee with a disability, and so they maybe don't understand what kind of accommodations their building may need to make or how they may need to, what kind of services like giving people extra time on projects or adjusting desk spaces or stuff like that. They may not understand fully what all that entails.

[42:33](#)

I had mentioned there's people out there who will come in and review your work environment and give suggestions on how to be more inclusive and how to make changes that are not only good for people with disabilities, but for your entire company as a whole. Being reactive, it's something we all end up doing, but if you can just get ahead of it and just be prepared for when you will have someone with a disability to come in and work at your place, work at your company, I think that's so important.

[43:13](#)

Conversation. I think some, if not most, I'm sure most employers are scared to ask questions. And I know there's certain rules and regulations and stuff that they have to follow, but I have found for me that having an open conversation with my manager or with HR or something, it has always been so productive because they get a better understanding of what I need and how they can help me. And so, it may need to start out as you going to the person with the disability and saying, "Hey, we just want to have a conversation about how we can meet your needs better," but don't be afraid to have those conversations. They're tough, they can be scary, and not everything will change overnight, but they're so important.

Mindy Henderson: [44:07](#)

So good. Spoken like a professional communicator. I love that. I think that that's fantastic advice. And I just can't thank you enough for taking a little bit of time out of your day to spend with me and to share your own experiences and your journey

and your wisdom. I know that it's going to be helpful to a lot of people who are listening.

Lauren Martin: [44:35](#)

Thank you so much, Mindy. I really appreciate your time and this great conversation. I've loved it. It's flown by for me, so I enjoyed it.

Mindy Henderson: [44:43](#)

I know. Me too. I could talk to you for a couple more hours, I'm sure. So, anytime you want to come back, let me know and we will do it again.

Lauren Martin: [44:53](#)

I will. Absolutely.

Mindy Henderson: [44:55](#)

Thanks, Lauren.

Lauren Martin: [44:56](#)

Thank you so much, Mindy.

Mindy Henderson: [44:59](#)

Thank you for listening. For more information about the guests you heard from today, go check them out at mda.org/podcast. And to learn more about the Muscular Dystrophy Association, the services we provide, how you can get involved, and to subscribe to Quest Magazine or to Quest newsletter, please go to mda.org/quest. If you enjoyed this episode, we'd be grateful if you'd leave a review. Go ahead and hit that subscribe button so we can keep bringing you great content and maybe share it with a friend or two. Thanks everyone. Until next time, go be the light we all need in this world.