

Adulting on the Spectrum: Geeking out on ADA policy and how to be a better advocate

Andrew M. Komarow

Welcome to "Adulting on the Spectrum." I am Andrew Komarow, an autistic certified financial planner. I co-run "Adulting on the Spectrum," with Eileen Lamb. Hey Eileen!

Eileen Lamb

Hey Andrew. Hey everyone. I'm Eileen Lamb. I'm an autistic author and photographer from France. I live in Austin, Texas now with my two autistic children. And with Andrew, we run this podcast because we want to highlight real voices of autistic adults and not just inspirational stories. You know, we want to hear from real people talking about their boring life or not boring. We want to give advice to people like us, basically.

Andrew M. Komarow

Today, our guest is Hayley Moss, Haley made international headlines for becoming the first documented openly autistic attorney admitted to the Florida Bar. She received her JD from the University of Miami School of Law in 2018. Graduated from University of Florida in 2015. In addition to being a lawyer, Haley is a neuro-diversity advocate and author, Haley is the author of "Great Minds Think Differently: Neuro-diversity for Lawyers and Other Professionals." And her next book, "The Young Autistic Adult Independent Handbook," will be released in November 2021. She is also the author of "Middle School, The Stuff Nobody Tells You About: A Freshman Survival Guide for College Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders, The Stuff Nobody Tells You About." Haley's work on neurodiversity, autism and disability has been published in The Washington Huffpost, Teen Vogue, Fast Company, among others. She was appointed to the Florida Bar, Young Lawyers, Division Board of Governors, and the Florida Bar Journal Editorial Board. Haley also serves on the constituency board for the University of Miami, Nova Southeastern University Center for Autism and Related disabilities. And if you are looking to have Haley, she needs more things to do to add to her bio. So...

Haley Moss

I'm just tired all the time. And then I would and then every time I listen to someone talk about me like, are we talking about the same person? Because I'm pretty sure I am just the 20-something who has no idea what they're doing.

Eileen Lamb

Hey Haley, thanks for being here today.

Andrew M. Komarow

We're just 30 somethings who have no idea what we're doing for the record and just happen to have a podcast. So, it's all good.

Haley Moss

Exactly. I think that I think that's the really great thing, and that a lot of us don't talk about is there's this kind of expectation that you have to have it together. And every time I see 30 somethings neurotypical or neurodivergent, like they all have it together, they know what they're doing. And then everyone tells me the same thing that they're all basically just three toddlers in a trench coat, and nobody knows what they're doing. And I think we kind of have to make peace with that everyone is trying to kind of figure their way through life. And I think, especially for autistic people, because we're always told, like, you have to hit this magic independence point, you have to do this, you have to hit these like magic milestones. And it's like, that's a load of crap. Because everybody is on their own individual thing. And no one feels like they really know what you're doing.

Eileen Lamb

Yeah, we don't know what we're doing. And sometimes, but that's okay. We wouldn't get we make it work. And I think it's a good thing to normalize. We start our podcast by asking our guests how they like to identify, so pronouns and a person with autism or autistic. So what's your take on all the identity language?

Haley Moss

All right, so identity, so my pronouns are she/her, I also am Jewish, I am a woman and I am autistic. I say that I'm autistic, because I'm proud of it. It's part of who I am. And I can't really take it off or take it with me or set it down and take it to the beach for fun. And if I'm living with autism, in particular, it's a really terrible roommate because it doesn't do the laundry and it doesn't help with the dishes. So I wish I was living with autism, because autism would have maybe been, maybe, probably not, it doesn't have very good executive functioning skills.

Andrew M. Komarow

So yeah, I don't like doing the dishes or the laundry. I actually made a casual day at the office last week for the purpose of because I didn't want to do laundry for white shirts. So, okay, and tell us, so tell us a bit more about your autism diagnosis and journey again, per your via biography, or introduction with a book even on middle school, you were diagnosed at a younger age, and I've been an advocate since at least middle school. Is that correct? Can you tell us more?

Haley Moss

Sure. So I was very lucky, I feel and I like to kind of trickles back and I feel very privileged. I've been diagnosed as a little kid. So I was diagnosed when I was three, and I was nonspeaking. I actually got kicked out of preschool. So my when I was in preschool, I didn't color within the lines. I didn't drink out of a cup properly. So we know how little kids are kind of supposed to drink out of a cup like this. I copied the dog and tried to slurp it like out of the bowl. Preschool is not exactly too thrilled with me. I have lots of really on brand stories about me kind of being a strange kid or a little bit of a terror from childhood. So that's the kind of stuff that led me to get diagnosed. And I realized what a privilege it was, even though yep, as we know, the late 90s were a very different time. So I was diagnosed in

1997. And that was before the big days of everything is on the internet, you can get all the information you want, there's tons of organizations that will connect you and lots of autistic adults you can very easily get information from. So when I was diagnosed, my parents didn't have as much information, they were given kind of a doom and gloom report, as a lot of clinicians tended to do it because their version of autism was very singular of this, you are going to end up in this basically like your life is going to be terrible. And my parents were really big on early intervention. So we did things like floor time, and I got to ride horses, and I always had a lot of adults playing games with me, I was the only kid. So I was very used to having a lot of attention anyway. So I guess that was kind of that journey in getting diagnosed. And kind of a little bit about early intervention. All I know is I was on a happy kid. And people always want to play with me. So I didn't ever think something was really off when I was a little kid. Even when I wouldn't get invited to birthday parties and stuff are excluded socially, my parents always found a way to spin it as like, I was a cool kid, and everyone else was kind of weird. So I kind of had the complete opposite experience. That meant a lot of other folks who are diagnosed later in life, or who just didn't have friends that were super accepting. And I found out I was autistic when I was nine, because my parents decided to compare it to Harry Potter because my special interest at the time was the Harry Potter series, we talked about how different is neither better nor worse. It's just different. And different can be extraordinary. So Harry Potter didn't fit in with the muggles, because he was obviously a wizard. And he didn't quite fit in with the wizards because he had that giant scar on his face. But he was still the hero of the story. And he was so cool. And everyone still loved the series. Like that was kind of what I was given. And I actually got into autism advocacy when I was just about off to go to high school.

Eileen Lamb

What did you do then?

Haley Moss

So I was actually invited to go to the Autism Society of America conference, I agreed to go because it was through the University of Miami. So I met you mentioned that I serve on the board there. And UM actually was some of the folks that originally diagnosed me. So it's like a very full circle thing for me. And they invited me and I'm like, Sure, I'll go do this, I'll do this panel. And it's in Orlando. And when you're like, 13, you want to go because you want to go to Disney World, even when you live in. Look, I live in Florida. I've been to Disney World plenty of times. But I still wanted an excuse to go to Disney World. So I agreed to sit on this panel. And it was all older men, and 13 year old me. And people wanted to hear that 13 year old we had to say and it was very confusing and very baffling. But I met lots of cool people. So I actually was listening to past episodes, and I saw that you had Brigid Rankowski on. Brigid was the first person that I met at the Autism Society of America conference like this is a very small world. And at that conference, I actually got connected with folks at autism, Asperger Publishing, and that is how "Middle School," came to be as well. So that was kind of how I got started in this. I feel like it was by accident, because I never intended to tell people I was autistic. I never planned to make it public part of my life. It just sort of happened that way.

Eileen Lamb

How about college? How was that? When I was in France, I tried college for three years in a row. And I failed. All three years. Not only did I fail, but after amounts of trying to go to college, I just, I quit. So I ended up doing a month, every year and then quitting and doing nothing until the next the next year, because it was just way too overwhelming. And it was France. So there was no accommodation or anything. I didn't even know I was autistic back then which is insane. Looking back. So how was it because you had to be in college for like, what, eight years

Haley Moss

So, I was in undergrad for three. So I was always very good at school. I was not very good at everything else that school was about. So when we say I like I did well in college. Yeah, I had great grades. I did two majors in three years. So I was I was a brain in college that didn't mean that I was good at anything else. I struggled so much with living away from home, I had never even stayed at grandparents house on my own like I had no experience with being away from mom and dad. And in my infinite wisdom, I went to a school with 50,000 people. And I honestly found it incredibly overwhelming as well. And I think I took solace in the fact that I thought school itself was very easy, but I didn't do a good job making friends. I had a horrible freshman roommate, who I will not name for obvious reasons but she she and I did not get along whatsoever and it was a disaster. I moved out and that was the one time I was able to get an accommodation school is to actually move into like a single dorm room and not have a roommate and I haven't had a roommate since that's how much having roommates was soured for me in college. And I actually did my third year from home. So that made it a lot better I did it I was able to finish online because I finished the hard classes anyway and saved all those like basic stuff for before I graduated so that that helped a lot. And then when I went to law school, I went to University of Miami which is closer to my family, it was the right thing for me. Law school is overwhelming. And we can unpack law school all day long, because law schools where I didn't get support from the university, and I was kind of self accommodating the whole way through. And I spent the entire time really thinking I was just lazy and dumb. But I had more support in my personal life, because I wasn't that far from home. I went home or saw my parents nearly every week that I lived less than an hour away from home. So I was always able to go home or, or they come visit me. And my parents would help me with things like cooking or cleaning or just hanging out together. And it was truly a blessing to have that. But I think there's so much of school that's beyond inaccessible. And I really hope that that changes. And it's just frustrating to see, because it's not that, for instance, like you're not smart enough, or you can't handle something like college, it's more of that the support isn't in place, and it takes so much work to even get that support. Or that you have to prove all of this documentation, or you have to be able to navigate some system that isn't designed with you in mind in the first place.

Eileen Lamb

I think that's amazing. Because when I was in France, I lived a five minute walk from the university college and I still couldn't do it. You know, you see you were seeing your parents once a week. I mean, that's not a lot. I mean, I know you know, considering college, it feels like a lot of for most kids, but like to me that feels not like a lot. And then I ended up coming here in the US far away from my family. And I actually did amazing just because the people here were so much more open minded. Like being weird. I feel like you can be weird here.

Haley Moss

Really, because I don't really think people I always think people are not that open minded. And sometimes I wonder if it's even just the culture of where in the US we live. Because yeah, I think Miami people generally speaking, I think a lot of Miamians are very rude. And they're not that accepting. I think Miami is its own kind of ecosystem there.

Eileen Lamb

I agree. And I'm lucky I'm in Austin. And Austin is also its own thing in Texas. Like Texas isn't great. But Austin is amazing. And so accepting of everybody. Yeah.

Andrew M. Komarow

And let's not even get me started on how I feel about Connecticut. But Connecticut's great, sarcasm.

Haley Moss

Thank you for the sarcasm warning. I would probably I would have probably bought it. See Florida, Florida is its own world anyway. But Miami is its own world within Florida.

Andrew M. Komarow

Yeah. Now in Connecticut, you can get anywhere within an hour. So when someone's just like where Connecticut, it's like okay, well, how do you know someone in Connecticut? You know, cause people always say where in Connecticut? Um, so anyway. Um, so how do you so it sounds like your parents were really supportive of you from a young age? And how do you feel about your parents, but how they they raised you, you mentioned that you're Jewish, as well as I am. And just in general, I find that the culture of just like so much family and social and food and just also how'd you feel? What sounds like they were very supportive of you, how do you think they feel about where you are now as well.

Haley Moss

So we actually have a very small family. So contrary to what you're saying, we were very insular. So a lot of our family was estranged or not as understanding and it was most a lot of the times it was the three of us and a couple other relatives. But we didn't always just like get together Thanksgiving or major holidays. So it was always kind of small and navigating that but I do think

Andrew M. Komarow

I said, are they adopting? (laughs)

Haley Moss

No, oh, no. My mom wants, my mom wants another dog, though. So she's really hoping to get another standard poodle in the near future, we lost our big guy back at Thanksgiving, and she's a wreck without having a dog around. So we would, we would like to have another family dog again. So that's probably the closest to adoption we're gonna get, but my parents are seriously the best. So I

know, you probably hear all sorts of different stories about parents, but I am one of those people who thinks that my parents did it as well as they could. And in many times, I think they were ahead of their time. So we talk a lot about parenting with acceptance. And I actually had this conversation with my mom the other day is because she was probably she was actually talking to me about neurodiversity and stuff. And she's like, this is really cool. And I'm like, you know, this is stuff you've been doing, you were always beyond accepting of me, and encouraging me to follow and harness my strengths. Like, even if you didn't have the vocabulary of what we consider social justice, or movement work, or whatever it might be. And I didn't mean that you didn't understand it. And she didn't. And she really just appreciate that. Because even looking at history, like a lot of these terms, a lot of the terminology that we use now and a lot of the concepts that we have now, didn't exist in the late 90s. And she's like, what we did the best of what we could and I'm like, Yeah, but you I think you did it, right. You stuck to things that you knew I would enjoy, you would try things even if I didn't enjoy them. We tried to get me to do sports, and it didn't go well. And instead of forcing me to stay in sports, we just pivoted to something else. Like my parents were very supportive and honestly, they're very, very proud. And sometimes I think I think this goes for a lot of us I kind of have this like perfectionism thing at times and I feel like I'm not going to be enough. And my parents are exactly the kind of people who will reassure me that I am more than enough. And I don't think that deep down they wish they had a different kid. I think that my parents were the perfect people for me. And I think, looking back, the only thing that I guess that would have been cool is if they had autistic friends, but I think that was kind of like some far fetched like weird dream of mine, because then it would have been cool to be like, okay, as a little kid, when you first find out about something that's very foreign to you beyond the Baby Sitters Club books, and like after school special type stuff, it would have been cool to have an actual human being that you knew or that they knew to attach it to and be like, oh, okay, yeah, kind of like their friend so-and-so. So no big deal. But I don't fault them for that. I just think that would have been kind of a cool bonus feature.

Eileen Lamb

So you were lucky to have super supportive, supportive parents? I think most parents are very supportive of their children. And it really makes me sad to see what's happening on on social media. I know we don't, we don't agree on everything. And you've published articles in the past. So you think parents shouldn't talk about their children online?

Haley Moss

I don't I don't necessarily believe that. I think there's a balance between privacy and exploitation. That's kind of where I stand. There's just a balance of what can we share without jeopardizing somebody's privacy? I think that's just how I see it just kind of want to clarify that.

Eileen Lamb

And I just don't see a lot of like, the really bad things being talked about on social media by parents, a lot of the time the parents who are being attacked, are sharing things that are so normal and very respectful. And it just really, really saddens me to see the bullying and harassment that is going on in the neurodiversity movement. And I've never seen you do any of that. Let's make this clear. But I know

you're also an advocate for the neurodiversity movement. And I want to know where you stand on that with the the ways it treats parents, how did you feel about supporting a movement, but also, as, you know, issues and problems in the way they treat other people?

Haley Moss

So I think every movement, every group, I think everything kind of comes with flaws, I think that it's hard to assign that to an entire movement, rather than just a bunch of individuals who are acting out for whatever their reason is. Maybe they think that parents are the enemy, because they had a difficult relationship with their parents. Maybe they have nothing better to do, or they have their own self esteem issues. I think a lot of it is individuals who want to latch on to something, and that hurt people hurt people. I think the majority of parents who are seeking support on the internet, or who are looking to learn from autistic adults, they're coming from a good place. They want to understand their kid, they want access to information, they want to know something they might be looking for hope they might be looking for support, they might be looking for all sorts of things. And I think that it's really important that no matter how you feel about causes or different therapies or different interventions, I think that it's really important that we listen. And that we understand that people oftentimes are coming from places where they don't have the same knowledge or information that we do. And it's important to understand that we're able to help people. That's why all of us do this advocacy work, if that's what we want to call it is we're doing it because we care about kids, we care about adults, and we want them to have better than we do as adults that we wanted them had better than we might have had when we were kids. So I think that's kind of how I see it.

Eileen Lamb

I just don't call it advocacy one day attack parents online, especially since a lot of the people who do that I've only done that, like let's talk about ABA for instance, and to call parents who expressed sadness about their kids diagnosis, martyr, mattea, martyr moms, and you know, posting memes shaming them for, you know, just saying autism is not always a gift for everyone. It can be for some people. But it's not for everyone. And the spectrum is so broad, and no one can speak for an entire community. So yeah, it's great to listen to the experience of other people on the spectrum, but their experience is not gonna be the same experience as my child or my experience or the kid next door. It's so different.

Haley Moss

Everybody's experience is different. And I think that no matter where you're coming from, I think bullying absolutely needs to be condemned, no matter who the bully is, whether they're neurotypical neurodivergent, whatever, race, ethnicity, other identities I hold, I think no matter what bullies have no place anywhere, in these movements. And I think it's an I also kind of come from places, why are these people doing this? Like, they're not just attacking parents, for the usually just to be trolls, they're usually just hurt people that have their own trauma. And they're unfairly loading and unloading it on people who don't deserve it and who just want support or information. There is grief. There are people who ought they don't feel that autism is a gift. And there are people who think that it's both a gift and a disability. And everyone agrees that autism is a disability. I don't think there's any question there.

Eileen Lamb

Oh, there is a question. I don't have any comments on it. I mean, I can send you a screenshot after the interview. People saying that not a disability because well first of all, there is the social model and the other model I don't even know what it's called...

Haley Moss

The medical model. So I was actually a disability minor in college so you can both not are not incompatible with each other, which is, I think the social model is a little too idealistic. And the medical model is too pragmatic. So there's always something kind of in the middle of both that makes them work. Like the social model, even in a perfect world, I would still be disabled by autism, the world isn't ever going to be this, the world is never going to be this magical, sensory friendly place for everybody's understanding, I will still struggle with certain independent living skills, no matter how accepting and sensory friendly the world becomes. There are certain things that will always be hard for me, there's always going to be a communication gap between me and neurotypical people, it just kind of is that way. And the same goes even for people who have physical disabilities is that even if everything is perfectly accessible, their bodies might still behave differently, yes, that should be accepted. And those barriers to access shouldn't be there, because of society, but there's still stuff they're going to struggle with anyway. And that they might want to alleviate some of those symptoms, like I would be totally fine if we had cures for things like anxiety, or chronic pain or any of that stuff. So I think that there's somewhere in the middle of those models that things really kind of do work, I think that we have to avoid being overly basically stigmatizing and pathologizing things but also realizing that just sticking straight to a social model is almost too idealistic. And it's not. It's just not realistic that we're gonna live in this perfect accepting, sensory, friendly, accessible world, even though I would love to see it. I just don't think it's realistic, that there's still things that will be disabling no matter what.

Eileen Lamb

Not only that, but yeah, like for someone like my child who can't communicate beyond like, I want water, I want cookie, even if everyone is accepting of that, like what happens when he can't tell me if he's hurting? For instance, what happens there, nothing is gonna change just because everyone is accepting Oh, you're hurting? We don't know where I'm so sorry. That's not gonna be helpful.

Haley Moss

So that doesn't help you and it doesn't help your child.

Eileen Lamb

No, it doesn't. Yeah. And oh hey Andrew,

Andrew M. Komarow

Oh, hey, hi. No, it actually and no, but seriously the other thing, too, from like a legal point of view. And I've been thinking about this because I do a lot from my world, there's so many different definitions of

disability, right? So in the United States, for the most part, being disabled is usually defined by the ability not to do you know, substantial gainful employment, that that's the definition that's attached to most services support, but having a disability, right, according to the ADA is again, another definition. And even then, when you say you're disabled in a non-work environment, there's like six different definitions of being disabled, even from like a, you know, a not being able to work perspective. So I'm also afraid of us taking it too far too. Well, that's how we're defining a lot of the protections that we need in that exist. Yeah. So

Haley Moss

Disability is really complicated, because it's such a broad umbrella. But I do think the ADA definition, I know, they expanded it to be a little bit more inclusive, because in under the 1990 definition, and I actually have done a lot of legal research, and I've read a lot of court holdings, but there were times at social things that were seen as more social impairments and things like autism didn't always get covered. Under the ADA, there was like not disabled enough type thing going on, which is what happened with those 2008 amendments to the ADA that made sure that we had all of these other conditions that were basically covered. So the ADA definition if you're listening and you aren't really familiar, the ADA defines disability is a condition that basically limits substantially limits one or more major life activity. And major life activities could be pretty broad category to be like eating, drinking, thinking, sleeping, concentrating, moving, walking, all sorts of stuff. So that's how you got a lot of different conditions, whether it's chronic pain and physical disabilities, mobility disabilities, we have things like autism, ADHD, learning disabilities, etc, etc, they all get covered, even chronic conditions and things like cancer, heart disease, etc, get covered under the ADA. So that's kind of something that's really important is disability is not exactly, you know, a monolith. It's a really big community, and it's the only minority or it's the only minority group, if you have the pleasure of living a long time that you probably will join in your life. Chances are we all if you're if you're if you're fortunate enough to live a long life, you will probably experience some form of disability.

Eileen Lamb

Yeah. Oh, and something else. I think disability is not a dirty word.

Haley Moss

It's not.

Eileen Lamb

I think people don't like like saying I'm disabled or, but it's okay. I mean, we should like drag this stigma around the word and I think that would fix a lot of the issues around people saying that autism is not a disability. It also that's confusing to me yeah I am going back on that, but why? How can autism not be a disability because to be diagnosed with autism, it needs to be disabling to you you know, else you don't meet criteria for diagnosis. So it's really confusing to me how people would say that autism is not a disability for them. I mean, I respect it as long as they don't say Autism is not a disability at all, if they say it's not a disability for me, I'm okay with it even though it still confuses me. Because if it's not, then why are you autistic? You know, because it is civic.

Haley Moss

I think I think that makes a lot of sense. And I think for a lot of people who say it's not a disability for them, I think that kind of comes from this idea of like internalized ableism. and kind of see the messaging surrounding autism as they think of it as this very severely disabling, limiting thing. And they go, well, that's not my experience, therefore, I'm not disabled. Which is complete BS, honestly, is, I think that a lot of people are afraid of disability and the idea of being called disabled. Because think about the messaging we're giving about disability from the time we're a little kids, how many times have you seen someone in a wheelchair when you were little? Or you saw some mobility aids and your parents told you like, Don't stare? Don't ask questions. That's weird. That's impolite. We're already told from the get go disability is bad. Not that it's just the norm. Not that it's just a normal part of existing. People's bodies don't always work the way we want them to.

Andrew M. Komarow

And then we were talking a bit before Haley about again, conservatorship, guardianship, and just because you know, the word autism is used, right? That it's assumed that Oh, you're 18. Okay, well, you can't make decisions. And and, you know, I talked to a lot of parents, oftentimes, they come to us when they're turning 18. And it's well, well, at 18, did you know exactly what you were going to be? Did you know exactly what you wanted to do? Were you, you know, completely perfect and ready to be independent at 18. And

Haley Moss

No, I didn't even know how to do. I got to college, and I didn't even know how to do laundry. I had no idea where you

Andrew M. Komarow

That's why you went to your parents house once a week, right? (laughs)

Haley Moss

No, no. I didn't get to go to my parents to law school. That was three years later. When I was an undergrad, I remember doing laundry in the dorms. And I put everything in the dryer first, but I didn't know which was the washer, and which was the dryer, because they look nothing like the washer and dryer that we had at home. Therefore I had no clue which was which. And then I walked out with a bunch of warm, soapy clothes. And I was like, oh.

Eileen Lamb

Cool.

Haley Moss

Great. That was a waste of 50 cents. I just felt so naive, like, and then I was like, oh, it's because it's not the same maker model as the washer dryer at home, obviously. Because you're used to the sameness and routine. And my routine of doing laundry with quarters and in dorms, these really

terrible machines that were super slow. That wasn't what I knew. At 18 year old me did not know how to do anything on her own and probably had no business doing anything on her own.

Eileen Lamb

I get that same way. I don't go to the gas station. I mean, if I don't go to the same gas station, I was just thinking about it. It drives me crazy. I did it last week. And of course it went wrong. I don't know what I did my car. But I got a message on the screen that I needed to go inside. I was like.. Oh my god. Now I'm gonna have to talk to a real person and like, oh,

Haley Moss

Yeah, like talking to people is like the scariest thing. I get scared when I have to call customer service agents. I think they're gonna hate me right away.

Eileen Lamb

Yeah, same. And especially because I have an accent. And it's hard sometimes for people to understand me. And it just like makes my anxiety higher. It makes it harder for me to like get words out and just like a vicious circle.

Haley Moss

See, I'm, I'm actually the opposite. So I will actually I know that sounds bad. And I apologize for anyone working at Comcast who's listening right now. But I will I will take my anger frustration out on customer service. And I will offer to lower people's like cable bills and Comcast bills, you know, for like for fun. And Eileen like I've offered your like call T-Mobile for me, right? I'm like, Yes, I love that. Right. I love like getting the deal and calling them. And the nice part too is is that there's no you know, venue. I never have to speak to them again. Like like, it kind of doesn't matter. I mean, AT&T probably has the file on me, I'm sure. But I don't know if T-Mobile does yet. And but just like yeah, doing that is actually something I very much enjoy. You're so brave. I'm scared to talk to the person when I order like clothes, and then it goes on sale like a day later. I'm so scared when I ask for a price adjustment.

Andrew M. Komarow

Oh, see, I'm really scared to do that.

Haley Moss

Because I do it all the time. It is usually like big chains. It's a little bit like one of those big mall stores. I'm like they can afford to toss me the \$6 refund. And I'm so scared to call them and I'll be telling my friends or my family and they'll be like, Haley you were a litigator you're trained as a litigator you should not have a problem litigating the customer service and like nope, nope, can't do it.

Andrew M. Komarow

So, but yeah, I know I very much do do enjoy doing that and just I maybe it's only certain though like I don't know, I'd probably let the \$6 just go for like clothes but maybe it's because I like technology and computers. I think when we're talking about one of our special interest things like overwhelm one of

mine technologies I think with the internet, because like I won't call it like a dinner order or anything like that but I will call a cable or phone call. You know, I have no problem, although I will say I get called ma'am. So a quite a bit. I'm really, yes. And apparently I sound like a like a very elderly woman over the phone. And so the plus upside to that though is I am able to you know, I just stopped correcting them at this point, right?

Haley Moss

It's just, you just say do you just introduce yourself as Andy because it's a little bit more ambiguous on gender as of a name than Andrew?

Andrew M. Komarow

You know what, I've literally never thought of that. I am going to start doing that. Thank you so much that will make my life so much easier. Yeah,

Haley Moss

I went I went to law school. I knew lots of Andreas who would do it because it would make them look more powerful in filings.

Andrew M. Komarow

I, that is brilliant. Thank you so much for that. I appreciate that. So although if I am very mad at them, then I will point it out. And then they'll feel really bad about it. And I mean, I'll even go as far to describe the anatomy I have vs. the anatomy they don't think I have. And then I usually get a deal. But I try not to that usually that's when

Haley Moss

They're having a hard time to. See my thing is I get really nervous. And my voice goes up like three octaves. And I sound like I'm a little kid or a teenager. So they already assume that I'm young, and they're willing to do things because they think I'm like, 15. I'll be like, Hi. Yeah. Yeah, and I get so nervous. And I my voice goes high, so they just assume I'm young.

Eileen Lamb

So just bonded over this. Great. Yeah,

Andrew M. Komarow

See, there we go.

Haley Moss

Anxiety is real. Yeah. Especially that social anxiety like dealing, it's easier for me to deal with a large audience or a group of people. Then dealing with that perfect stranger.

Andrew M. Komarow

But if you're but if you're talking with a stranger about the law and being a lawyer, right,

Haley Moss

That's much easier.

Andrew M. Komarow

That is much different. And leading into a question. If you are not a lawyer, what would you be doing? If you were not a lawyer?

Haley Moss

If I didn't go to law school, I think I probably would have wanted to be a journalist.

Andrew M. Komarow

Okay.

Haley Moss

I think I would have still wanted to ask people questions. I think I always wanted, I knew I always wanted to write. I feel like that would have been kind of that natural fit. And also, some and I still think about this a lot because a lot of lawyers are journalists anyway. So I get to write for all sorts of cool people. I also have interviewed people and some of my favorite TV journalists, because I'm also one of those nerds who watches like daytime television. So a lot of the cool people on daytime are lawyers who became like TV journalists and broadcasters felt like maybe that's what I'd be doing. I think it'd be very cool to be like a broadcaster, or to be some kind of print journalist. I don't know. I could see that though.

Eileen Lamb

Sounds cool. I want it to be a journalist to when I was I was a kid because I like writing, not like a journalist that has to talk to people, but like a writer. You kind of become famous for being an artistic lawyer. How has this changed you? Do you do you wish you could go back and just be a lawyer who happens to have autism? Or how is that for you?

Haley Moss

Yes, and no. So the cool thing is what happened really kind of I feel like changed our profession, for the better. So looking back, my profession never talked about mental health very well. We've always been behind the eight ball and everything. And I say this in the nicest way possible. But lawyers were slow on diversity and inclusion. We're slow on technology. We've got opinions from the Florida Bar back, like, I think maybe less than 10 years ago, when My Space was very out of favor telling lawyers how to regulate their My Space presence. Like that's how slow we are adopting anything. So when it comes to mental health, and anything in that kind of disability stigma, lawyers are really, really bad. Like, we you have to disclose if you who have received treatment for mental health and mental illness on bar applications, they can discriminate against you with this whole big thing. So we're very bad about talking about anything in this realm. Thankfully, that's actually kind of

Andrew M. Komarow

What's the logic behind needing to disclose that on a bar application?

Haley Moss

They're making sure that you are fit to practice law, that you don't have an impairment that would make you unfit to practice. I, a lot of the questioning if you asked me is discriminatory under the ADA, there's lots of challenges to it, and nearly any state bar that still has mental health questions, most of them still do. And after several findings, the National Conference of Bar Examiners basically gave them all sample language to make them ask these questions. That's like not discriminatory, but it kind of is they're really going after people with more severe mental illnesses to question their competence and capacity to practice. I don't agree with it. That's a whole other can of worms. But we're just very bad about these conversations. And I think for me, it was really great being able to open that conversation because all of a sudden, we're doing different like legal education. Surrounding neurodiversity, we're having panels. There's other lawyers and law students who come are in law school now or who are later in their career who are more willing to disclose and share. And I think it's a really necessary change, kind of like, following the steps of the tech sector, honestly. But I do think in my career, it wouldn't. In a lot of ways, I think that if I wasn't openly autistic, because of what I've done for the majority of my life, I would have never disclosed. And I say this, because I know how people act. I know that there's lots of times it would have been against me. And I know even in my first legal job, that I would be given a lot more technical tasks, because it was assumed that I followed the stereotypes of autism that I was this pattern seeking technology wizard. And so I was talking about it with a group of lawyers not too long ago, and I'm like, oh, you were just getting typical first year stuff. And I was like, No, because the other first years in my office, were getting really substantive stuff. They were doing the deep things. They were doing the deep dives, and I was getting this technical stuff, look for the patterns in discovery, go through millions of documents, find some patterns, run the firm website as well. And I'm like, No, they just assumed it was a technology, computer genius. I mean, and I spent so much of my early career, trying to live up to that, because I didn't want to burst their bubble. And when you're an autistic person with a job and you don't work for yourself, you really don't want to lose that you want them to like you. You are, there's so much messaging surrounding employment, that you're lucky to have a job in the first place. So you're kind of just trying to be this thing, even though you're not you're overcompensating and masking in the weirdest way possible, of basically trying to seem like you match every autism stereotype at the same time. So I think I would have avoided that had I never disclosed or just been just been awarded with autism, as you're killing it. I think I would have been kind of in a different place. But I don't regret it. I think that in a lot of ways, it has helped both the Florida Bar and the lawyer nationally, actually. So I do get to serve on the Florida Bars, Young lawyers, Division Board of Governors. So it's the first time a lot of them have addressed disability issues more broadly, that we've actually talked about it, I get to yell at them about accessibility every once in a while. We actually are doing neurodiversity programming, so we can actually support our colleagues who might have other mental health conditions, ADHD, learning disabilities, etc. and autism, of course, as well, like, we're just, I think that it was a necessary conversation. I don't know. Looking back, I am glad that I was able to help open that conversation. I don't I think this is how it was meant to be. But I think if I was never open, it never would have went

down this way. And I'm sure someone else would have happily done it. But I'm grateful to have had the platform that I did.

Andrew M. Komarow

I noticed that beyond the tech sector, one of them that's is finance, which is so broad that I'm in and you know, that seems to be a little bit slower, but it seems to be like I really see a lot more, you know, lawyers seem to graduate to like, even liking law, even if they're not lawyers, right. So I remember just like saying what I like who I really like, reading contracts, right? I know, there's a million different types of law. And I know I leaned probably looking at me having seen my writing, you know, before it's edited, right, me like contract writing? No, but I really like it. And so but and I'm, and I'm told that there's a certain part of it, where I think a higher percentage of the neurodivergent population, it, you know, is more fit for, again, all different aspects of, you know, law, legal work attorneys, I don't have anything great to support that. And there seems to be a lot of people embracing a lot of the work you're doing. My best friend is a neurodivergent attorney as well. So I may just have a bias there. But why do you, why do you think that is? Even if it's not the stereotypical strengths? As you mentioned, there are still strengths, right? Diversity with the law.

Haley Moss

So the dean of my law school, who was not the dean when I was there, but the dean, the current dean, we had a conversation about this several months ago. And he said, exactly, probably the best way to ever describe this is like law is the software of society. He's like, in the way, he said that if just laws of software society like, that makes a lot of sense, because you know, there's a lot of folks on the spectrum who gravitate towards that idea of justice and fairness and all that stuff. And even just, there's lots of rules, it's usually pretty hard to pass. Sometimes, if you're really aggressive, and you have a good idea. You can get to change the rules. There's a lot of writing, there's a lot of you can be as involved with people as you want and be a litigator, you could be a transactional attorney and never see people and just do contracts and stuff in deals all day. That it's such a broad field, really, that there's kind of something for anyone. And I think what makes neurodiversity so great in law and why a lot of neurodivergent people do gravitate to it is it's just a different way of problem solving, is that your brain doesn't see things the same way that everybody else does. And sometimes and sometimes that's exactly what clients need. They need something, someone who's going to think about their problems a little bit differently. And not just assume it's one cut and dry solution because off Sometimes it's not.

Andrew M. Komarow

But I find that also individual autistic individuals can also really not like when rules aren't being followed. And what I find with the law,

Haley Moss

And you persuade the court to make them follow the rules?

Andrew M. Komarow

Well, yes, but that at the same time to just because something's a law doesn't mean like it's followed, right. And there's so much more to well, I guess, different parts of the law than what's actually the law, if that makes sense?

Haley Moss

And not all laws are good laws.

Andrew M. Komarow

Yeah, exactly. So do you struggle with that? Or do you know others who do or,

Haley Moss

I mean, a little bit of everything. There's this desire to follow rules. And then when the rules are really unfair, there's a desire to break them and change them, you kind of see, I kind of love that and that our people are the first ones we're going to be like, these are really shitty rules, that these that this is complete crap, let's do what we can. And it's just so exciting to see. And I think that passion really does matter. And especially once you get past those initial, like barriers to entry in this profession, and I think that there's way too much gatekeeping who is and who isn't going to be a good lawyer anyway. Like, I don't think passing the bar exam makes anyone a good lawyer, I, if you had to practice law, the way that you take the bar exam, every single person would be convicted of malpractice.

Eileen Lamb

Do you practice law right now?

Haley Moss

I'm not practicing right now. I actually left my last practice in December 2019, I got to start my own business. I mostly do consulting. I get to geek out about ADA and policy for big companies and other stuff, too. And I get to educate people, I got to teach a college class last semester, and I'm teaching again next semester, too. So I'm, I'm kind of just get to be a big nerd about all this kinds of disability stuff. And but I still say very lawyer involved, because I think lawyers are pretty cool people. Just the job and culture surrounding firm life kind of isn't always the best.

Eileen Lamb

Sure, sometimes, I guess

Haley Moss

The firm culture is wild.

Eileen Lamb

Yeah. I don't know I, for me, lawyers is such a hard job because you, you can have to protect people who you don't really want to, you know, protect, if that makes sense. And that's something that I feel like I would have such a hard time doing like, you know, having to pretend that this person is a good

person. And I don't know, maybe I get that from movies. And I haven't really seen it in real life. But I know it's true. Like sometimes they can assign you like lawyers to get on. And

Haley Moss

Yeah, that's usually public defenders. So if you can't, if you're like, in criminal and you can't afford an attorney, that you'll get appointed one from the government. Yeah, I actually actually wanted so I actually very briefly wanted to be a public defender. And usually, whenever you tell people that you want to be a criminal defense attorney for two seconds, or that you want to be a public defender, everybody's first question is how can you possibly defend someone who like, maybe killed somebody? Yeah. And the honest thing about public defenders, that it's not whether or not the person's guilty, it's whether or not their rights were violated. So whether the cops did like an illegal search on their property, maybe there's something that can be excluded. So even when you go to trial, you don't get the full picture of the evidence, because maybe there was something that was obtained illegally and it got caused. It's such a it's so wild. This is why I'm never gonna serve on a jury. I know so much. But I think that it's really about protecting someone's rights. And I think in a lot of ways public defense, is really that you're protecting you're trying to advocate for the underdog. So I guess that's kind of how I see it is you're seeing someone who usually wouldn't have access to any kind of legal services, they might have done something wrong, or they might not have you don't really know. And it you honestly, I don't think that's kind of what matters is whether or not they did it. I think what matters is is this person getting their constitutional right to an attorney? Are they getting a fair shot in their day in court? I think that's kind of the mindset you have to have. I think you have to almost put those feelings aside, but I was not a public defender. But I feel like that's kind of the only way I think I would have been able to rationally approach it.

Andrew M. Komarow

Yeah, that I will never get to serve on a jury because I am a libertarian, all for jury nullification. So if I say that I'm, I'm out. Anyway, moving on.

Haley Moss

I just know how the legal system works and like, okay, yeah. How many motions to eliminate happened before we got to trial? How much evidence was not included?

Andrew M. Komarow

Yeah. Yeah.

Eileen Lamb

No idea what's going on. But, (all laugh)

Haley Moss

It's an it's a messed up.

Andrew M. Komarow

So basically, Eileen if I if I disagreed with the law, I would just say whether they're not guilty, whether they are or they're not, right, it's called, you know, basically, the jury should get to decide, right? So if I think it's Tom than I would say, not guilty. So they don't like that. So yeah,

Haley Moss

Yeah, that would freak out. That would freak them out. I actually know because I have friends who do very much do jury trials. They used to ask about the political affiliations of some of their jurors, so they would try to look it up if they could, because they knew it might sway it might make them make decisions one way or another. There's some really weird stuff. So actually, it's to do with ethics research, and I was in law school. And I remember I got to present like, continuing education on whether or not you can stock your jurors on like Facebook. Like are you allowed to do that?

Andrew M. Komarow

What's the answer?

Haley Moss

You are as long as it doesn't send them notifications? Okay, so you can't like friend your jurors, if you if you like view their LinkedIn profile, you can't have it send like a, you have to like have your settings so it doesn't send like "so-and-so looked at your profile", because that would be considered a communication to the juror. So it was so interesting, though, but yes, you can go look them up on Facebook. You just don't like their posts, don't run them. Don't do anything. That's a communication.

Andrew M. Komarow

Got it. Thank you.

Haley Moss

It's like the we. There's all sorts of really weird legal stuff. I just think it's super fascinating. But I think if I do go back to practice one day, and I'm sure there might be a point in my life where I want to, I would probably rather be actually in Elder Law, like we're talking about with conservatorships and guardianships, and supported decision making, or I'd like to do labor and employment and actually get to do stuff with, like anti-discrimination, disability discrimination at work ADA, or also the thing that I think is super fascinating that I'm trying to learn more about because I just think it's interesting is labor unions. So I think labor and employment is so interesting.

Eileen Lamb

Yeah.

Andrew M. Komarow

Like, yeah,

Haley Moss

It's okay. It's okay. It's okay. In my old life, I I got to sue insurance companies.

Andrew M. Komarow

Well, that excites me. Here we go. Right.

Haley Moss

I represented, I represented hospitals. Okay. Not people. I would not a personal injury lawyer. I got to represent hospitals trying to get money from insurers.

Andrew M. Komarow

Okay.

Haley Moss

Not so exciting.

Andrew M. Komarow

Well, anyway, I mean, to me, but we won't bore the other. You know,

Haley Moss

See, this is why I think talking about autism and disability is far more fun. It's a much better job.

Andrew M. Komarow

You're much talking about life insurance law. I mean, there we go, like I'm in, right.

Haley Moss

I don't know, because I don't know much about life insurance. And I don't think Eileen and I are going to want to listen to you. If you geek out about life insurance a little bit too much.

Andrew M. Komarow

Well, it's basically contract law. But okay, let's move on. Okay, so I okay, quickfire questions. So, yes. So Eileen is going to ask a bunch of unless Am I doing the quickfire questions? Eileen...

Eileen Lamb

I got it.

Andrew M. Komarow

You sure?

Eileen Lamb

Yeah. I can see what you wrote in there today.

Andrew M. Komarow

Yeah, I always do. I always put a just random quickfire question in there for Eileen, like right before the podcast so she doesn't have time to read it until she reads it out loud for fun. So the quickfire questions just don't overthink it in the nicest way possible and just give the you know, first answer that comes to your mind. And there's six of them. And here we go.

Haley Moss

Okay.

Eileen Lamb

What is the best piece of advice you've ever been given?

Haley Moss

Be yourself.

Eileen Lamb

What do you like to do to relax?

Haley Moss

Play video games. Read books.

Eileen Lamb

What's your favorite?

Haley Moss

I have a Switch and I'm obsessed with it. And I've been actually replay What have I been playing? Pokemon.

Eileen Lamb

Yeah, me too. Nice.

Haley Moss

I got Pokemon, the new Pokemon Snap. And it's so relaxing. All you do is just take pictures of Pokemon. It's like, it's kind of like going on a weird like, like a like baby little Pokemon Safari. It's like little vehicle thing and you just snap a little picture.

Eileen Lamb

That sounds fun. I like that. What's your favorite food?

Haley Moss

Pizza.

Andrew M. Komarow

What kind of pizza?

Haley Moss

Cheese, I'm boring.

Andrew M. Komarow

Okay.

Haley Moss

I don't like experimenting. I like most of my food planned.

Eileen Lamb

What's your favorite movie? Film, TV show?

Haley Moss

Legally Blonde. [all laugh] No, that's fine. Because you're autistic. You're obviously amazing at memorizing everything. Tell us the most obscure little facts you remember. Oh my god, I'm gonna overthink this. I'm sure

Andrew M. Komarow

Want me to share mine?

Haley Moss

Sure

Andrew M. Komarow

Because of pre prohibition, the USPS it is illegal to ship alcohol. That's why only UPS and FedEx can ship alcohol.

Eileen Lamb

Why is that?

Andrew M. Komarow

Because before UPS and FedEx existed before we made alcohol illegal. We made it so the United States Postal Service could not ship alcohol that is still illegal to this day. That is why you can only ship alcohol through FedEx and UPS. All the drug dealers use the post office yes,

Eileen Lamb

That's good to know.

Haley Moss

I had no idea yeah, I can't I can't compete with it. I'm sorry. I don't feel like I have any fun legal facts something like things that I think are just really ridiculous with like Florida's involuntary psych law but that's just because I think yeah, that if you are a considered a danger to yourself or others that you can be placed on a mandatory 72 hour psych hold.

Eileen Lamb

What's that?

Haley Moss

Like they could put you in a psychiatric hospital for like three days. And the thing is it gets used a lot against kids with developmental disabilities in schools because they don't want to arrest them. Because school resource officers get like, do we have to arrest this kid? Or do we do a psych hold but there's all sorts of like, little wrinkles in there. It's, it's called The Baker Act. It's really confusing. And it is. I think it gets overused for things that should not get used for,

Eileen Lamb

Yeah, what's considered a danger to yourself, like, where is the

Haley Moss

Exactly and you see autistic kids who might something, say something sarcastic, like, Are there they don't, or they don't know what sarcasm like, Oh, I might kill myself or fling in some teacher hears it. And they think there's a serious psychiatric problem. And even though there's a developmental disability exception, they'll say that it's related to some kind of anxiety, depression, something else and then and then the kid ends up in like, psych in a psych hospital, basically, and they should have no business being in and the parents don't get informed. It's a disaster. There's all sorts of really crazy news stories about this if you ever look into it about kids that end up basically in psych holds or are arrested because of The Baker Act.

Eileen Lamb

That sounds really sad.

Haley Moss

It is it's the one thing that if I felt like I knew more about that, if I had the skill set, I feel like I'd want to be fighting it.

Eileen Lamb

Yeah. And where can people find you online? You want to tell them anything you want to advertise

Andrew M. Komarow

Anything you're working on?

Haley Moss

Okay, there's always something I'm working on in my little world. So I hate being a salesperson but I have a new book out now called "Great Minds Think Differently: Neurodiversity for Lawyers and Other Professionals." So how it can be better in the working world also with in some other legal related things, but most of it's not illegal book I promise. It's super readable. My mom is not a lawyer and she said it was good. So I'm trusting her and she so there's all sorts of cool stuff in there. And we also do talk a little bit about courtroom we talk a little bit about clients representation, like good stuff and a lot of workplace stuff. You can find that on my website, or at the American Bar Association, which is the other ABA. So most times when you guys say ABA, my first default the American Bar Association and not the intervention, so I get very, very confused. I know that that's the worst part being a lawyer you don't know what ABA anybody's talking about.

Eileen Lamb

That's it. No social media.

Haley Moss

Oh, social media, right.

Eileen Lamb

I mean, up to you.

Haley Moss

I was getting I was I had to take a pause. I felt like I was gonna just keep rambling and I sound like a like a train like just like running, running, running. Okay, social media. So you can find me on most social media at Haley Moss Art. I'm on Instagram at Haley.Moss, I know I finally got my name on Instagram. I've been waiting forever for that to happen. And you can visit me at Haleymoss.net.

Eileen Lamb

Sounds good. Well, thank you for joining us today and talking about all these topics. I don't think we've talked about that stuff before. So this was nice.

Haley Moss

This was a lot of fun.

Andrew M. Komarow

Thank you.

Haley Moss

Thank you both for taking the time to talk to me.

Eileen Lamb

Of course. Bye

Andrew M. Komarow

Bye

Haley Moss

Bye