

Adulthood on the Spectrum: Autistic startups, gaming and learning to take the first step

Andrew M. Komarow

Welcome to "Adulthood on the Spectrum," I am Andrew Komarow, an autistic Certified Financial Planner. I co-run "Adulthood on the Spectrum," with my host Eileen Lamb. Hey Eileen.

Eileen Lamb

Hey, Andrew. Hey everyone. I'm Eileen. And in this podcast we want to highlight real voices of autistic adults, not just inspirational stories, but real people talking about their boring life or not so boring. Basically, we want to give advice to people like us. And today our guest is Vanessa Castañeda Gill, I hope I pronounced that right?

Vanessa Castañeda Gill

It was perfect.

Andrew M. Komarow

And Vanessa's mission is to unite her passion for art and stories in innovative ways that help people learning from her experiences. Growing up on the autism spectrum. She founded Social Cipher, a social emotional learning platform that connects neurodivergent youth and their advocates, counselors, teachers, mental health professionals, in an immersive virtual world. Their empowering game-based approach helps autistic youth fail safely for social emotional success beyond the screen, her 40% neurodivergent team recently released their game series, Ava, a space pirate adventure that explores social challenges through the eyes of an autistic protagonist. Hi, Vanessa.

Vanessa Castañeda Gill

Hello, How are y'all? I'm excited to be here.

Eileen Lamb

Thank you for being here, then. So we want to make sure we we talk to you the right way we refer to you the right way. So we always ask our guests how's it like to identify and by that I mean, pronouns and also autistic identity. So like person who has autism or autistic person, on the spectrum?

Vanessa Castañeda Gill

So yeah, pronouns she her, hers. And then for autistic? Autistic is good.

Andrew M. Komarow

What led you to getting diagnosed with autism? When were you diagnosed? And also, how has your identity as an autistic person changed over time?

Vanessa Castañeda Gill

Sure. So I was diagnosed when I was 14. I, and yeah, that was, you know, after cancer words, it was it took a while to sort of get there. But there were a lot of science. And unlike a lot of people who, you know, have been kind of relieved, once they get a diagnosis, they feel like, you know, things make sense. For me, I was 14, I felt like I was just a broken person and I succumb to a lot of the stereotypes, I felt that I couldn't connect with people, I thought that I just wasn't capable of it. So I tried to shut it down, and just not do that. And that resulted in some pretty harmful mental health issues. And so that was really difficult. And that was my perception losses. And I was like, I have a cold and calculated robot that cannot be fixed, and I am broken. And of course, that was not the case. So once I actually started learning about myself, the way I interact with people through stories, and movies, and music, and games, and it was through those kinds of things that I realized that, Oh, I'm not actually a broken person, I just learned very differently, and I'm very divergent. And I, you know, went to college, became neuroscience researcher, and put personal experience together the research experience and started social cipher. And yeah, I would say, over time, the way I see my, my autism has really changed. So even though I've had created social cipher, and I was in a place where I was like, yeah, I'm going to help other people like me, so they don't have to go through what I went through, I still had a pretty negative view of my past self. And I just thought, you know, my 14 year old self was so you know, annoying and emotionless and careless and selfish. And all that wasn't true. I was just, you know, someone that was a different learner that was doing the best with what she had, and was going through a lot. And I originally through the game, and through, you know, through everything with Ava, I was like, yeah, I'm gonna try to fix my past self so that no one has to go through this. But you know, after talking to a bunch of other autistic people, that that wasn't actually the case. It's, it's about having compassion for your past self, and coming to terms with your artistic identity, and its strengths and weaknesses. And working with it and embracing it a little,

Eileen Lamb

I know that you found comfort in games, that something new you talked about, and you are the CEO and co founder of Social Cipher too? And what is Social Cipher? And who is your platform for? And how can people be a part of it? You want to tell us more about that?

Vanessa Castañeda Gill

Sure. So yeah, Social Cipher. We're a game based social emotional learning platform that works with neurodivergent youth and the professionals who work with them. And basically, employers, we make these pirate adventure games for these youth that weave in social emotional competencies, and help people embrace activities to just kind of live better lives and feel more confident about themselves. Yeah, and we have, you know, along with our team series, which features an autistic protagonist, we have curriculum, and then we have an entire life streaming tracking platform that goes on with it. And we sell that to counselors, therapists, other mental health professionals in schools.

Eileen Lamb

How can someone be a part of it like if I want to be a part of it? How do I do that?

Vanessa Castañeda Gill

Sure, so you can always head to our website, which is Social Cipher Game dot com. And you can follow us on Twitter at Social Cipher. Or you can follow me on Twitter as VanSolo 42. Because I'm a

huge Star Wars fan. And you can also buy your game or schedule a demo if you're a teacher counseling mental health professional on our website.

Andrew M. Komarow

And one thing and actually so so we do some work. And we actually I did it and play through the game. And just like the really interesting feedback was, I had someone who works for me and does a lot of the coaching the support, you know, on my team, and he went through and he's like, it's different. And I'm like, in what way, and then when I told him that it was designed by autistic neurodivergent people, he's like, well, that explains it. He had like never, you know, done something like this that was not just designed for, but designed by. And full disclosure I have not played it. But I mean, but I just thought that was such interesting feedback. He's like, it's different. And then he couldn't figure out why not good or bad. But then when I explained it to them, so how is having like a neurodivergent, like, team impacted the game versus other ones out there. And again, in a positive way, it was designed for the people that it's serving, which is how it should be.

Vanessa Castañeda Gill

Yeah, exactly. I think that, you know, having a divergent team like, for me, representation is more than just, you know, having representation with a character or a couple of characters in the product, you have to have that representation in the people that are making it as well, because that's really where where that full circle kind of impact happens. So I think that having your diversity people in the team has, it has really been different for people, you know, we also co-develop with hundreds of neurodivergent youth, autistic adults are professionals in the neurodiversity community. And we play to us with hundreds of people. And we take everyone's feedback, and we take it seriously as a team. And I think that's why we have you know, a lot of nuance in our characters, they're not something that's just meant to like, adhere to a framework and teach the things. It's like, No, we don't only want to do this, we want to show that people are represented here, we want to inspire people, and we want to be able to Yeah, educate them and teach them at the same time. But I really believe that you can't have you can't have true impactful education without being truly engaged or invested in some way. And something this, that's why I think this works so much more. It also just helps when, like, you know, for example, I when we in our game, we have these shutdown sequences for when the main character Ava undergoes sensory overload. For us that's like how lives work in our game. And I, you know, you can only describe the sensation of having a meltdown if you've had what, especially like an autistic or sensory overload. And so the way that we came up with that is I would straight up, go into crowds, and subject myself to it and take notes on how I was feeling. And then I would communicate that to our animator into an artist. And that's the only stuff that you can get from other autistic folks. And, and I knew that we were successful when you have when we have young people that we're looking at this on screen, they're like, Oh my gosh, that's, that is exactly how I feel. That's exactly what I do. And no matter how much you know, reading or studying you do, nothing can be that lived experience. And I truly believe that.

Eileen Lamb

I think it's true that no one can explain what it's like to to have a meltdown, for instance, better than an autistic person. I know that there is a lot of overlap between like autism and other condition that can cause someone to feel like uncomfortable in a crowd or with lights and sounds. But when you're

autistic, it's just another level. And I just don't think it's the it's the same thing and who else can know better than an autistic person? So I guess that's one of the reasons why you think it's important to have neurodiverse people in your, in your company. Is there anything you would like people to know about neurodivergent people? That's a broad question. But,

Vanessa Castañeda Gill

Yea, no. I mean, I would say that, I really want people to understand that neurodivergent people aren't broken, we just have a different way of learning. And with the right support and accommodations by listening to us, that's the way that you can help us thrive and, you know, reach their best potential. And also that, you know, we're, especially as adults, like we're fully like, we are adults as well, and, you know, deserve to be spoken to and regarded that way. Just because we, you know, have this condition doesn't mean that, you know, we're in any way less. And so that's, those are the biggest things that I would say and also, I, I think that a lot of the time, one of the hardest things to learn, at least for me as an autistic person was being able to advocate for myself and communicate my needs. So that's something that you know, neurotypical folks also should try to, like meet us halfway at or at least be conscious of is that you know, we're on our way and learning about or at least I'm on the way and learning about advocating for myself, figuring out my needs, and you know, just trying to help and you know, it helps when people are supportive and can listen and validate things that I feel are that are going on with me, even if you're not experiencing them yourself.

Eileen Lamb

Is your app also targeting individuals like my son with higher support needs? Is that accessible to them? Or is it for people who are higher functioning, don't show me Andrew

Vanessa Castañeda Gill

Right now, it's right now where it's mostly for folks with sort of lower support needs. It's for anyone that can really read it, like a middle school reading level can use the mouse or the keyboard. But that's about that's pretty much it for us. We'd love I mean, that's, that's a lot of what we're working on is trying to really get around the spectrum, trying to help as many folks on the spectrum as possible. That is where we're starting.

Eileen Lamb

And I just want to mention that I said the word app, but it's not an app, like on an iPhone, or it's more of a platform. Do you want to talk about that, too? And explain?

Vanessa Castañeda Gill

Yeah, totally. And Thanks for pointing that out. Yeah, so essentially, our game is, our game series comes out in different episodes where a web-based game and then we have a web application for streaming and talking with social emotional goals. And we also have curriculum that comes with it, too.

Andrew M. Komarow

So again, you're not just neurodivergent, right? You're also a woman in tech, right? In the startup world. And it's coming from somebody who, like, does sales as well, right. And just, there's a whole, like, I don't golf, and I'm in finance, I feel like that puts me like a leg behind. Like, I hate golf, I can't stand it,

right. And all these companies want to give me golf balls, invite me to golf outings, but like, how is like, you know, if you're looking to raise funding awareness for your app, not just as someone who's neurodivergent, but someone who has other diversity as well. Have you had more challenges or less challenges? And how have you overcome them again, in your field?

Vanessa Castañeda Gill

Yeah, that's a great question. And I would say, that's the tough part. It's all I can really working on. The fact that, all right, I have I like, it is real, yes, I have a harder time with things, I have more challenges, but I've been trying not to focus so much on that, and more trying to spin it into, I like, all these things are, you know, quote, unquote, against me, but I'm not gonna be a victim of them. I'm going to use my strengths that I've learned from all these things and, and try to spin it. And so that's, it's hard, because I think when, when things get really difficult, like in fundraising, or in sales, or, you know, when I when I talk to someone, and they don't regard me as you know, or treat me the way I should be treated, right? It's so easy to feel discouraged and fall back on like, Oh, it's because I'm autistic. I'm a woman, I'm Latina, I'm, you know, I never grew up in, you know, an affluent kind of community. Um, you know, but I think that that can only take you so far until you start either taking action, educating people about it, or, you know, acknowledging that, like, yes, this is the thing that I have that may put me against, against lots of things. But you know, what, it also serves as a great indicator of the people I shouldn't be working with. It serves as a great indicator of the people that are not on your side, and therefore, you know, you shouldn't be working with them, and you can create a workaround. And so, that's a lot of what I've done. I think that one of the hardest things like I've definitely as you know, as most autistic professionals have gotten, so I won't go over it too much. But, you know, I did this TEDx talk, I went over all these things of how I've gotten from competition judges that like, I can communicate so well. And that, oh, I don't even look autistic. Oh, my goodness, this is so Wow, this is so cute. Looks so great, what you accomplished. Maybe that's a combination of being autistic and woman and it's definitely infantilizing. But I wouldn't have to kind of clap back if I can just talk now. And really just turning my anger into more fuel for like, Oh, this is why I'm here. This is why I'm doing this work. So this doesn't continue to happen to other people in the future. Yeah. So

Eileen Lamb

How would you like to refer like, you know, the spectrum is broad. Some people have higher support needs, then others. I would say some have severe autism, and some are like higher functioning. How would you like to refer to that difference in levels on the spectrum difference in severity of symptoms? That make sense?

Vanessa Castañeda Gill

Yeah, no, that makes total sense. And that's the thing you know, that's something we've researched a time. And I really like every autistic person is totally an individual there are, you know, there there are folks who are nonspeaking but you know, have strengths and But other completely different areas that can live independently and do whatever, you know, do whatever they need to do, people are selectively speaking and they have different strengths they're like, I think that the idea of like right or up to down spectrum of just like this is low functioning and this is high functioning just doesn't doesn't explain the full diversity and just like capabilities and you know, different sort of like strengths and challenges of folks on the spectrum. And I think there needs to be more of an understanding of just the vast diversity

of folks. And I really think that, you know, you've talked to one autistic person, like, you've talked to one, because there are so many different experiences, and it just really can't be condensed into like, high or low. Nor should it be.

Andrew M. Komarow

So the reason that you dislike again, the higher the low functioning isn't so much, it's almost the opposite of that you think that all autistic people are autistic, it's the fact that you think that, you know, that's not enough descriptor, we even need even more like better ways to describe someone or everyone is just so unique. Not that, you know, you know, everyone's autistic is the same, and therefore, we should get rid of functional labels, but almost the opposite that everyone with autistic being autistic is just so different. Right? And there's so many different levels of support, and basically, you know, describe the person and saying a functioning level is not really describing anyone,

Vanessa Castañeda Gill

Right, I think it and I don't know, I don't know how, I don't know how that would work, I don't think there should be you know, like, it's absolutely ridiculous, like categorization system, because I just don't think

Andrew M. Komarow

But you're autistic, I thought you think you shouldn't we think that? (laughs)

Vanessa Castañeda Gill

I mean, I love data and categories, but I also think that it would just get to be too, it probably just said to be a lot like too much, and you kind of lose the human of it. And I don't know, I think I think it's, you know, kind of like identity, something that folks should identify for themselves. And, and really sort of like, this is why being able to advocate for your needs. And teaching people how to do this is so important. Because if you don't know what your needs are, like, you're not going to be able to have the language, whatever, you know, formal communication that may be to describe what's going to help you thrive or what's going to help you feel more comfortable with feel better. So I think that's where things need to be started with, like, advocate advocacy, and, and being able to find those words for yourself.

Eileen Lamb

I think the issue here is that there are autistic people like my son who are, you know, level three autistic, and that he can communicate basic needs with an iPad, an AAC but I don't think he'll ever be able to advocate for himself or live independently. And there are so many autistic people who are in this category. And of course, you don't hear about it, because it can be on social media as they can't advocate for themselves. And I'm like, what, what do we do about the higher support needs individuals, you know, it's it stopped because they need someone to advocate for them, they can do it for themselves. And not just when they're kids, but when they're adults too. And that's where it becomes tricky. And so while it's true that someone who is high functioning, can still struggle in severe ways in certain areas of their life, they're still going to be better off if I can say, than someone who can never do these things, you know what I mean? Someone who sometimes go non-speaking, because of you know, overload cannot comprehend what it's like to be fully non speaking, for your entire life. And I find that it's hard to find advocacy for those severely autistic, high higher support needs people, and it's hard to include them in advocacy. Do you have any, any ideas about that?

Andrew M. Komarow

And maybe how you have done that with your own app and your own work?

Vanessa Castañeda Gill

Yeah, I mean, that makes absolute sense. And I've I've been thinking of the same question, too, of like, how are we including people in this and for us, you know, right now we're working, we're mostly with like, high support people we have, we do have nonspeaking characters in our game, and we're trying to increase representation through that as well, because that's super important. So yeah, I think, you know, besides finding, you know, finding some kind of way to communicate, whatever that may be, whatever that whatever is most comfortable with, you know, a person with, you know, higher support needs. I think that like, that's also you know, where parents and autistic advocates may just need to work together, right? Like and you know, you understand what is you understand and you want what's best for your child, and you know, what's going to make them comfortable or make them feel happy and working, you know, working with other autistic advocates who you know, of course are not going to know your exact experience of your child's unfortunately, but may have some idea of at least you know, this sensory and social kind of things around it. It's at least a start. And I honestly don't know, you know the right answer. But I think that working together with like, a parent or a guardians kind of like, love for the child as well as, you know, information that we do have from actually autistic folks. I think that's, that's where we have to start.

Eileen Lamb

Yeah, I love that you said that. It's, it's balanced, you know, because it's true that, you know, no one knows what being autistic is like, as well as an autistic person. But it's also true that just because you're autistic, doesn't mean you understand what someone who's on another part of the spectrum is experiencing their own autism, because we're all different. So there is a middle ground there, you know, and working together would be such a nice thing to do, instead of having that war, and I know you, you purposely stay away from the autism community debate, and you seem more focused on doing great thing and helping autistic? Do you have any advice for others?

Vanessa Castañeda Gill

Yeah, I think that, I think we're less staying away from it and trying to, like find our place in it. I think we, we, I, you know, I like to think that I understand both sides, right? Like I, I, I know, parents, I have a parent who you know, has raised an autistic child with me. And I've spoken to a lot of parents, in interviews and all and then you know, of course, we've interviewed and talked with and have an employee, like, quite a few neurodivergent, folks as well. And in addition to me being an autistic person, and I, the hard thing is that I see both sides, right, like I see, I see that everyone is at the same wants the same end goal, everyone wants for these young people to just feel, feel accepted, feel good about themselves and have a happy and good life. It's a way of going about it, and the polarization surrounding that. That is the difficult part kind of, as you were saying. And I really think that, you know, we've I've had a really I've had a lot of trepidation kind of going into this arena, because I don't want to make either side mad. I don't want to, you know, I don't want to alienate anyone, because I think that, you know, going after same end goal. But at the same time, I as a neurodivergent. person, and just as, as someone that really believes in, like, the goodness of people, and the good intentions of people, like,

I think that building bridges is a really important thing to do, I don't think that we can make any progress if we're not working together on this kind of thing, or at least open to hearing each other out. And so, you know, there are certain times where like, a parent will say something, or, or someone will say something that originally would make me really angry, and I'd be like, they have no idea what we're, what we're going through. And, you know, that might be true, they don't, they don't totally know we're going through, but they have good intentions. And they, they do want this. And so it's it's a matter of like, sure, you can get angry, but like, get angry, realize where that anger is coming from it and channel that into educating and building a dialogue with people. So we can get to a place where we're doing what's best.

Eileen Lamb

It's great advice. I hope people are listening and taking notes because I think that's how we're gonna heal. And bridge the gap is that the expression between parents, caregivers, and the actual autistic autistic community, we need to communicate and not get angry at each other. Yeah, that's a that's great.

Vanessa Castañeda Gill

Yeah, and I think I always want to add that, like, you know, I, I know that there, there's a whole range of strengths and weaknesses that comes with being autistic, and I don't want to discount that, but at the same time, like, I think one thing that is empowering and and that is going to lead to change is, you know, not looking at autism as a tragedy and not portraying it that way. Because, you know, we're here, autism is part of us. And it's, it's, you know, being an autistic person is part of my identity. And not everyone will identify it that way. But you know, it's, it's part of a lot of who we are, and it's going to remain that way. And I think that, you know, treating it as something that is, what it is, where you just like anything else you can grow from it. You can build upon it, you can spin it, you know, turn it into whatever you want, that's going to make you feel better, or comfortable. Like I think doing it automatically as a tragedy is what what put me into a really bad headspace and lots of mental health issues, because I kept seeing the stereotypes and because I kept seeing like, "oh, I'm not going to be able to do any of these things", like, pre-determining whether or not we're going to be able to do these do things before, like, you know, we can we can have a chance to do it ourselves is something that I think we have to eliminate. Because, yeah.

Andrew M. Komarow

I work with lots of parents. And what's really, you know, interesting is, you know, we're talking about, they'll talk about like their 16 year old daughter, right? And they'll talk about how they're not sure what she might want to do or to be successful, we always try to include the individual as much as possible. I always like bringing up like, so why don't you want to do when you were 16? And what are you doing now? How did that turn out for you? Right? Like, because on one hand, being a confused 14 year old girl seems like the end, like going through like a depressed phase seems like the epitome of normal. But I mean, on the other hand, there are additional struggles. And, you know, I think real, you know, focusing on what you're good at, right? And not as much of what you're not good at, is really important to use a game analogy that someone my company came up with, and she said is "Having autism is like leveling up a role playing game, you know, why waste your limited skill points on weaknesses, when you can build up your unique strengths to reach your fullest potential." And I mean, that that really

struck me not too if you don't play a role playing game, it doesn't mean as much to you, but I'm like that, that's perfect. And just so accurate.

Vanessa Castañeda Gill

Yeah, that makes absolute sense. And I so that was the hard that was the hard thing about growing up and going to college, you know, the idea of like, going to college, getting a job and all that, like my, the other thing that builds up on on all this right on being, you know, being an autistic person being bogged down by stereotypes, all that kind of stuff was that, like, you know, I was, I was the first in my family to go to college. And, you know, we, at the time, like, my I, my parents divorced, I was raised by a single mom for like, most of my life, and, and we were, you know, we were struggling financially. And so my whole, like, my tunnel vision was on like, well, I'm autistic. So this is a great excuse for me not to have friends. So I'm not going to do it at all. And I am just going to focus on like, getting into college, I don't know for what yet, but I just need to get there, I need to get a scholarship, I need to get a job that makes money. And then I need to, like, make sure my family's okay, like that was that was it for me. I didn't care what I was going to do. Unless it was like a high paid job, then I don't you know, now I'm in like, you know, a startup, which is like one of the most unstable things that you can be in. But, um, but you know, at the beginning, that was really my goal. And I was like, well, medicine, there's, you know, medicine, there's a lot like my uncle, our PA is like, I, there's money in there. So like, I'm gonna, I'm gonna go for that. So I thought I was just gonna go towards medicine, just because, like, it's stable, and there's money. And then I started, you know, I started really getting into my understanding of the brain. And I was like, you know, especially after got my got my diagnosis, I was like, I really want to learn how I even work, like, How is this even happening? And so I started getting super into neuroscience. And I was like, Okay, I'm going to be a neurosurgeon, because that's still medicine, and it's still safe, but there and there's money, but it's something I'm really interested in. And then I take organic chemistry, and I realized that medicine was not for me, I also realized that I hate the scent of blood. So also just not going to work out. So then I couldn't and I was like, Okay, I'm gonna be a neuroscientist. And that's when I started well, I started working in a neuroscience lab, really Luckily, like my before my freshman year of college, sighted, amazing. PI. And yeah, and, you know, I got published and I was like, Okay, this is the path we're going on. PhD here, I come. And then I came up with Social Cipher. I thought it was going to be a college passion project I was going to do with my friends, I thought I'd make a great paper. But then we started winning pitch competitions. And I, I got accepted to a program called Halcyon, where, right after college, I went to live in a mansion in DC for six months, and they paid me to do it. And I was like, well, I'm working full time on my company now. And that's why we're here.

Andrew M. Komarow

So one thing is, is I find that, you know, especially neurodivergent folks are well suited to be entrepreneurs. At the same time, we're horrible to the entrepreneurs, like, you get exactly what I'm saying. Thank you. So, um, but you know, but you've taken it like a step further, not just like a small business, but like, you know, when I'm working with you, I say, like, just, you know, how do you help other entrepreneurs who want to get to where you are, and I like to tell a lot of like, you can be successful without raising money and fun and having an app, I mean platform or an app if that's what they're thinking. But like, how, what advice can you give to others who are saying, you know, I struggling to do that. And I guess the thought that comes to my mind is I find we get way too lost in the details, a lot of times, which could be an amazing strength. But I find a lot of times with business, you

just need to get started, right? We were talking just before we started recording right about how no day nothing turns out how we expect it to be, especially when you're an entrepreneur. So you know, sometimes just have to see what happens. What advice would you have to give?

Vanessa Castañeda Gill

Yeah, so I'm autistic and have ADHD. So the whole getting started thing is like, you know, something I'm still trying to figure out, I mean, of course, I've gotten services, but they're, you know, right after you get started with a thing, there are millions of other things that build on to it of like other things.

Andrew M. Komarow

A squirrel!

Vanessa Castañeda Gill

Yeah, exactly,so, this is I have, I have a squishy brain right here that I'm like, squeezing, because I'm like, I got to stay focused. Um, but, you know, I, I guess, my like. So this is also an example of like, you know, the challenges that I'm facing, right? Like, but that are also kind of strengths. For me, it's like, I didn't grow up in high high income households. And I'm a Latina, like, we're known for those two things like, known for being very resourceful that is, it is taught me to, like, be super scrappy, to like, figure out how to get things without paying for them, and to lean on people for help. And like, do what I get what I need to done by using the resources around me like that is probably the number one thing that has helped me is like, because we we did not contrary to all of the TechCrunch. And whatever startup publications, whatever, contrary to all that you do not need to like start hitting the ground, raising money from investors right away, you shouldn't actually you should bootstrap, and do your research, which we're great at, like, we're great at research, we're great at searching databases do not insert as much as possible. For the first two years of our venture, we only were raised, like, we are completely running off of money from pitch competitions, crowdfunding campaign that we did, and grants. That was it. And just now I am started like three and a half years in, and I am now actually raising money. But before that, that's all it's been. And there are so many resources out there, there's accelerators, and incubators and fellowship programs. And like you can do, it is literally just like Google search for funding opportunities for startups, for women, for neurodivergent people for you know, for people of color, like all of these things. Use what you've got, and like, Google search it. Um, I also think that for if you want to do a startup, like, know that, it's weird, because what helped me like keep up with the startup was that I thought at the beginning, that this was just going to be a passion project or a paper. But, you know, it's turned out to be my life for like the past, you know, almost four years now. And I think it actually helps to, to not know that, like, I think it actually helped to be like, Alright, this is just gonna be the first step, whatever happens from it happens, but like, at least I can, at least I'm not gonna regret not starting this ever. And I think that's what happens is like, the essence of getting started with something, especially when you're like me and have autism and ADHD, is that you get more scared of not doing the thing than doing the thing itself. And I think for me, I was just continuously like, I don't want to be like, he not at I wouldn't be at a bar at 80 I don't know, maybe I would, I don't want to be like, 75 at a bar or like, out of like, my grandchild's wedding or whatever. And be like, yeah, I almost tried to start this company. It was a cool idea. But you know, someone's already done it. It's too far for me now. I like imagined myself saying that. And I was like, "oh, god, no, I don't want to do," that I want at least try. And so that's, that's kind of how I got started. And I think you can just you can, like, pull the card

and just be like, dude, I'm an autistic and I'm this and I'm not and nobody's gonna take me seriously. Or, like, people like me, don't do this kind of thing. Like, find role models, man. I'm out here. Andrew is out here. Like we're all out here. Like, there. There are people out here that are neurodivergent that are starting businesses. There are people like me that are out here doing startups, and you're not alone. And you just you just got to search for us. Like if you're thinking of starting startup, and you're autistic, like me, reach out to me. Oh, I will. I will help you out because I know I'm probably one of like one of the few like autistic women in a startup but like, we're out here and we're so down to talk to you. Yeah.

Eileen Lamb

That was beautiful is the perfect way to, to wrap this up. You know, I always said, because I, I'm very stern, too when it comes to fulfilling my dreams and ideas in my head

Andrew M. Komarow

As someone who chats with Eileen frequently, I will say she's very stubborn about everything, but continue. (all chuckle)

Eileen Lamb

Yeah, my husband would agree. But that's also a good thing, you know, because I, I never give up. And when people ask me, like, how would you do it? I'm like, Well, I am gonna be told no, like, 30 times, and I'm just gonna keep going. You know, that's what happened with my book. And I think that that's how you do it. You never give up, basically. And you touched on that. And that was beautifully said. And, like Mark Twain said, "The secret of getting ahead is getting started."

Vanessa Castañeda Gill

Definitely.

Eileen Lamb

So we, we are going to ask you some quickfire questions. Just like you tell us the first thing that comes to your head, no pressure. If it's the second thing that's going to. What is the best piece of advice you've ever been given?

Vanessa Castañeda Gill

Ask for help.

Eileen Lamb

What do you like to do to relax?

Vanessa Castañeda Gill

Meditate and watch obscure YouTube videos on movie analysis.

Eileen Lamb

What? I thought you were gonna say games?

Vanessa Castañeda Gill

And games. I do that too. I just love like analysis of like little scenes and stuff like that.

Eileen Lamb

What's your favorite food?

Vanessa Castañeda Gill

Cheesecake.

Eileen Lamb

What's your favorite film? Movie ? TV show?

Vanessa Castañeda Gill

Between "Silence of the Lambs," and "The Matrix". Depends on what mood I'm in.

Eileen Lamb

Jar Jar Binks?

Andrew M. Komarow

That was a question. (laughs)

Vanessa Castañeda Gill

No. The answer is no. (laughs)

Eileen Lamb

What does that mean Andrew? I am never gonna trust you again. (all laugh)

Andrew M. Komarow

I always throw in like one question. Like, as the podcast is happening, because we edit a Google Doc for Eileen to read and

Eileen Lamb

I need to Google this,

Vanessa Castañeda Gill

You'll automatically see that the answer is no, Eileen.

Andrew M. Komarow

Yeah, just like the most hated Star Wars character, like just ever. So

Vanessa Castañeda Gill

He's so hated that actually, they re-did it. Like, there were fans that hated it so much that on YouTube, they posted the video with all of his, like, clips, cut out of the movie, and then just posted the movie like, now it's better.

Eileen Lamb

So autistic. (all laugh)

Vanessa Castañeda Gill

Honestly, probably was, it was probably an autistic person.

Eileen Lamb

That's fine. I guess I need to watch Star Wars.

Andrew M. Komarow

How have you not watched Star Wars? I'm not doing another podcast with you until you watch at least one Star Wars?

Eileen Lamb

I have no movie culture. I mean, I just don't. Sorry. So where can people find you online?

Vanessa Castañeda Gill

Yes. So great question, you can find us at Social Cipher game.com. That's cipher with I. And if you press the get the game button, and especially if you're a teacher, counselor, mental health professional school administrator, you can press that button. And you can either buy the game directly from there, or you can contact us and I will demo you through it. And, you know, ask some other questions, and we can figure something out. You can also follow me personally on Twitter as Van Solo 42, as evidenced by the Jar Jar Binks question, I am a Star Wars fan. So that's why that name is that way. And then you can find me on our company on twitter at Social Cipher. And that's mostly where we are. We also have Instagram with the same handle. But really like our website and our Twitter are probably the best places to see us.

Eileen Lamb

Thanks so much for joining us today. It was so great talking to you was fun.

Vanessa Castañeda Gill

Yeah, thank you all. This is so fun.

Eileen Lamb

Bye.