

**This Global Accessibility  
Awareness Day**

# **Empathy Experiences**

**Spreading the Accessibility Love!**

# Preface

*“You can only understand people if you feel them in yourself.”*

– John Steinbeck

My own first interaction with disability, was over the internet back in 1995. Growing up, I don't think I was even aware of differences amongst people. But overtime I realized that differences are part of life in general.

Having founded BarrierBreak, a digital accessibility consulting firm, one of the things I yet have to do everyday for the last 15+ years is answer the question & break the myths around disability, inclusion and accessibility.

When people ask “Why Accessibility”, “Why Inclusion”, “We don't have disabled customers”, “Can blind people watch television”, “Why do we need sign language, Can't deaf people read” and so many more.

On the 9th Global Accessibility Awareness Day (GAAD), we thought it was time to let people understand differences amongst people by just experiencing things for themselves & noticing how the experience was.

Empathy Experiences are 9 different experiences that you and your teams can conduct and discuss together. The aim has been to take real world situations that we all encounter on a regular basis and understand the challenges that people face.

For example, reading medicine strips and bottles is something all of us do. We don't even notice the challenges we face in reading the labels and move ahead!

So to benefit from the Empathy Experiences, take the time to notice and discuss what works for you, what doesn't work for you, how did you overcome the challenges, consider diverse groups of people and what do you think they would experience.

Let yourself experience the activities and see empathy from a different lens! The lens of Accessibility. And finally, after the experiences, do read Demystifying Accessibility which is the last card.

Spreading the Accessibility Love!

From

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# Experience 1

## Making tea with closed eyes



Let's have tea in a different way and have fun!

Prepare Tea. Easy? Isn't it?

Such a simple task. Now let's make it interesting.

Here comes the fun!

Let's close our eyes and make tea.

## TIPS

- Do not open your eyes.
- Identify the 3 Jars of Tea Bags, Milk and Sugar.
- Find the cup and spoons in the drawer and kettle on the table.
- Try and not spill anything.

## YOUR EXPERIENCE

- How did you identify the tea, milk powder and sugar?
- How did you find the switch of the kettle?
- How did you identify that how much water is in the cup?
- How long did you take to make the tea?
- Which was the most difficult part for you?



# Experience 2 **NoMouse challenge**



Time to have some fun on your computer!

For the next 1 hour, hide your mouse, put it away, remove it from your computer and do everything with your keyboard!

Yes, yes, you read it right! It's the NoMouse Challenge, time to ONLY use your keyboard!

## TIPS

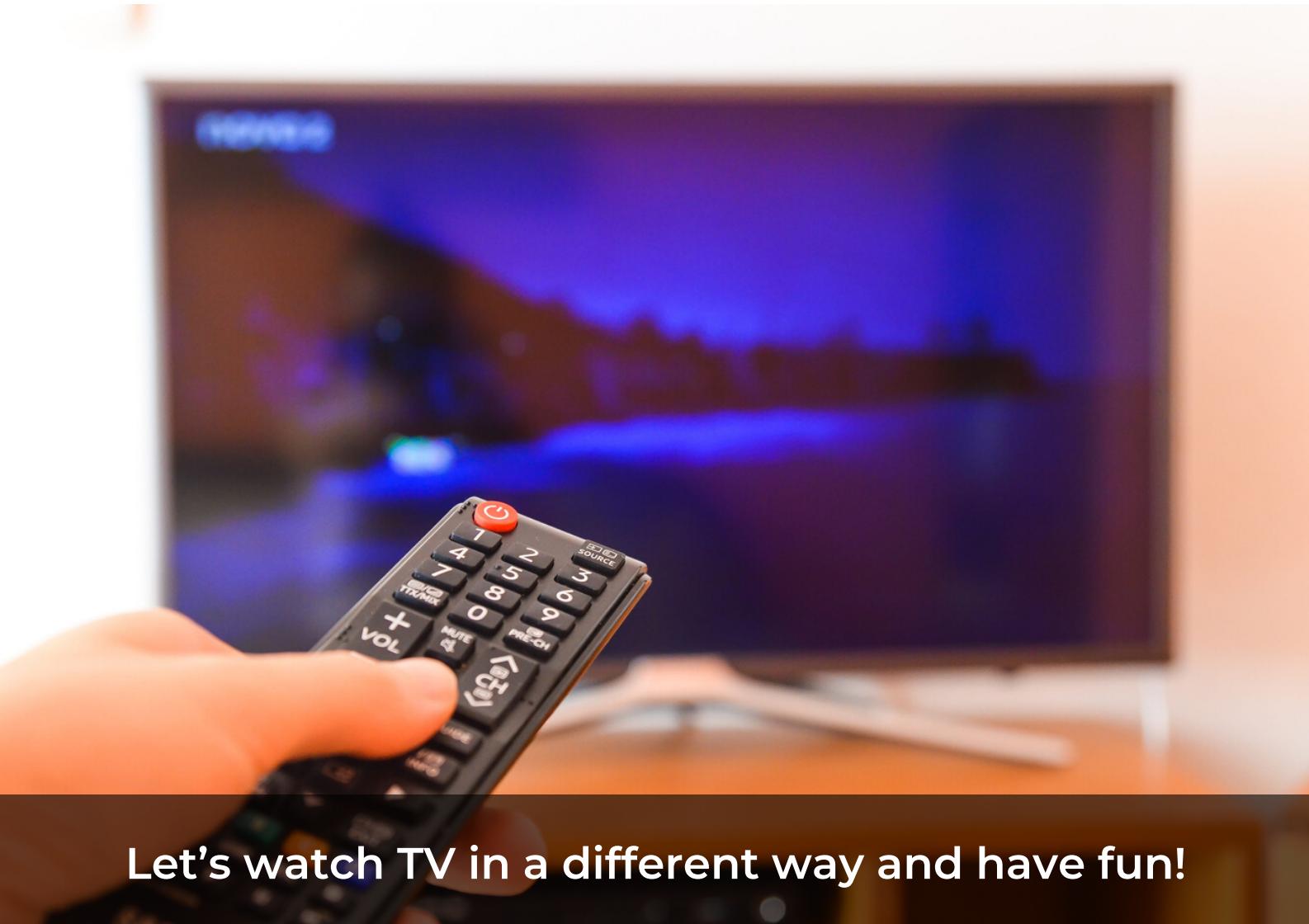
- Tab - To go to next element
- Shift + Tab - To go to previous element
- Enter - To select an element

## YOUR EXPERIENCE

- How difficult was it not to reach for the mouse?
- Did you get stuck at some point? Where?
- How did you manage to go ahead?
- Did you learn something new while using the keyboard?



# Experience 3 Silent TV challenge



Let's watch TV in a different way and have fun!

Now you may ask what could possibly be different in watching TV? We told you it's a challenge, so it's not going to be that simple. Here comes the interesting part. We challenge you to watch TV putting the mute mode on for 30 mins. Sounds interesting right? You can try watching any News or movie silently. Let's get started!

## TIPS

- Put in your full concentration.
- Try to guess the dialogues from the gestures, facial expressions and body language.
- Try using other platforms for watching if you don't have access to a TV right now

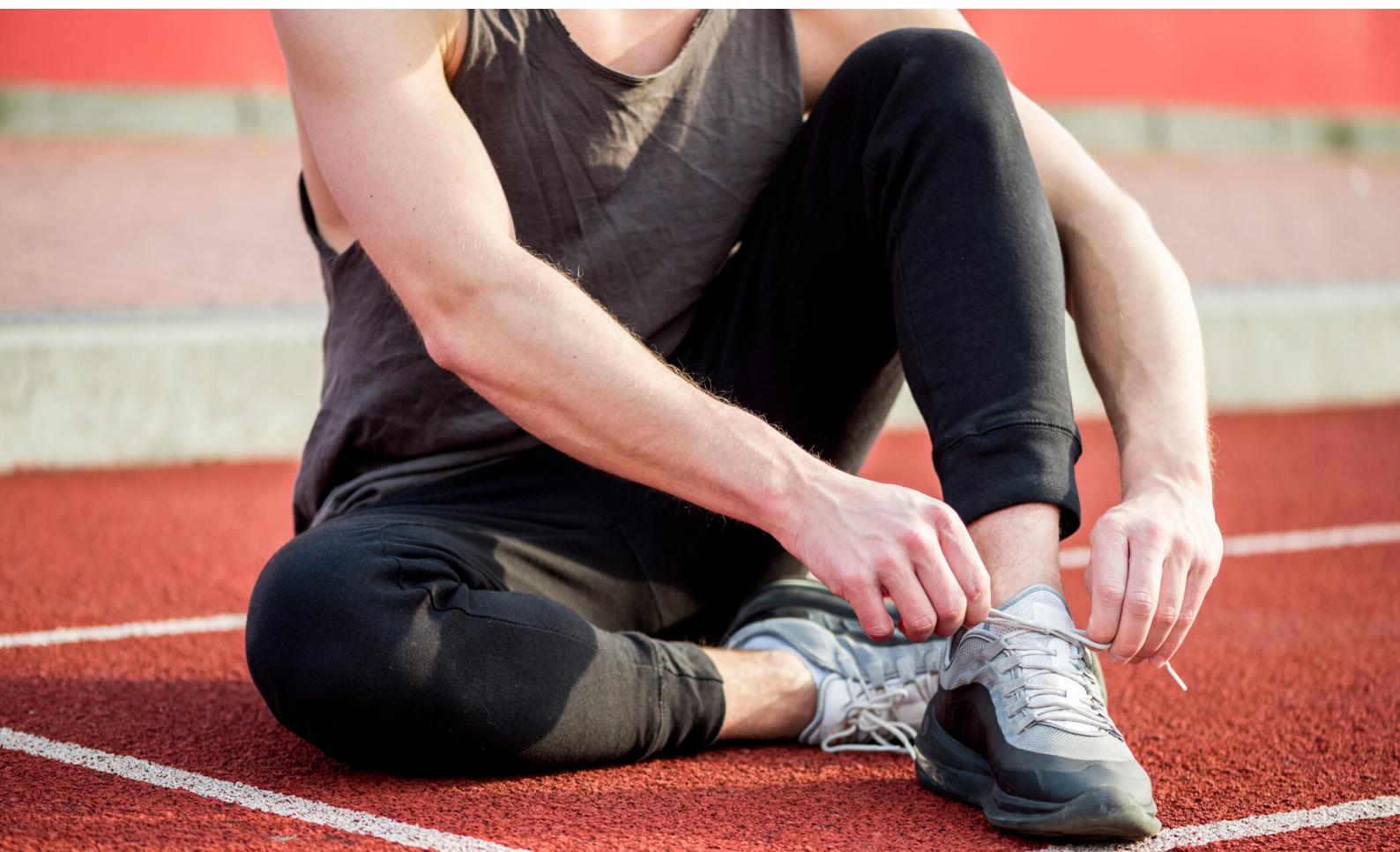
## YOUR EXPERIENCE

- How was your experience watching TV with no sound?
- Did you learn anything?
- Were you able to guess what they were speaking through the facial expression and body language?



# Experience 4

## Tie a knot



With this activity we are going to learn something new!

We know you are a pro at tying knots, but what if we challenge you to tie a shoelace using only one hand?

Put your dominant hand behind your back, set a timer for 30 seconds and try mastering tying a knot using only one hand! Remember it's going to be tempting to use your other hand as well, but do not!

## TIPS

- Be creative and try finding an alternative way.

## YOUR EXPERIENCE

- Were you able to do it independently?
- Did you have to ask anyone for help?
- Were you able to tie it in under 10 seconds?



# Experience 5 **Hold on**



**Do not hold your pen in a fist and remember, no cheating!**

This challenge is going to be a tricky one! So, let's find a pen and a paper and get started! Did you know that our index finger and the thumb are two of the most important fingers?

We need them both to in order to hold something. Using your dominant hand, try holding a pen without using your index finger and thumb and write your name down 5 times.

## TIPS

- Keep readjusting if the pen keeps slipping
- Use a pen which works smoothly

## YOUR EXPERIENCE

- Which fingers did you use?
- Were you able to grip on firmly to the pen?
- How different was your handwriting with and without using your index finger and thumb?
- Did holding a pen like this require more strength than it usually takes?



# Experience 6

## Read it out



Read the label on the packaging of medicines!

With the changing weather conditions, we all have some or the other kind of medicine strips at home. For this experience, all you have to do is get any two medicine strips/bottle and read the label on the packaging of both the medicines.

Some of you may say it's not at all difficult but, in order to make it a little challenging, if you wear subscription glasses, please keep them aside.

## TIPS

- To focus, try adjusting the distance at which you read
- Make sure you are in a well-lit room

## YOUR EXPERIENCE

- Which label was easier to read?
- Why was it easier to read?
- Did the colours and the colour contrast help you read?
- Did you prefer holding the medicine close to your eyes or a little farther?



# Experience 7

## **Ready, steady and go**



**This game will take us all back into our childhood!**

As kids, haven't we all spun around the house and gotten dizzy just to see the room spin? Well, we are now going to relive our childhood through this game!

Stand in the center of the room and spin around not more than 5 times, yes, exactly the way you did as a little child. Now try maintaining your balance and walk from one point to the other in a straight line. Be careful and go!

## TIPS

- Do not spin for more than 5 times
- Try extending your arms on either side of your body to maintain balance

## YOUR EXPERIENCE

- Were you able to maintain your balance?
- How difficult was it to walk in a straight line?
- What were your thoughts when you were not able to walk in a straight line?



# Experience 8 Messaging without text



Use emojis, pictures, icons and get creative with messaging!

For this experience you have to send across a message but with a twist. You need to make meaningful sentences or phrases using only emojis or images or icons but remember, no text. Send them to your friends or family, ask them to guess and vice-versa.

## TIPS

- Start with easy phrases and then move on to difficult ones
- There are many websites online to get icons

## YOUR EXPERIENCE

- Was using only emojis/ images/ icons effective enough to convey what you wanted to say?
- Were you able to understand what your friend was trying to say?
- Do you think emojis/icons could ever replace text?



# Experience 9 Open it up



**Open the bottle lid with your fist!**

We say, fist is not only meant for a fight/ fist bump. Let's see how else we can use our fists to complete this task.

You have to take a water bottle (with circular lid) and open it.

Easy right? Now make a fist and try opening it again.

You are not allowed to open your fist at all.

## TIPS

- Try finding alternatives to opening with your hand.

## YOUR EXPERIENCE

- How was your experience?
- How did you manage to hold the bottle?
- How much time did it take for you to open the lid?
- Were you able to open the lid?

# Demystifying Accessibility

Now that you have experienced some or all of the activities, lets link some of it to accessibility and inclusive design.

Accessibility is about ensuring that people with disabilities can also use products, services, websites, mobile apps, televisions, etc. The list is endless, since in the ideal world everything should be used by everyone!

So how do you consider accessibility & inclusive design!

For me accessibility is about giving people choice. If they can't do it one way, can they do it in another way. Different people face different challenges when using the same product or service, this is because we have different needs, abilities and ways of doing the same thing.

I love reading books but someone else might like listening to books. I mainly use my computer with the keyboard but someone might prefer using the mouse. When I watch movies I like captions on, whereas somebody might find it confusing.

Lets me share my reactions of the Read it out experience.

I found myself struggling to read the medicine name and expiry date.

The font size was too small and I found myself squinting to try and focus on the words and bringing the medicine strips closer to my eyes, so I could see better. I found the colour contrast of silver packaging and red text very difficult to read! I found the packaging difficult to open.

Go back and relive the Experiences and list down the challenges that people with diverse abilities might face. A good place to start is to start with thinking of your senses. I love how the European Standard EN 301 549 talks of it as functional performance statements. Some of them are:

- Usage without sight or with limited vision
- Usage without hearing or with limited hearing
- Usage without vocal capabilities
- Usage with limited manipulation or strength
- Usage with limited reach
- Usage with limited cognition

So whatever you design, develop, build, create, implement and test think of how people consume that information with diverse abilities. That would be the perfect start of your accessibility journey.

**Don't ignore a 1 billion people in the world! So think Accessibility, think Inclusion!**

# About BarrierBreak

BarrierBreak is an accessibility consulting and assistive technology firm based in India specializing in accessibility testing, accessible documents, and accessibility consulting. Your one stop solution for all your accessibility needs!

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