Jodiann Gayle Disabled Lawyer and Proud Transcript

JG = Jodiann Gayle, DH = Daniel Holt

Daniel Holt (‘DH’): Hello, and welcome to another episode of Disabled Lawyer and Proud. Today, we have Jodiann Gayle, founder of Legalnable. Legalnable is a support group for law students. Jodiann decided to found Legalnable after longing for a group where there was a space for people to share their personal experiences, feelings, coping strategies or first-hand information about having a disability. Jodiann also works as a disability advisor in higher education, where she uses her lived experience of being disabled to influence change by way of reasonable adjustments. Jodiann is a law graduate who was diagnosed with dyslexia and she uses her experience to help others while pursuing a career at the bar. Welcome, Jodiann.

**Jodiann Gayle (‘JG’): Thank you. Hi, everyone.**

DH: It's great to have you on and work together again. Jodiann was part of our panel for 2022 International Women's Day event. Jodiann, my first question for you is, what does being disabled mean to you?

**JG: Um... Okay, so... When I think about it, I just think... I'm just differently able to do things. I'm able, not disabled, but I'm just different differently able to do things that other people can do, or other people do. Yep, that's it. That's how I'd answer that question. Yeah. And I think, for everybody else that has a disability, I think, yeah. And that identify with the community, we're just differently able to do things. We're doing everything but we do it differently. Take longer. We could... Yeah. But we still do it, we still end up doing it and we still can with just a little bit of help and assistance.**

DH: That's very interesting because there's a big debate about that in the disabled community. Yeah. How do we phrase what we are? You mentioned we are differently able. Some people don't get on board with that, because you're not disabled, you're able in different ways. Some people will say that disabled and unable aren't the same thing, and disabled means we are prevented from doing things equally by thematic and attitudinal barriers.

**JG: Yeah. I know what you mean, there's a... It's... Everybody has a different way in which they'd like to be identified, isn't it? Yeah. And I guess that's what causes there to be a lot of, er, different perspectives on the subject matter of disability and what it means to everyone. I'm sure everyone's got their own personal relationship with their disability as well, and I guess it all depends on what sort of disability you have as well. I'm dyslexic, so I just look at it as, I learn differently to everybody else. I process information differently to some people. Not everybody, just to some people. But we're all different and unique, so in our own way, we're all individuals. So, um, yeah.**

DH: Yeah. In the work you do with Legalnable and in your job in higher education, you help people remove those barriers that enable them to be able to have equal opportunities to education and work opportunities.

**JG: Yeah. Yeah. We enable, erm... So, in education and with Legalnable, I enable students to have access to education and the workplace so they can be quite successful in the things they've chosen to do. Yeah. And providing the support along the way, as well.**

DH: We started Disabled Lawyer and Proud in July, because July is Disability Pride month every year. How do you feel about disability pride?

**JG: Erm... I feel that disability pride is important. You know, I... When it comes to disability, I don't think that anything should be left out, because disability encompasses everybody, and if disability encompasses everybody... When I say everybody, everybody that has a disability, at least, and you know, the community of disabled people is quite diverse. We're all quite diverse. So, yeah, I think it's quite important that it's celebrated, it is acknowledged and it is something that's taken into consideration.**

DH: Absolutely. Are you proud to be disabled?

**JG: Yeah, I'm proud to be disabled! Yes. I don't know... I've never... I don't think I had the opportunity to not be proud because I just found out that I had a dyslexia when I was at University and then I was like "Oh, I'm dyslexic. Okay, well, that was it all this time? This is why it took me so long to read my books and everything? Okay, well thank God. Well, now I know what it is I can actually study and get some work done. Yeah, because you guys are going to teach me all these strategies that I can put in place to get my work done." So, great. So, I was proud to now understand how I think and how I learn and I was proud to know now... I was proud to be to closer-- to to be connected to myself a little bit closer. I don't know. Yes, I was always proud. In terms of disclosure, have I been proud to say that I'm dyslexic? Erm... I was... I think.. I don't think I've ever had a problem to say I'm dyslexic, it's just whether somebody else will receive... When I say-- If I say to somebody “I've got a disability”, will they receive it the same way as I think they will? So that's my hesitation, um, but I've never been not proud. No.**

DH: Yeah. People do take it in different ways, and that's why we constantly have a battle about whether or not we disclose-- an internal battle about whether we disclose or not. Some disabled people, like me, don't need to consider that because it's evident at first glance. [laughing] Or you can hear it with me. So, that's a real battle, and I can understand how difficult and wearing that can be. Yeah. Yeah. I want to be proud, but society constantly tries to let me think I'm not supposed to be proud. Even more reason to be. Can you tell us a bit more about Legalnable?

**JG: Yeah. So, Legalnable is a law disability support group. We want to be a disability network, so we're pushing to not be a small disability support but a big disability support group, collaborating, partnering with other disability societies, being part of the community and ensuring that students who want to pursue a career in the legal profession feel supported and connected with the disability community. So, Legalnable was created to sort of bridge the gap between education and career. Yeah. That's what Legalnable does, and reaching out to loads of different law socities within the university and helping them to be more inclusive and ensuring that they can provide more access to disabled students in regards to the events that they do and workshops that they have. Yeah. So, that's just a little bit about what Legalnable does. And we have events, as well. And we've got an event with yourselves. We're collaborating, aren't we? We'll talk about that in a little while. I'm looking forward to it. Yeah. I really am.**

DH: Can you tell us a bit more about your day job? Your role in higher education?

**JG: Yeah. So, I work as a disability advisor, and I've been working as a disability advisor now for... since 2018, I've been working as a disability advisor. In a disability advisory role. 'Cause I started as a disability officer, which is kind of the same thing, and yeah. I've worked for... I've worked in about six universities, so I've been all around and I've been able to provide and help and support lots of students, which is something that I really am happy about because it's something I really wanted to be able to do as a disability advisor. Being able to go to lots of different universities and connect with students has sort of given me a better understanding of the problems students are facing and the processes that are in place for students and what changes need to be made in regards to providing students the access to education that they need. But yeah, that's what I do. I think it's really important that disabled students have people within the university who are willing and able to help them to achieve their potential. I think you do that. Every career has good aspects and not-so-good aspects.**

DH: What have been the biggest obstacles in your career?

**JG: Oh, the biggest obstacles in my career is learning to navigate my way through the legal profession, and just outside of the legal profession as well, jobs, in terms of my disability. Yeah. Learning to navigate my way through the professional world knowing that I have a disability and I face obstacles and a few challenges in the jobs that I will... I've applied for and I'd like to do. Because I do aim high, I don't try to be confined by the limits or the barriers that have been put in or that are there. You know, I'll work as hard as I need to. I fall into the 'resilient' category of people because I keep on going and I don't stop. So, yeah. I think...Yeah. It's just the difficulties I've had, and I'm constantly learning how to just navigate through the working world with my disability. Yeah. Knowing that I have a disability, yeah. Yeah. That's the way to do it.**

DH: What have been the best experiences of your career?

**JG: Best experiences is, erm... sticking at what I... sticking at the work that I want to do. So, you know, not allowing the things that I struggle with to hold my back. 'Cause I do struggle with speech and language and I find it difficult to stay on track in terms of my speech and speak in a coherent manner or deliver the organised thoughts that I have in my head to everyone, to an audience. I do struggle with that, and it causes me to stutter quite a lot of times. That's down to my dyslexia, I think. It's something I've had to work on. But the great thing is that I'm in spaces where I'm speaking all the time. People have given me the opportunities to speak, like I'm here on this podcast. Daniel's asked me to come and speak on this podcast. So, putting, you know... Even though I find it difficult and it's a challenge of mine, I'm still able to be in the spaces where I'm able to speak and my voice can be heard and my disability is not something that's holding me back. I was part of Toastmasters, where I want to practise my public speaking, and I came second place in a public speaking contest. That's something I was... That's one of my greatest achievements, because I was always nervous and I always put myself down for not being a great speaker and not being able to express myself in terms of my speech and writing, as well. And I think another great achievement of mine is, again with the speech and the language, you know, all the things that affect someone that's dyslexic. I contributed to a project on inclusion and diversity in the workplace by writing a chapter on disability in the workplace for the Centre for Legal Leadership. They contacted me and asked me to write a chapter on disability and I wrote that chapter and it was a brilliant chapter on disability, as well. I was quite proud of that because I thought I couldn't write, I thought I wasn't good at writing. And now, I'm... What would you call it? An author, maybe? I still can't believe it. Yeah. An author. I wrote something. Yeah, so I'm doing everything I thought I couldn't do, and I've been put in those spaces of people that do do those things.**

DH: Yeah, you wrote a good chapter in a great book. I haven't been able to read it properly because it was quite a dense book. [laughing]

**JG: Oh, yeah. Yeah. Yeah.**

DH: But I will get round to it. Can you tell us what the book was?

**JG: Oh, what the book was? Okay. So, the book is... It's the second edition, Inclusion and Diversity, the second edition, and it's the Centre for Legal Leadership who are behind this project as well.**

DH: We will put a link to it in the description so people can find it, read it and enjoy it, hopefully.

**JG: Yeah.**

DH: What advice would you give to those aspiring for a similar career as you?

**JG: Okay. The advice I would give for those people who are aspiring to go down a similar career path as mine... In terms of the legal profession especially, I'd say do as much... join lots of societies and different communities, closely connected to the communities that you would identify with, and then also you know join other communities that you might not identify with as well so you can learn more and get a better understanding. In terms of the legal profession, the more you get involved in terms of going on court trips, join the Law Society, the disability law societies or do pro bono work. The more you'll get used to those spaces and interacting with the lawyers, barristers, solicitors, judges, that when you do actually start working in practice, you will not be in unfamiliar territory. You'll be really familiar with the territory that you're in. For someone like myself with dyslexia, when I'm in an environment that I'm not used to, I then start to... I say my dyslexia flares up because I'm not used to that space, I'm not used to that room, so then it can cause me to face a lot of challenges and obstacles along the way in terms of my training and my development. So I encourage everybody who wants to sort of get in a specific career path-- go down a career... pursue a specific career just to get into those spaces before you actually start doing the job. It makes life a lot easier and it helps you to relax and sort of learn a little bit better when you start doing the work.**

DH: I couldn't agree more. And obviously, networking is essential to any legal career. And getting involved in different parts of the profession, groups and support networks. That can really build a support network around you and it really helps in these professions. What would you like people to take away from your journey.

**JG: Oh, erm... To not give up and not listen to... If you have the determination and you know exactly where you would like to go in your career, don't give up. As they say, where there is a will, there is a way. And you might not find the way tomorrow, or get to achieve all the things you'd like to achieve the day after that or the day after that, but I encourage you to stay the course. Stay the course and start to enjoy it a little bit more. Find all the things that you enjoy, that you like to do within that career path that you've chosen to do, and just sort of do them. Do the little things that you like, and then gradually, you'll start moving towards the bigger things, and the bigger things, and the bigger things. That's what I'll say. Don't let no-one discourage you, and stick with the people that want you to succeed and want you to progress. Stick around them. Get a mentor, and, yeah, someone to show you the way, as well, is really, really, really important. That's what I'd like everyone to take away.**

DH: I really like your never-giving-up approach. I think what really demonstrates that is your commitment to developing your speaking and your public engagement. Obviously, I have a speech impairment and speech is a big part of being a barrister. It's something I have to work on as well, and so I really resonate with that. And yeah, I do public speaking and I'm going on an advocacy course. My chambers are helping me with additional advocacy training. It's about not giving up and finding ways around your impairment or the barriers in place that stop you from having an equal opportunity.

**JG: Yeah. Yeah.**

DH: What would you consider to be some of the most pertinent issues around disability rights at the moment?

**JG: Um, I'd say visibility? I would say visibility. Um, in terms of, people aren't aware of their rights, for one. The students, I find that they are not aware of their rights so they don't understand how to navigate their way around the disability world. They've been diagnosed with having a disability or you know those have just been recently diagnosed especially um they don't really understand and they're often led by the advisors, disability advisors in the universities and if if you don't have a good disability advisor, you know, that student still is sort of um, you know, left in a grey area or the dark in regards to their disability, um because they were relying on someone to teach them. So, what I um encourage students to do is um, you know, take the time out to learn their rights and learn… understand their disability, yeah, as much… as best as they can because only you will you can know how to speak up for yourself or only you understand your disability. You can't really expect other people to understand our disability for us, but a lot more visibility in terms of what's happening in the disability world, yeah. It's a lot more visibility and um yeah I think that's what I have to say. Visibility and engagement from from the disability community. Yeah. Yeah. We have to start doing some stuff I think. Um, you know we've been put in a situation where we always had to wait for people to do things for us maybe, um, but it'd be good for us to take action in the small ways that we can and, um, yeah join communities or actually um do things for ourselves and what we can do for ourselves we do for ourselves.**

DH: Absolutely. Visibility is important and it’s a big part of what we do with the ADL and I know it’s a big part of what other works you do. And you know it’s getting better. Particularly in Law. I know there are more people in the media as well. Providing role models to the general public and we have lawyers being models to law students. But it’s still important and we do need people to come out and be role models to young disabled people or less experienced disabled people. I think then we can encourage more people to take similar careers and opportunities. I also think the issue around knowing your rights. When I was a student, I didn’t know about reasonable adjustments. I mean, I knew the kind of overarching concept but I didn’t really know how it worked and the application of it. Even though I had a great disability advisor, we had reasonable adjustments that weren’t probably suitable. My exam in the first and second year would be about 8 hours long and when you do an 8-hour law exam it has an impact on you.

**JG: Yeah.**

DH: So, in my final year we split it up a bit so I could do it in different chunks. And I did perform better. So, I really resonate with that. I understand law to be a very difficult career to understand, but there are resources out there where people can read about the legal protections they have. I’ll get some and put them in the description below. To finish our conversation, we wanted to end on a very positive note, and that is, our joint event for Black History Month. Jodiann, can you tell the audience a bit about the event that we’re doing?

**JG: Okay. So, our event is going to be on the 31st October and we are collaborating with the Association of Disabled Lawyers, Legalnable, and our committees are going to be there so our committees will be present at the event so you'll be able to see all the lovely people behind the both networks as well so you'll be able to meet the teams and you'll hear from the panelist speakers. I'll be on-- I'll be a panelist speaker, we'll have Mark Robinson, we'll have Placida speaking and we'll have Gabriel speaking as well. Mark Robinson is a barrister, Placida is a solicitor and an advocate in the disability world, and Gabriel has a disability and he has started his own initiative called Barristers Breaking Barriers, and he'll share that with us a little bit as well. Um, yeah, and he'll be telling us about how he he applied for a scholarship and how he got a scholarship. The panelist speakers will be sharing their experiences and their journey with with the students so, it'll be a really really nice event, hearing from them.**

DH: I’m really looking forward to it. The collaboration once again will be good enough in itself. But it will be a huge celebration of Black History Month and I’m really looking forward to doing that with Legalnable. To finish off, and keeping in line with our event, please can you tell us what Black History Month means to you?

**JG: Okay. Black History Month means to me... It means back to again, visibility and support. It means that um... what Black History Month means to me, it means, you know, if given the platform or if people are able to see me, if I'm speaking up, people can see that, you know, as a black female I work as a disability advisor, so you know, as a student if you've not seen a a disability advisor or a black person working in the sphere of education, you know, I'm there, I'm present, you know, you could always reach out to me and speak to me. Also, in the legal profession as well, if you have not seen a black person as well with a disability, I'm here and I'm present and you can always reach out to me if you wanted to speak to me. So Black History Month is just about about, you know, amplifying the voices of black people in different careers and also just having them speak up and sharing their experiences and talking about some of the... and sharing how, ways of how people can get the support that they need and and how they can stay connected. Yeah.**

DH: I am looking forward to the event. It's going to be great.

**JG: I'm looking forward to it as well. I'm really looking forward to it as well. I think it will-- it's going to be the first event for Legalnable this year, er, not this year but this academic term. The students will go back.**

DH: Great, yeah. Obviously, for people not in education anymore, the academic year is just beginning [laughing, JG: “Yeah.”]. Many students are becoming accustomed to stress and their increasing workload, so I’m sure it will be a nice break for anyone who wants to attend.

**JG: Yeah. Yeah, no, most definitely, most definitely. And yeah, it's just again, bringing the communities together. Yeah, yeah, yeah.**

DH: Thank you for joining us, Jodiann, it’s great to see you again, though I look forward to seeing you very very soon [JG: “Yes. Thank you.”] on the 31st of October. Thank you to you, the audience, for listening or watching another episode of Disabled Lawyer and Proud. I am Daniel Holt - I always forget to introduce myself - I am the Chair of the Association of Disabled Lawyers. Thank you for watching. Take care. Bye.

**JG: Take care. Bye. Thank you.**