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CTRL+CLICK CAST #125

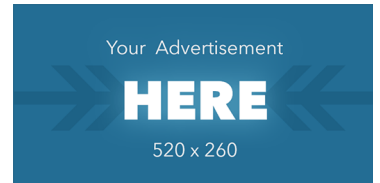## Designing for People Struggling with Mental Health with Francis Rowland

CTRL+CLICK CAST is proud to provide transcripts for our audience members who prefer text-based content. However, our episodes are designed for an audio experience, which includes emotion and emphasis that don't always translate to our transcripts. Additionally, our transcripts are generated by human transcribers and may contain errors. If you require clarification, please listen to the audio.

Preview: People are just people. The people who use websites, for example, or any kind of digital product are just people and everybody faces problems and challenges and perhaps impairments of some sort. So it probably helps to kind of reinforce the value of having that perspective because there has been explicitly or the project hasn't been explicitly about accessibility in the sense that many people foresee that, but just to do it, you know, does this work on a screen reader, which is certainly a very valid and very important point, but is a part of accessibility and inclusive design. So I think it probably helped me and my teammate consider other aspects of what do we mean when we talk about inclusive design and reinforce some ideas and then kind of open this up to other things, and even working with the subject matter, social matter experts in mind as sources of things. We've learned things about what we're doing and who we're designing for.

[Music]

Lea Alcantara: From Bright Umbrella, this is CTRL+CLICK CAST! We inspect the web for you! Today Francis Rowland joins the show to discuss how to design for people with mental health conditions. I'm your host, Lea Alcantara, and I'm joined by my fab co-host:

Emily Lewis: Emily Lewis!

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Emily Lewis: And starting next month, Lea, sponsorships won't be the only way to support our podcast.

Lea Alcantara: That's right. We are launching a Patreon for CTRL+CLICK CAST next Wednesday October 31st. We're hoping the Patreon support will help us innovate and experiment with content, but we also want it to help us better connect with you, our listeners.

Emily Lewis: Yeah, that's why we're offering some pretty sweet rewards for our supporters, early access to new episodes, voting on topics, SWAG…

Lea Alcantara: Access to a private Slack to chat about episodes after they're released, even one-on-one video chats with us to talk about whatever you want. [Laughs] So please stay tuned to our Twitter feed for all the details at CTRL+CLICK CAST. All right, let's get to today's episode.

Emily Lewis: Just like last episode, we're focusing on mental health this month in honor of World Mental Health Day and Mental Illness Awareness Week. Last time around, we had career counselor Dina DeLapa on the show to talk about self-care to help us better manage job stress and burnout and even deal with negative feedback at work, and today we're still talking about professional stuff in context of mental health, but this time, really about how to be better designers like expanding our idea of what inclusive design really is and how we can create good user experiences for people who are struggling with their mental health.

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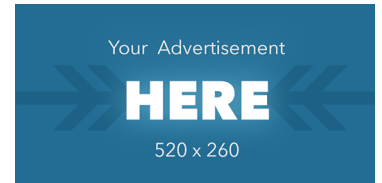
Joining us is Francis Rowland. He is the senior UX architect at Sigma, leading their office in Cambridge, UK, where he is involved in the full cycle of design projects, from research to ideation to design strategy and evaluation. Welcome to the show, Francis.

Francis Rowland: Hi Emily. Hi Lea. Thanks for having me. It's really nice to be here.

Lea Alcantara: Thank you. So can you tell our listeners a bit more about yourself?
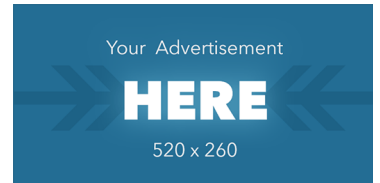
Francis Rowland: Absolutely, so as you said in your introduction, I'm based in Sigma's Cambridge office. So our office is actually on a science research campus so we're surrounded by European science institutes and other kind of businesses who are mostly focused on doing things with biological data, so we're kind of the odd ones out on this campus because we're all designers, but we find ways to get on and we work with some of the people here, with some of the other companies and institutes, which is pretty good fun.

Emily Lewis: Nice. So how did you even get started working on the web?

Francis Rowland: [Laughs] That was a long time ago. So originally I did a degree in environmental science, so quite different stuff, but while I was at the university, I had friends who worked on and were studying computer science and they introduced me to this thing called HTML and using chat sites, if some of you remember chat sites.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

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Francis Rowland: And the fact that you could use HTML to kind of do things, funky things like change the color of text and make things italic, and I thought, "This is pretty clever," and so learned a bit more about it I guess and then when I graduated, my first job was kind of so much of really just for a few weeks was updating things on somebody's website. I kind of went from there really.

Emily Lewis: Yeah, I think that's sounds very similar to me as well. [Laughs] You know, before we get into today's episode, I want to remind our listeners that none of us are mental health experts, we're web professionals, even though we are going to be talking a little bit about mental health today. But if you are struggling with your own mental wellbeing, please reach out to professionals and we're going to make sure to include links to some reputable organizations that have resources in our show notes on our website. All right, so Francis, this whole episode came about because last year, I saw on an interview you did with Digital Arts about your team's work with the mental health charity Mind.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Emily Lewis: And I thought it was interesting in that interview, you noted that designing for people with disabilities first has been a really effective strategy for just overall good user experience, like a good baseline. So can you explain a little bit more about why can accessibility-first approach works?

Francis Rowland: Sure. I think it's an interesting approach to take because it asks us to change our perspective ultimately. So it's asking us about who we're designing for and, in fact, to think the idea that we might be designing for our future selves.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Francis Rowland: So it's very easy to design for ourselves now so I can design for my situation very easily because I know myself and I know all the people like me, but what it's asking us to do is to
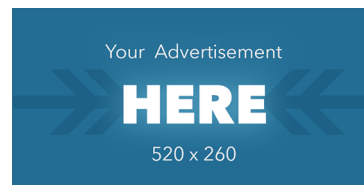
think of it more widely, and in doing so, we can often find very kind of elegant but simple solutions to think that yes help somebody who may have an impairment that impacts their ability to access information or to perform tasks that can actually help people more widely that make things just generally easier to use and more welcoming.

Emily Lewis: Well, you talk about may be designing for our future selves, not just people we may perceive to have a disability, what do you mean by that? Like what kind of future self are you referring to? For me what comes to mind is I just turned 44. My eyesight is really changing a lot.
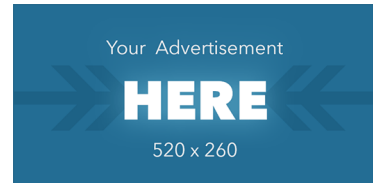
Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Emily Lewis: And I'm constantly telling Lea I need better contrast and higher fonts in the comps that she sends me. That wasn't there a decade ago.

Francis Rowland: Yeah, I mean, it's exactly that sort of thing. All of us change over time. So it's not a "them and us" situation. We're not permanently able bodied with perfect vision and perfect mobility and perfect cognitive skills. We all change with all of these things. So exactly, as we age, our eyesight changes, our range of motion changes, but there are also I suppose not necessarily a permanent thing in the future, there are situational changes that we can have so we might break an arm or we might have had a head injury or we might be designing for people who are doing something else, and while using something that we've designed, they might be holding a baby in one arm.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Francis Rowland: You know, all of these different situations that are not like me at my desk in my office that we need to think of. So yeah, sometimes it's the future self and sometimes it might be considering different situations in which some things has been used.

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Emily Lewis: You mentioned that there are oftentimes really elegant but simple solutions that we can take taking that accessibility first. Could you share an example of that that may be people might be familiar with or might be simple for them to think about themselves?

Francis Rowland: Yeah, I guess so. I mean, I suppose the first thing that comes to mind, which many people, many of your listeners will think, "Yeah, I've seen that or I've done it myself," is to chunk information or to chunk pieces of a task, so to cut things off into you read or you do a thing and then when that's completed, you then show and allow somebody to interact through the next thing.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Francis Rowland: So an example might be a kind of a checkout process, let's say, where you hopefully are clearly taken through a process where you select an item, let's say you add it to a basket, and then there's the billing information, the postal address, those kinds of things that you're asked for in sequence. That's something that can help people who may struggle with being asked for all of that at once.
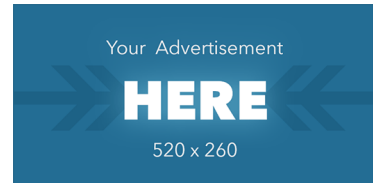
Emily Lewis: Right.

Francis Rowland: Let's face it, that's probably most of us. If you pour all of that on a screen at once, let's say, that can be a bit overwhelming where you think okay and it's fine, this information and it's fine. This thing, it certainly adds a cognitive load, but it's unnecessary really.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Francis Rowland: So if we can design those kinds of things thinking that it would help somebody who needs it, for whom it's simplest go-to things in steps and have those chunks of tasks they need to perform, that can also then be true for the wider community or the wider population, I guess.

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Emily Lewis: That makes sense.

Lea Alcantara: I think that's a really important thing to underline over and over again in that while we are focusing a lot on accessibility and mental health with this particular topic or just approaching design, there's a wider benefit, immediate benefits in user experience when you have this particular perspective because right now when you're talking about say like form design and cognitive load, you don't necessarily have to be someone with mental health issues to want to close that page and not press buy because it's simply too busy or overwhelming and the lack of simplicity just doesn't help you fulfill your tasks.
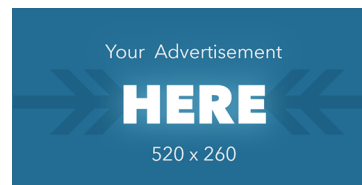
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Emily Lewis: Yeah, and I think there's data to back it up and just generally breaking something out like that increases conversions so it's connecting with everyone.

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Emily Lewis: So I mentioned the work you did with the charity Mind. Before we get into the specifics of tips for thinking more inclusively and designing better user experiences, can you talk a little bit more about that work for Mind, what they needed, what their business goals were, and then what you all did to help them achieve those?

Francis Rowland: Absolutely, yes. So we started working with Mind in summer of last year, so summer of 2017, and they approached us because, I mean, ultimately, I think the thing they started with was wanting to improve their website.

Emily Lewis: Yeah.

Francis Rowland: So they have a website that runs on an architecture that needed to be updated so content management system and then other things that plug into that, but whilst doing that, whist making this kind of technical change, they wanted to make changes to how things are designed, so how information is presented to people or how people could get involved in fundraising events or donate money to Mind that do try and tackle this. So it's part of the bigger digital strategy that is still ongoing for Mind to really make the most of the kind of digital channels for which they connect to people. So the primary goal is to kind of I guess sufficiently and effectively deliver information about mental health conditions or treatment or the law to people in the UK so the leading charity in the UK who do this and provide this as a service to I guess people in the country, but they wanted to make primarily the delivery of the information as clear as possible.
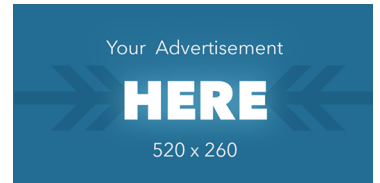
Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Francis Rowland: Beyond that, they are a charity. As with charities anywhere, they rely on donation and charitable giving to do what they do, to provide the kind of great information and guidance that they do. So they also wanted to drive more donations and to raise the profile of their fundraising events and get people involved in running races or doing parachute jumps or for being sponsored to raise funds for Mind as well.

Emily Lewis: And this is an assumption, but it seems to me that given the fact that they provide a lot of information to help the people who may be struggling themselves or may have family members that they have an audience that has challenges that may be a typical person on a typical day may not be experiencing.

Francis Rowland: Correct. So when we started working with them, they had already done some work themselves to develop some kind of personas for the kinds of people who use particularly that website.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Francis Rowland: So the kind of core focus is on the website, and yeah, within that, then they had to think about people who were coming up with information and some people who were coming because they had to kind of perhaps chronic mental health condition as kind of an ongoing thing or as you say, they were seeking information on behalf of a family member and who may be in a situation where, "I need this information now, who do I contact about this? Help me out."
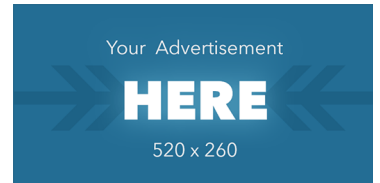
Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Francis Rowland: So not always necessarily people who are in a crisis situation, although Mind do try and support that group of people as well, but just getting people to the right information without getting in their way really.

Emily Lewis: Well, I mean, even if you yourself is in crisis, if you're trying to get information for someone else, it feels like a crisis too, so like you said, you want to get that information quickly without friction, making it simple so that you can get that information and move on to the real problem at hand.

Francis Rowland: Exactly, yeah.

Lea Alcantara: Is there anything particularly unique about viewing that user experience challenge with that particular audience? Because overall, obviously, a lot of us, web designers and developers, want to remove friction in general, was there anything that you learn with this particular project that changed your perspective or was there a particular nuance that you were like, "Oh, for this audience, we really need to consider X?

Francis Rowland: So I suppose one of the interesting things that probably is the case, I think you know this, with anyone who reflects on it afterwards, it's probably the case. You know the situation as well, but certainly when we worked at Mind, it was to think that people or let's say her persona might change. So they might go from somebody who's seeking help and information to somebody who wants to get involved in fundraising event because they want to give back effectively.
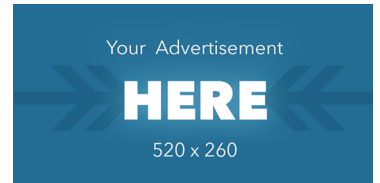
Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Francis Rowland: So that we are continuing to work with Mind, so we're still thinking about. It's really to consider the transition between personas really, so you're not always one thing. You're not always seeking help so that from a design points of view, then you don't want to kind of funnel people down information where you'd say, "Oh, are you seeking help? Okay, well, here's how to do that," or funneling them the fundraising route necessarily. We want to allow people to move between those things because they think, "Oh, I found out what I need to do, that's great. How could I donate, for example?"

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Francis Rowland: And so that they shift them into a slightly different, you know, or they have different needs, they don't have a different profile effectively. So I guess we were kind of juggling that knowledge while also thinking about making design choices really.

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Emily Lewis: I mean, that challenge alone, it reflects a broader accessibility challenge. It's one of the reasons why here in the US, some of the standards require that you have multiple paths of navigation to really give people that freedom of choice, but at the same time you have to make those design decisions about not overwhelming. I was thinking when you were just talking earlier about chunking up a form process for a user who might feel overwhelmed by that tremendous amount of information that they have to contribute, I think that same thing shows up not just on websites, but even like in apps for me. It came up as one of the things Lea wants me to do professionally is to engage more on Slack.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Emily Lewis: And it triggers my social anxiety, like it is completely overwhelming for me, and I don't understand how people get value out of it because it feels like something that's just too much and so for me, I just turned off and I feel like that that's one of those things that when you're experiencing either an app or a site that that point of overwhelmingness, whatever the right word for that, that really can shut someone down. So giving that freedom of getting out of it, like making it a funnel, not keeping them tied in to one avenue, kind of, can help relieve that.

Francis Rowland: I think that's correct. Yeah, exactly, so for example, within particularly how Mind presents information about mental health conditions or treatments or the law, there's a lot of fairly technical terminology because it's the correct terminology.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]
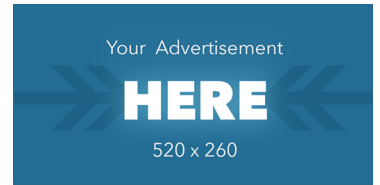
Francis Rowland: You need to be sure about which words you're using. So if people kind of get funneled too much, they might feel a dead end because they think, "Now, wait a minute, this isn't what I need. This isn't me. I don't recognize myself here." So Mind, they're often very careful about how they do it, how they allow people to move kind of sideways, if you see what I mean, between things and not kind of get stuck down an alleyway and the like.
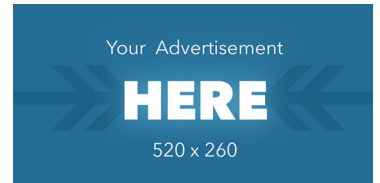
Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Francis Rowland: So that's something that we then try to reflect. As we work the thing, we began to kind of process like new ways of presenting things like information to allow that sort of sideways movements and make it clear where are you, what is this about, is this the right place to make the decision quickly and then be able to go back from that, which essentially is a basic usability issue to allow people to avoid that and be able to recover from them if they make them.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: I feel like that leads really well to a great listener question we got, especially when you mentioned like a user could read something and say like, "That doesn't sound like me." She asked, "Other the more obvious accessibility requirements such as non-seizure inducing content and color contrast and psych-based color theory, is designing for mental health more about content tone and voice?"

Francis Rowland: That is a good question, yeah. I mean, I think there is something in that. I think probably yes it is, it has to do with that. We early on, I think, settled on the idea that there were some design principles really that we wanted to follow, and the most prominent one that comes to mind is one about reassurance.

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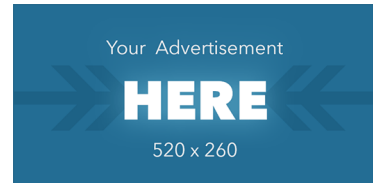Bright UMBRELLA

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Francis Rowland: So reassuring the reader of the information that they weren't being considered that this was for them and to then adjust the tone accordingly so that although yes there is kind of specific terminology that one has to use when talking about mental health conditions, for example, it does still not vary, it's not cold, and it's not clinical and that the content teams who work at Mind are very good writers and they're very conscious of that, so they write accordingly, so they deliver factually correct, reliable information. It has a stamp, like an information stamp that says very, very high quality information, but yes, they are thinking about tone and kind of we each try to work that as well really. It's just to try and make something that was welcoming. It's actually not hard and cold.

Emily Lewis: Can you talk about that a little bit more? Can you talk about some of those design strategies that align to create something that wasn't cold, something that was reassuring?

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Francis Rowland: So some things were fairly simple. So for example, making it very clear what this we page is about when you get to it. So web pages generally can often have a lot of fluff, a lot of things happening around the top and the sides that can annoy effectively and you as a reader it needs to be clear quickly, "Is this relevant to me? Is this what I want?" And the same is true for pages of information, for example, on Mind's website. So we would want to clarify what this page is about so you as the reader can quickly make a decision, "Is this right for me?" So making it more prominent really the title of the page, even perhaps changing the title page slightly to be clear and obvious was something we wanted to do. And to relate back to the point I made earlier about kind of chunking, about cutting up information, we've built that into the moment you're still in that kind of the first time stage.

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Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Francis Rowland: But we built that into how we suggest information is presented, so that it's easier to see quickly the very relevant information and then choose to kind of expand things and dig into it a little bit more. If you need to know about the law around this, so you need to find some other kind of pieces of information. It's not all printed all at once, but you as the reader can choose to kind of find your way, explore a little bit, but still the very first thing you see should give you something. It should either tell you you're in the right place and where you think reassure you by doing that or say, "Okay, this is what you're looking for."
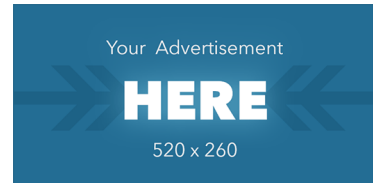
Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Francis Rowland: But it's easy to go somewhere else so that the navigation is very clear to like move away or move backwards, let's say.

Emily Lewis: You know, this may sound like such a lay person's perspective, but was color at all at play in here? I remember like my Psych 101 class talking about how different colors were used in hospitals to make people feel calmer. Did color come into play at all?

Francis Rowland: It has actually, yeah. When we started working with Mind, it wasn't kind of like a blank slate, let's change everything. So they have their brand.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Francis Rowland: So they have the website, but they also produced print material there and events, there are shops as well that they use to raise funds. There are many things, physical and digital, that have a brand and use colors in a certain way. So we couldn't start completely from scratch like that.

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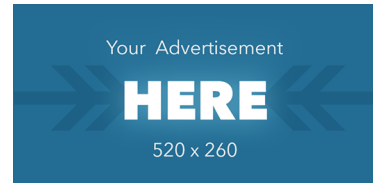
Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Francis Rowland: Certainly, the designer in our team who works on this began to explore what was in that brand, the guidelines, and what could he do, and he certainly did then begin to introduce different uses of color or using the color to mean different things or to suggest a call to action or something like that. So a less intensive use of big blocks of color and a more kind of considered use of color to draw attention to certain things, which of course is a good design approach. Changing the specific colors, I think he has suggested that from what I remember in some of the first stage, yes, because there are other colors available from the palette in the basic kind of brand guideline of Mind there.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Francis Rowland: So choosing some of those to use in a different way, certainly he has done as well.

Emily Lewis: Yeah, I certainly can't speak for everyone who experiences anxiety, but I do feel like if I'm very much in a bad place with that, being on a site with a lot of color is distracting or it almost feels like there are too many choices for me to consider too many things that are trying to draw my attention, and so I do think that if you're thinking of an audience who may have those challenges, whether it's something that's mental health related or situational, being careful about color so that you're really only drawing attention to something that really should be kind of registering the mind as important as opposed to having ten important things that someone feels they have to process.

Francis Rowland: Correct. Exactly, that's it. So we did a lot of work with Mind to break down to kind of understand what a page needed to do, so let's say it's a page of information about a condition like anxiety, what should this page allow its reader to achieve, and then begin to remove all the stuff that

you didn't need to see really. Not that there was lots of stuff. I mean, in their current website, in the way they present things, it's not overloaded with all sorts of things.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Francis Rowland: But still you can kind of refine that and kind of bring forward what somebody needs to know or what they need to act on so they know what to do next, which is really their purpose.

**Lea Alcantara**: Yeah, and I think that some people forget that a lot of these are actual design choices.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: So we are focusing on color, but another common design choice is spacing, and giving the right amount of area so that things don't look overwhelming. So even if there is a lot of information, making sure that the most important stuff is highlighted and isolated instead of like several paragraphs for example, or making sure that the links aren't like cramped together. Those kind of things that are just good design principles are also great for just general accessibility and making things less overwhelming for anybody who is taking a look at a site and wanting to be able to make the right choices. Especially if you do enter a site based on a crisis mindset, the last thing you want is confusion as your next step.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Francis Rowland: Absolutely, yeah. I mean, I remember that years and years ago when I first started designing things really learning about the CRAP principle, so I've used it on myself and then used it,
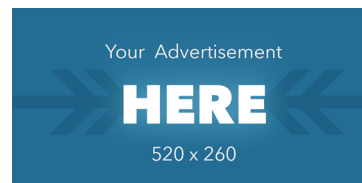
kind of taught it to other people since when I kind of taught user experience design courses, so this is to think about it. CRAP stands for Contrast, Repetition, Alignment and Proximity.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: Yes. [Laughs]

Francis Rowland: And in case you're getting worried about what that might be.
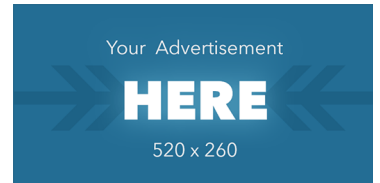
Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Francis Rowland: But yeah, it's kind of a very, very useful basic design principle to follow. Think about contrast. Think about how things lined up. Do you understand how one thing relates to another in terms of proximity? Do you repeat things using the same pattern or are you using all sorts of different ways to mean the same thing? Things like that are very useful, and it's not particularly true with accessibility, but yeah, it makes things more accessible for everybody, which I think is the point really.

Emily Lewis: So were you able to do any user testing with Mind's audience as part of the work you've done? How did you test the solutions you were designing?

Francis Rowland: So we didn't do it directly as an agency. Mind did it themselves actually.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Francis Rowland: So they have a really good digital team who basically who we've been working with as like one big team between us, and they have kind of a panel of users who they can call on who have at some point volunteered to help with different things. We kind of gave them some advice about how they might evaluate things, and in this case, it was early prototypes. So this was I think during the first phase of work we did with them. We helped them put together the kind of scenarios and things that they would use to evaluate these early prototypes.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Francis Rowland: So they took a number, I can't remember how many now of people who kind of volunteers in this panel and did an evaluation and that has then fed into the kind of later phase of work that we've been doing of actually building things and delivering things.

Emily Lewis: From that testing, was there anything that came back to your team that you thought was interesting or surprising or completely expected?

Francis Rowland: I don't remember anything surprising particularly. It probably was more of the expected things.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Francis Rowland: Like it's kind of not so surprised that when there are less things on the screen and it's very clear what the key piece of information is, it's very easy to read and the other stuff is not getting the way that then people kind of say, "Well, that includes you, I like that. That's better."

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

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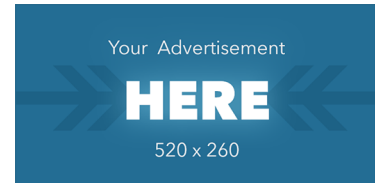
Francis Rowland: And I supposed there's validation of our thinking, our shared thinking, because obviously we were working with Mind to produce these things. So we did, for example, a lot of comps and modeling with Mind and kind of just the things that go on beneath the surface of what content do you need on a page about the mental health condition and what should its priority be.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Francis Rowland: And so we worked closely with their mental health experts on that, and again, testing that allows us to see, "Yeah, it clearly helps people to see that thing first so they can make decision about whether or not this is the right place for them and really want to keep reading." So that kind of thing helps, so that that kind of confirming one's thinking is certainly helpful part of evaluation.
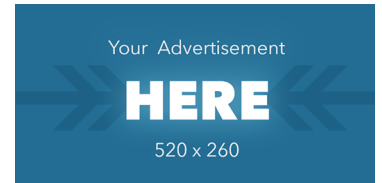
Emily Lewis: So I'm going to put you on the spot here because we didn't tell you about asking you this question in advance, but it only just occurs to me, especially as you're talking about the content modeling and you had mentioned earlier that this started as a technical requirement for Mind to sort of look at what their underlying CMS and content structure, but was there anything that your team was involved with in terms of that back-end, in terms of the CMS to have that support these decisions?

Francis Rowland: Yes, lots, in short.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Francis Rowland: So I'm blessed with having very dedicated, very capable teammates who are good at what they do and yeah, certainly, the technical people in our team who have been working on this had done a lot and in collaboration with counterparts in Mind as well. So in introducing a new or kind

of an updated content management system, we worked closely with the developers who are responsible for that to help them understand the information architecture.
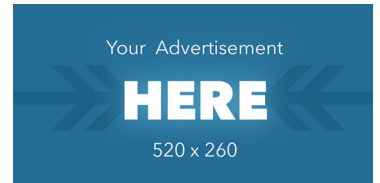
Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

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Francis Rowland: So what do we need in terms of content and how should it be connected to allow people to move around, to allow those kinds of transitions between personas that we talked about earlier, and then that's reflected in the technical architecture of the content management system that's being implemented. So we're talking about things that are not surprising, but things like tagging pieces of content.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Francis Rowland: So metadata is all important for this, so being able to tag a fundraising event and a personal story and the page of information all with the term "anxiety," for example, allows us to then connect things and allows us to present things to people at different times, but that relies on technical architecture and the understanding, the kind of shared understanding of people across the team of why do we need to do that, what's the point, so that makes it possible.

Emily Lewis: You know, that was going to be my question. I was wondering if you felt the technical team were as tied to the front-facing user experience as the design people were thinking about the users and the goals, because sometimes developers can – whether it's the organizational structure or the project or whatever – sometimes aren't able to be as tightly tied to that part of the process.

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Francis Rowland: Yeah. That sometimes happens, of course, but if they were and they continue to be tied to it, they continue to be heavily involved. So really, anybody who's making choices and decisions is affecting the design of something, not just the person who has designer in their job title.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Francis Rowland: That's also why it's worth understanding what the developer does, you know?

**Emily Lewis**: Yeah.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Francis Rowland: So I can talk to my teammates what's possible, and they might suggest something to me based on their expertise that allows new ideas to form and, "Okay, well, it looks like we could do this, let's explore that." So yeah, it's really important that they're involved and engaged and they're not just given something to build.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Francis Rowland: So it makes all the difference.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: So then I'm curious since we've been focusing a lot on the design driving some of the technical decisions, have there been technical feedback that has affected the way you've designed for this particular audience?

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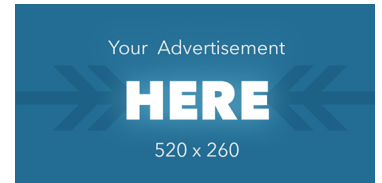
Francis Rowland: Oh, it's a good question. Yes, I guess there is. I mean, there is, for example, just understanding what's possible in a content management system.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Francis Rowland: So that allows certain things to happen and allows us to have conversations with the content authors about how they need to write that content and how it then needs to be tagged and then connected. So I supposed it's a dialogue really of things going back and forth and the project team as a whole has stand offs every day and there is sprint planning and there are always kinds of things that people to expect from the technical part of the projects, and so these conversations are going on all the time, "Well, can we do this? I want to achieve this or I want to help the audience, and at this point, do this thing. Is that possible?" Equally, the technical people can suggest things and can say, "Look, we can do these kinds of things with maps on the website, for example."

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Francis Rowland: There's a free flow of ideas really and that then I realized this something in first types and then then we can perhaps build what looks like what's going to work.

Emily Lewis: We have a few questions that we wanted to ask you about; resources and advice and stuff, but before we move in that direction, I just wanted to take a step back and just reflect if there's, you know. We've talked a little bit about making it clear for people what next steps are, talked about chunking contents so it's not overwhelming and other ways to serve that. Were there any other things that you needed to do for this audience like a challenge that this audience faced that you needed to do aside from those things? I'm thinking, you know, we've talked a lot about creating that calm, reassuring experience, but maybe perhaps with the donation process, was there anything about that that needed to be looked at, that was unique specifically because you may be dealing with people
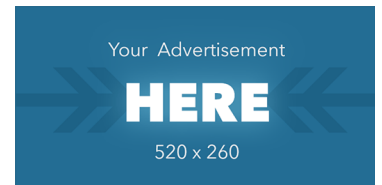
who have experienced a mental health struggle and are now trying to give back. Was there anything special about that audience?

Francis Rowland: Hopefully, this is going to be a simple answer to your question. You can stop me if it isn't, if it sound like it is, but with donation that you mentioned, one thing there is to – and all charities are often sensitive about this, it's not just pushing donation in every bit of space everywhere with flashing button saying, "Donate."

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Francis Rowland: But yes, of course, everybody knows that charities rely on donations and a charity like Mind is not state funded or anything, it entirely relies on donations and fundraising and that kind of thing. So I suppose we needed to be sensitive about helping Mind achieve one of their goals, which is to do with making donation easier basically, so their donation process previously wasn't working as well as it could do and is a kind of a bit more clunky than it needed to be and it added friction, and friction can be helpful, but sometimes it can be really quite of an obstruction.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Francis Rowland: So we've worked on that and actually the donation system that works now on the Mind website is live. The first thing that we designed has gone live. It's new and it works in a smoother way and kind of guide people through things better than it did before.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Francis Rowland: But the way that you get through donation is important as well, so rather than let's say having big flashing buttons of things everywhere, if you're somebody who's reading about a condition, and particularly if you're currently in a situation where in the grip of that condition, you probably don't want this kind of thing flashing at you.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]
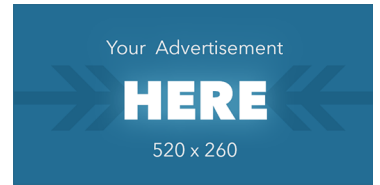
Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Francis Rowland: So we had to think about allowing people to choose to take or kind of follow the path of making donation, but not make it so prominent that it was making them, well, more than irritating, but kind of know why they were there for, and we had to kind of balance that, I guess, and so find ways of introducing effectively a call to action for donation but in a sensitive way. So again, that's still something that we're working on with, as I said, in a kind of a prototype stage in terms of how it's presented in different places across the site.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Francis Rowland: But essentially, it's choosing the right moment to ask for something in the sense of like we would if we were talking to somebody.

Emily Lewis: Yeah. Yeah. I feel like this is the whole emotional intelligence aspect of being a designer. It's really trying to be sensitive to all the potential scenarios that might come up in trying to define in some way how people might experience things. It's really pushing I think the field of design beyond what it's ever been before. I think it's a very important, but also a powerful direction that's happening on the web. I don't even know if this kind of stuff comes up in print design, but I think it's – oh, actually brings me perfectly to my next question, like has this process of designing for a different audience with more inclusive approach, has it changed you as a designer on your perspective?

Francis Rowland: I think it helped to reinforce the idea that where often it's more helpful perhaps to think about designing for diversity than it is to think about designing for disability.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Francis Rowland: So people are just people or the people who use websites, for example, or any kind of digital product are just people and everybody faces problems and challenges and perhaps impairments of some sort. So it probably helped to kind of reinforce the value of having that perspective because the project hasn't been explicitly about accessibility in the sense that many people perceive it as to do with, "Does this work on a screen reader?"
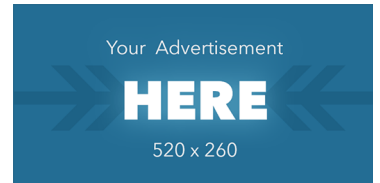
Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Francis Rowland: Which is certainly a very valid and very important point, but it's a part of accessibility and inclusive design. So I think it probably helped me and my teammates consider other aspects of what do we mean when we talk about inclusive design and reinforce some ideas and then kind of opened this us to other things, and even working with the subject matters with social matter experts at Mind has taught us things. We've learned things about what we're doing and who we are designing for.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: I think this also just really reinforces the importance of designing in context.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: You know, we're talking about designing for the audience, and maybe this is top of mind because we just had episodes on design systems and we've been talking a lot about design systems recently, and I think it's like if you create a system where you're like, "Okay, this module goes here and this call to action goes there," but as designers, it's our job to also really critically review those blanker kind of decisions that should apply on every single page because maybe it shouldn't. Maybe those calls to action shouldn't be there. As we mentioned that it might not be appropriate to have a Donate Now in the "What is Anxiety" page prominently displayed because that's just inappropriate.

Francis Rowland: Yeah.

Lea Alcantara: Again, we're talking a lot about this in the context of mental health and reducing friction, but even in just a general business context, when you just have blanket design decisions for, say, "simplicity's sake," that could actually turn somebody off, like if you had a smiling face next to something where it was a new story of disaster, that's not necessarily good design or good context whatsoever.

Francis Rowland: I agree. I mean, I think like a little bit later on where we'll talk about resources, then I might mention this, but my friend Axbom who's a designer based in Stockholm in Sweden is talking and writing about this, exactly this topic at the moment really of considering the impacts of design.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Francis Rowland: So by making the decision, "do we really think about who I might exclude or what negative impact it may have," sometimes just stopping and kind of asking those questions and
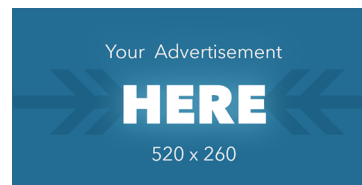
thinking, "Actually, yeah, this might have," and kind of weighing things up and considering risks, I suppose, not being too kind of scattered about thinking about it, but being really quite clear about asking those questions is important.

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Emily Lewis: Well, since you started, that's a good point to bring in, the topic of resources. So you mentioned Per Axbom, is that how you pronounced his name?
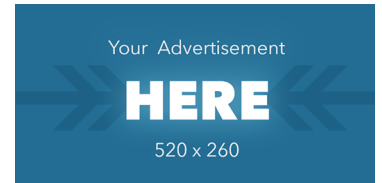
Francis Rowland: [Agrees]

Emily Lewis: Okay, so you have mentioned you had sent us a book called *Misusability*. Is that the one you're referring to?

Francis Rowland: Yeah. So I think Per is in the midst of writing that book in a moment, but he has things like worksheets available on the website for it. It's called Misusability.

Emily Lewis: Okay, great.

Francis Rowland: He has these worksheets that kind of help people stop and ask these questions about impact and consider the risks of something, and I think that's fairly recent that he's been doing that, only in the last year or year and a half, but it's really helpful thinking and it's really a good thing to have in your toolkit I think as a designer.

Emily Lewis: Oh, this is really, really interesting. Huh, yeah, definitely. We'll definitely have a link to those worksheets online. I think that would be a great resource as you're designing. Do you have any other resources you can recommend, whether it's for people who are thinking about an audience that may be struggling with crisis or mental health or just general inclusive design?

Francis Rowland: So I think probably the information that comes from the wide inclusive design community is most helpful because that helps us then think about diversity really and consider other people and consider a situation.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Francis Rowland: So people with mental health conditions, it's not like kind of a niche group that could be everyone. In fact, as you mentioned as we discussed at the beginning, we can all go through these phases. There are things like Microsoft fairly recently, I think again in the last couple of years published a booklet as a PDF. It's called Respecting Focus and that broadly has to do with interruptions and notifications and things like that, but the negative effects of that.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]
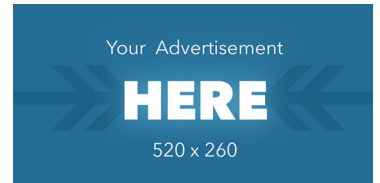
Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Francis Rowland: Because, as we all know, you don't just get notifications for one thing, you get it for five things or ten things, and that can be a big drain for any of us.

Emily Lewis: Oh, I'm just reading through this, and I was just like, "Yeah." [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Francis Rowland: Exactly, you have to see it and you'd recognize a lot of things, right?

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Francis Rowland: So I think that's really good, and Microsoft generally I think is really interesting. They've got some very strong people. There's a woman called Kat Holmes who is based in the States who works a lot on accessibility and broadly on inclusive design.

Emily Lewis: Yeah.

Francis Rowland: And she is worth looking up also I think with the articles that she's written and interviews of her, I think she's brilliant, and she's recently kind of launched something called Mismatch Design that's looking at this issue of how we think about inclusive design and how we think about inclusivity, what it means.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]
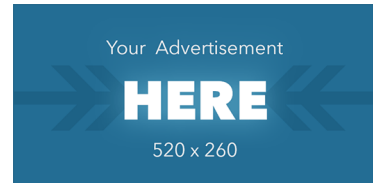
Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Emily Lewis: I'm looking at her blog right now. She's got a wide range of topics but all sort of in that concept of redefining who the user is, that it's so much bigger than we think.

Francis Rowland: Yeah, exactly. I think it's helping change perspective really. It's the key then.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Francis Rowland: So rather than inclusive design and accessibility being a kind of a checklist-driven thing, "Have we done this? Yes, yes, yes," it's more about people and considering them in their situation and kind of helping them do something, do whatever it is they're trying to do, find something.

Emily Lewis: Excellent. We'll have links to all of those in the show notes, and you would send us a couple of others in email that will link to, too, in addition to the ones that you've mentioned.

Francis Rowland: Yeah, I could tell you about a couple of those, if you like.

Emily Lewis: Yeah, sure. So one of the things you included was something from Sigma, Accessible Spaces, and it's sort of inclusive design beyond screens. Can you talk about that a little bit? This is really interesting.

Francis Rowland: Yeah, so I think this is a work by some of my colleagues that taking the thinking around what it means to design inclusively, and once you begin to have this mindset, this perspective, you can then, of course, apply it in non-digital environment, so physical spaces as well as things that we see on our screens, so the accessibility of buildings or the accessibility of presentation of all the kinds of information or events that people can join in.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Francis Rowland: There are different aspects of accessibility that aren't the fallback things that we might often think about, but maybe more subtle to do with basically how welcoming is something.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Francis Rowland: So the foreword in the piece that my colleagues have written is from another designer called Alastair Somerville here in the UK and he talks about just a sense of "Is something welcoming" and it's a very human aspiration really to make something welcoming. So applying that to physical and digital spaces is a very important thing to try and do.

Emily Lewis: Yeah, I like his statement in that foreword that accessibility supports the whole experience, physically and emotionally. That really fits very well into our conversation today.

Francis Rowland: Yeah.
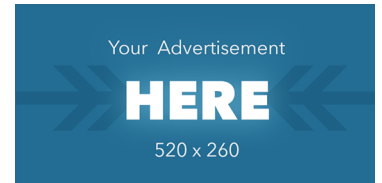
Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Francis Rowland: Yeah, exactly.

Lea Alcantara: So Francis, do you have any final advice for designers who want to be more sensitive in creating experiences that are comfortable for people who struggle with mental health?

Francis Rowland: Well, hopefully, this isn't sound trite, but I think just to be compassionate is the thing, like I was just mentioning really is this idea of being human, thinking about the people. When we talk about human-sensitive design, it's not just an ISO standard, it's other people and their situations, so sometimes I guess taking a step back from what we're doing, if we're busy making things, thinking about the people who will use them eventually, is it going to help them out? Is it going to get in their way? Is it going to help them achieve what they need to do? And what impact it might have if we make different kinds of decisions. I think all of that can be rooted in being compassion and taking the time to think about other people really.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]
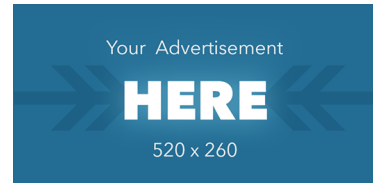
Lea Alcantara: Oh, very important topic.

Emily Lewis: Yeah.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah. [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: I feel like not just to be compassionate to other people, but open to listening to people's experiences.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

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Emily Lewis: And if you personally feel you can, to share your experiences. Now that I'm in a better place than I was a few years back, I feel comfortable talking about some of my challenges with mental health, and I think it's useful for me to talk about t. You can work towards not feeling uncomfortable. You can work towards not feeling weird when someone tells you about something like that and having a compassionate approach, so you're open to hearing people share their experiences so that can inform how you may approach your work or what you're building, because like Francis says, it's about compassion and that's also includes being open to hearing what someone else might have experienced.

Francis Rowland: Yes.

Emily Lewis: So Francis gave us a bunch of resources we're going to link to in the show notes, but we're also going to add a few more resources for anyone who may be struggling with mental health. We will list the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, the Veterans Crisis Line, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, as well as a really useful, at least here in the US, and if I can find something for the UK, but it's a locator to help you find behavioral health treatment services in your area. So we will make sure that those are listed as well.

Lea Alcantara: All right, but that's all the time we have for today, but before we finish up, we've got our rapid fire ten questions so our listeners can get to know you a bit better. Are you ready, Francis?
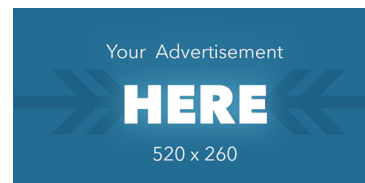
Francis Rowland: I think so.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: Okay. First question, what's your go-to karaoke song?

Francis Rowland: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Francis Rowland: Go-to karaoke song, this is not going to be very rough, is it? But I have to think about that one. It's probably something by Led Zeppelin, but I'd have to think about which one really.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Francis Rowland: Hopefully, nothing with high notes in it.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Francis Rowland: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: What advice would you give your younger self?

Francis Rowland: Trust your friends.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

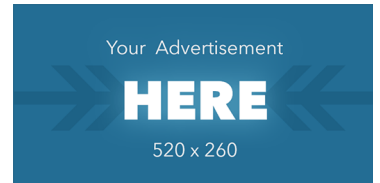**Lea Alcantara**: What's your favorite PG-rated curse word?

Francis Rowland: Well, that might change totally, damn, probably damn.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Francis Rowland: We say that quite loud over here.

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Emily Lewis: Who's your favorite superhero?

Francis Rowland: I would say my favorite superhero is probably quite like Silver Surfer.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: Cool.

Francis Rowland: Mysterious. [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: What is your favorite time of the year?

Francis Rowland: I like summer.

Emily Lewis: If you could change one thing about the web, what would it be?

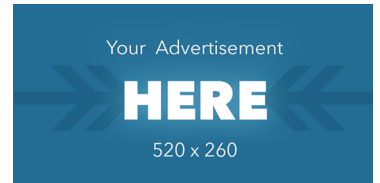**Francis Rowland**: Oh, well, probably making it a little bit more inclusive.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: What are three words that describe you?

Francis Rowland: Listener, aikidoka, and father.

Emily Lewis: I have to ask what was that second thing.

Francis Rowland: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: I've never heard that before.

Francis Rowland: An aikidoka is a Japanese word. It's a term for somebody who practices a martial art called aikido.

Emily Lewis: Oh, okay. How about three words that describe your work?

Francis Rowland: Okay. Strategy, design, and people.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: What's your favorite meal of the day?

Francis Rowland: Breakfast, I think.

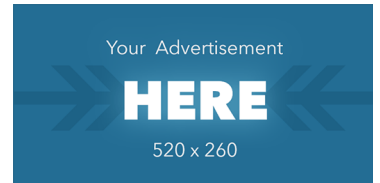**Emily Lewis**: All right, last question, coffee or tea?

Francis Rowland: Coffee.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: Thank you. So that's all the time we have for today. Thanks for joining the show.

Francis Rowland: My pleasure. It was great. Thank you very much.

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[Music starts]

Emily Lewis: In case our listeners want to follow up with you, where can they find you online?

Francis Rowland: Probably the easiest is Twitter so I'm @francisrowland on Twitter.

Lea Alcantara: Great.

Emily Lewis: Thanks again, Francis. I think this is a really important topic and I'm so appreciative that you shared with our listeners today.

Francis Rowland: Oh, it's my pleasure. I'm really glad.

Lea Alcantara: CTRL+CLICK is produced by Bright Umbrella, a web services agency invested in education and social good. Today's podcast would not be possible without the support of our hosting partner Arcustech!
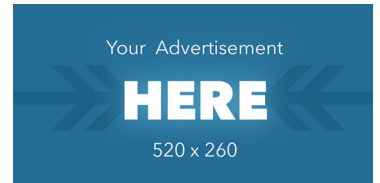
Emily Lewis: We also want to thank our listeners for tuning in! If you want to know more about CTRL+CLICK, visit our website ctrlclickcast.com.

Lea Alcantara: Speaking of our website…

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: We are in the final stages of our mobile refresh and EE 4 upgrade. Starting December 5th, you'll finally have a great mobile friendly experience on our site, finally. [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

https://ctrlclickcast.com/episodes/designing-for-people-struggling-with-mental-health

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Lea Alcantara: So be sure to follow us on Twitter @ctrlclickcast for details about that site refresh in early December and our Patreon launching next week.

Emily Lewis: And don't forget to tune in to our next episode which will be second to last of the year, if you can believe it, we're going to talk with Rachel Nabors about web animation. Be sure to check out ctrlclickcast.com/schedule for more upcoming topics.

Lea Alcantara: This is Lea Alcantara …

Emily Lewis: And Emily Lewis …

Lea Alcantara: Signing off for CTRL+CLICK CAST. See you next time!

Emily Lewis: Cheers!

[Music stops]

***Timestamp**: 00:50:15*

Produced by
Bright UMBRELLA