[music playing]

[Narelle] Hi!

Welcome to this week's episode

of The Digital Access Show.

I want to tell you

a bit of a story.

I had to fill in some

forms the other day,

and those that

listen regularly realize

that I have a severe

vision impairment.

One thing that happens with

a severe vision impairment,

is I'm really reliant

on the keyboard.

Now this form was not

accessible by keyboard,

and it got me thinking.

What are the

effects on the brain,

cognition and understanding,

when a brain has to

work that much harder…

to do something that a so called

normal person can do quite easily?

To answer the question,

I've brought on Allan Parker,

who is a micro behavioural…

neuroscientist and linguist.

Allan, thank you

so much for coming.

[Allan] As always, Narelle,

a pleasure to be with you.

[Narelle] So Allan,

what are the effects on the

brain when it has to work double

or triple time to do anything?

[Allan] Wow, and you're talking

about in general for all of us?

[Narelle] For everyone.

[Allan] Yeah.

Narelle, I want

to start by saying…

saying, irrespective

who we're talking about,

y'all have what I call a

"perfect pace threshold."

[Narelle] Yeah.

[Allan] Yeah.

And the perfect

pace threshold is,

how…

How fast…

am I going?

Can I go? Do I need to go?

And how much…

do I need to do?

And what's the quality

of my performance?

So, it's time and

pace over quality,

irrespective of what I'm doing.

And…

One of the terms that we constantly

hear people talk about is,

how do I get in the flow?

And flow is that state where

you and I are doing something,

and it just seems to fall

into place and happen.

It doesn't require an

additional amount of…

energy,

attention,

or thought.

Somehow or other,

the things that I

needed to do just…

happened how I wanted them to.

[Narelle] Yeah, I know

what you're talking about.

[Allan] In the time

I had available,

[Narelle] Yeah.

[Allan] And in the time I have

available is an important piece.

Because the amount of

time I allocate something…

determines a lot

about my internal state.

So if I go in to fill in a form,

to use your example,

if I go in to fill in a form,

and I consider that I've

got 10 minutes to do it,

and it takes me 20,

I'm going to find it really

hard to find my perfect pace.

[Narelle] Yeah.

[Allan] So, one of the first

things we've gotta do is go,

what amount of

time am I allocating?

And is that time realistic?

Yep.

The second is,

how much of my attention

do I have available…

to fill in that form?

And that is, have I

just left a meeting,

and somebody else is
wanting me to do something,

and I've got an
external demand on me.

Now that little extra pressure
will add more pressure.

If, for instance,

I'm filling in a form,

and it's a technical form,

and I'm not sufficiently
technically skilled,

then that's going to put
a little extra pressure.

The more I'm doing

what I know how to do,

the more likely I

am to get into flow.

The moment that I do something

that I'm not familiar with,

I haven't done before,

I'm not familiar with

how the process works.

Then I've got to

allocate more time,

because it will take longer.

[Narelle] Yeah.

[Allan] If I strike,

as I did myself,

on a flight coming over

here to Hong Kong today,

a...

a Wi-Fi system...

that actually required 17 strokes

for me to get in and use it.

Now, I don't know about you,

but I think that's too many.

-[Narelle] I actually would struggle.

-[Allan] Now, I had plenty of time.

[Allan] Well, I had

plenty of time available,

but there's a part

of me that says,

I don't want anything that

requires me to hit 17 buttons,

particularly when I know that,

if I'm in my own home using

the Wi-Fi system I have at home,

it's two or three

commands and I'm in.

So I think of what

I'm putting to you is,

there are a lot of variables…

that need to be considered here.

The second is,

you know, is it my

computer I'm using?

Yep. So, there are…

a lot of variables in the mix,

but whatever the situation is,

I have a threshold.

And it's around available time,

and the quality I require.

And I've just gotta make

sure that I'm getting those…

really well considered

and assigned well,

because if I've done that,

that gives me the best chance.

However, we live in a world,

where we work with somebody

else's processing system.

And we may, we would not have

been involved in the design of it.

So, we're the user of

somebody else's system.

And as you know, in

the accessibility world,

when people who aren't…

in a position where they have…

a distinct need,

and they're designing something

for people with distinctive needs,

the likelihood of them getting

the design right is limited.

[Narelle] Agreed.

[Allan] So there's a really,

I just want to state first,

the work you're doing

in digital accessibility

and auditing accessibility,

and helping people

who produce products,

produce software,

who produce apps,

need to hit the pause button,

and go,

The able-bodied person…

isn't the only one who's

going to do, be using this.

The, the well-sighted

person isn't the one that's…

…the only one who's

going to use it.

And really, your industry,

the software industry,

needs to step back, hit

the pause button and go,

are we considering

enough variables?

And are we considering,

you used the word earlier,

about how do we be efficient?

And my take is

we'd be less efficient,

and we'd be more effective.

Efficiency is getting

the job done right.

[Narelle] Yeah.

[Allan] Effectiveness is

getting the right job done.

-[Narelle] I like it.

-[Allan] We've got to get clear…

[Allan] Yeah, we've

got to get clear.

And if I can blend efficiency

and effectiveness, Narelle,

my nervous system is going

to go, oh, thank goodness.

Because if you want me,

if I'm short of time,

and I'm not really

skilled with what it is,

and the system's

not very accessible,

that's a formula for

me getting agitated.

Yeah.

But if I can go,

how do I do this?

And how do I…

do it in a way that

I consider quality…

as important as time?

I consider quality

as important as pace.

I consider taking the

time to correctly do things,

and not rush.

Narelle, rushing,

being busy, rapid, in a hurry,

is our, our, our nervous system's…

least favourite friend.

[Narelle] And it's actually a downfall

for everything you do, isn't it?

[Allan] It's…

This conversation isn't

about people with a handicap.

This conversation

is about all of us.

We've just got to understand

this organism, this…

body that I live in inside,

and you live inside,

has a perfect pace.

And if I can be

tuned into my body,

tuned into my thoughts,

tuned into my feelings,

and if I just, every now

and again go, hang on,

Let me stop.

Pause. Take a breath.

Just step back and

go, hang on just a sec.

You're getting a bit racy here.

Give it a little bit more time.

Because the faster I go,

the less dexterity I have.

The faster I go, the more

likely I am to make mistakes.

The faster I go,

I fail to see or

hear or find or feel…

opportunities to do things

the way I want to do them.

Yeah.

[Narelle] Which means, then, in

that situation I was describing,

the odds of me making

a mistake were huge,

because I was doing

a lot more keystrokes,

to try and do the same…

job that someone that

can use a mouse can do.

-[Allan] Yes.

-[Narelle] Yeah.

[Allan] Yep.

Now in that instance,

you've got two really different

ways of looking at that.

You can look at it and go,

the system is how it is,

I can only do what I can do…

…with the system

in the time it'll take.

Now, that's a, that's

a damn nuisance…

…if you're in a rush in

your short time frame.

Or worse still, you've got

somebody pressuring you going,

where is it?

[Narelle] Yeah.

[Allan] Yeah.

And really, you and

me doing our best…

is dependent on knowing

what's the pace at which I go.

And how many things can I

attend to at the same time?

See, I know if I only have

one or two things to do,

I'll get bored.

[Narelle] Yeah.

[Allan] But I know if I've

got four or five things,

I do better…

when I've got more

projects to work with

and move between

and to coordinate.

Yeah.

However, some people like to

do one or two things at a time,

and complete them at the time.

Yep

And we've really got

to be in tune with…

…which way do we like to work,

and not affirm that that's

the only way I can work.

Because if I'm somebody

who likes four or five things,

I'll get bored.

If I've got five or

six, I'll be floating.

Give me seven or eight,

and I'm now in a rush, edgy

I'm frightened I'm going to

drop or lose or miss something.

Yeah.

And that's when

we make mistakes.

[Narelle] Yeah.

[Allan] It's that rush,

busy error-making…

…state that we can easily get into.

That's the side,

I always say if I'm in

one of those states,

that's my signal to my nervous

system that I need to stop,

breathe,

and just regroup again.

-[Narelle] Yeah.

-[Allan] Yeah.

[Allan] And sometimes, Narelle,

I need to say I can't

do this right now today.

Or I can't do this

right now in this hour.

Or I need to go for a walk and have.

Or I need to do a different task

while I cool down

and distract myself.

Or I need to call on somebody

and go, hey, I need a hand.

Yeah.

But I think it's…

It's vital…

that we, and vital that we realize…

that we all have

almost an exact pace…

…at which we operate superbly,

and that'll vary from

one task to another,

depending on the

degree of difficulty,

depending on how

familiar I am or not.

Yeah.

Depending on how well

something's designed.

-[Narelle] Yeah.

-[Allan] Yep.

[Narelle] And often times,

you won't know how well something's

designed until you go do it.

And that's where

you need to stop,

and breathe and say, okay.

We know there's a problem here.

In my cases,

I had to fill out this form,

and I have to admit, I stopped.

I walked away.

I thought, okay, what

am I going to do? Okay.

Rang the business that

required the forms and said,

this is the issue.

This is what I can do.

And luckily,

they said, okay, will you

get what you can done?

We'll tell you what's missing.

And then I thought, okay.

And then I can go to the VA,

or another, and get them

to double-check for me.

So I wasn't getting stressed,

because in this case,

I have no control over the

format of those documents.

[Allan] Yeah.

And it is the point I made

just a little while ago.

So often we need to go, I

actually need to call for help.

Yeah. Whatever

form that might take.

[in unison] Yeah.

[Allan] So sometimes,

you need to call for help.

Sometimes, we just

need to take a break.

Sometimes, I need

to go for a walk.

Sometimes, I need to distract

myself with another job.

Sometimes, I need to

ask somebody else to do it.

[Narelle] Yeah.

[Allan] It's making

sure that we don't,

too frequently in any one day,

over alert our nervous system,

because that cortisol,

particularly, is cumulative.

You know, if I've

spent half an hour…

trying to get this form

filled in and I'm agitated,

now, the adrenaline

will kick in,

and that'll help

me make mistakes,

but the adrenaline will

subside reasonably quickly.

But if I've been

doing it for 30 minutes,

I've now got

cortisol kicking in,

and the cortisol might

take an hour and a half,

or two hours to clear.

And I've just got to make

sure that I don't impede…

the next task.

Yeah.

[Narelle] It makes sense, Allan.

[Allan] One of my

favourite things is,

because I'm very, you

know, I'm very disciplined.

If I start something,

I like to finish it.

I'm very determined.

And every now and

again, I've gotta go, Allan,

not this one, stop.

-[Narelle] Yeah.

-[Allan] Let it go.

[Allan] Now, how long I let

it go for is a different matter.

But there is a time

where I just go,

my nervous system

is so over alert.

I'm actually, my body is…

…unuseful for the task

that I have at hand.

And another way

of saying it, Narelle,

is sometimes we

need to be just a little…

…kinder and gentler to ourselves.

[Narelle] Yeah.

And, and I think you've

got it right, Allan.

It is knowing your,

and I don't like the

word limitations,

knowing your boundaries.

Knowing, okay,

when you hit that time.

Stop.

Find another way to do it.

But for me,

I like to go for my walk

And you've seen

me do it tons of times.

I'll go for a walk,

I'll come back an hour later,

and I will have the answer.

[Allan] Yeah.

[Narelle] Because I've cut that…

tie to whatever I'm doing.

I've given my brain a break.

And from what you're saying,

that means the cortisol lessens,

goes away.

[Allan] Yep.

[Narelle] The adrenaline's gone.

I've had some fresh air,

and you can think

straight again.

[Allan] Yeah.

And because I'm a negotiator,

I'm going to go,

sometimes I've got to go back…

to the person who's given

me the task or set the deadline,

and just go, I've

run into trouble.

I need to renegotiate

the time frame.

Or I've actually had a go at it.

I've spent,

you know, I've spent

an hour and a half on it.

It should only take 10 minutes.

I, I need to leave it or

hand it over to somebody.

[Narelle] Yeah.

[Allan] The renegotiation bit,

we don't do nearly enough.

[in unison] Yeah.

[Narelle] Allan, what's the

advice you can give people?

[Allan] What I was going to say,

me being a much less

technical person than you are,

in terms of computing,

I'm, I'm always amazed

how frequently…

I'll hit a problem

in the computer,

and then I'll know the steps,

so I'll switch it off,

and I'll start again.

Ad I'll go through the three

or four steps that I know,

and I'll get to the same place.

A little bit like when we
were setting up this call,

and I kept going in and
doing what I normally do,

and all of a sudden this
screen appears and says,

waiting for the host
to start the meeting.

When I'm the host.

[Narelle] Yeah.

[Allan] Then I go,
what do I do here?

So it's like I'm going for

a drive in the afternoon,

and I've driven around the

corner and I'm in a cul de sac.

[Narelle] Yes.

[Allan] And I didn't want

to be in the cul de sac.

How do I get out?

I can't tell you how many times

I drive out and drive back in,

instead of driving out and doing

anything else that's different.

[Narelle] Yeah.

[Allan] Anything else…

that's different.

-[Allan] Yeah.

-[Narelle] That's it.

[Narelle] So Allan, what's the

takeaway that you'd give people

when they run into

problems like this?

Because, as you said, everyone

runs into these problems.

For me, it was a form

that wasn't accessible

that caused me to go into

overload until I walked away.

What is your takeaway?

What's the advice?

[Allan] Yeah.

Gosh.

It's…

For me, being fairly stubborn.

For me, I've got to face

that my stubbornness

keeps me in cul de sacs.

And so, when what

I'm doing isn't working,

don't keep doing the same thing.

[Narelle] Yeah.

[Allan] And don't

get frustrated,

because I kept doing the same

thing and got the same result.

It's just,

how can I either distract myself

while I recoup my stability

and get back into

a stable place.

Or I break the

pattern and I go and…

…seek assistance from someone.

Or I go and renegotiate the

the expectation, the time frame.

[Narelle] Yeah.

[Allan] Or I call for somebody

to come in and give me a hand.

Or I weigh up how

important is this right now,

and can it wait until tomorrow?

Or can I check in with the

person who gave it to me,

how important it is,

and get them to say it's

okay to do it tomorrow.

[Narelle] Yeah.

[Allan] Yeah.

[Narelle] Allan, just really great

advice. Thanks for coming on.

[Allan] It's a conversation that I

think's applicable for everybody.

-[Allan] Yeah.

-[Narelle] Oh, I think so too.

[Narelle] Yep. And I will

add one more thing.

If you find a form

that's not accessible,

go back to the person

or the company,

and explain to them

that it is not accessible.

Explain that it is linked to the

Disability Discrimination Act,

and this is actually

mandatory in Australia.

And then, as you

say, Allan, negotiate,

you know, say you need it

fixed, but in the meantime,

negotiate how the

form's going to get filled in.

[Allan] Yes. Yeah.

[in unison] Yeah.

[Narelle] Great advice.

[Allan] You just gotta

pause and breathe,

and calmly make our

best decision at the time.

-[Narelle] Yeah.

-[Allan] Yeah.

-[Allan] Yeah.

-[Narelle] That's it.

[Narelle] So Allan, thank you.

We'll see you next time.

I come up with a, oh,

I've got a question for you.

[Allan] Another one?

I look forward to it.

[Narelle] Yeah, they're always

great conversations, Allan.

So, this is…

The Digital Access Show.

Look, if you like what

we do, please like,

subscribe, review.

We really love feedback,

whether it's good,

bad or ugly.

And I'll be honest, if it's

ugly, I go to Allan and say,

okay, I need some

perspective on this.

And Allan's always

got perspective.

That's when he stops

laughing sometimes at me,

because I do make some

decent boo boos at times.

But that's life.

Thank you,

and we'll see you next week

on The Digital Access Show.

[music playing]