

Outstanding Advocate—Haben Girma



Photo: Haben and Mylo are sitting on a bench. Mylo is a black and tan medium-sized German Shepherd dog. He's wearing a leather harness, and Haben is holding his leash. Behind them is a large grassy field with trees in the distance.

- * Haben Girma was the first Deafblind graduate of Harvard Law School. She chose to become a disability rights advocate after learning of other's accomplishments using ADA to create a more inclusive environment.
- * The daughter of refugees, a Black woman, and disabled, Haben developed a powerful path to success, rooted in her belief that inclusion is a choice. We all have the power to advocate for positive change. Becoming a leader begins by role-modeling the change we need in this world.
- * When asked why organizations should be inclusive, Haben's response was, prioritizing inclusion helps your organization. People with disabilities represent the largest minority group, numbering one billion worldwide. Reaching a group of this scale creates value for everyone. Organizations that prioritize accessibility benefit by gaining access to a much larger user base, improving the experience for both disabled and non-disabled users, and facilitating further innovation. Organizations also have legal obligations to ensure access for people with disabilities.
- * Numerous economic and social barriers currently exist for people with disabilities. A study by the United Nations found that about 97% of websites have access barriers. These digital barriers create an information famine, limiting employment and educational opportunities for people with disabilities around the world. Guidelines exist to help you make your information accessible. The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0 is a set of technical standards for making websites accessible to people with disabilities. Programming for accessibility generally does not change the appearance of websites and apps. The ADA balances all interests, ensuring creativity in the tech industry while protecting access for Americans with disabilities.
- * I recently learned of Haben through friends Paul Grossman and Mary Lee Vance who presented at the AHEAD conference I attended in July.