

Introduction - done by Cynthia and Nicola

Nicola

- Welcome! Please be comfortable. If you need to get up, move around, lay on the floor, step out, or cover your ears when we use loud sound effects like a horn or bell, please feel free to do so. Cheer, laugh, hiss, snap, clap - we invite you to be your full self with us.

Cynthia

- This isn't the first session on inclusion, diversity, equity, and access in this forum, or in the wider span of our industry. Often, these talks focus on recruitment and hiring, or creative. But there's so much more to projects.

Nicola

- And importantly, across industries, we continue to see workplaces and organizations rely on historically marginalized and oppressed people to be at the forefront of the work. That's not fair. It's not equitable. It's not right.

Cynthia

- We asked ourselves: we're in the entertainment business. Is there a way for us to make the talk stick more?

Nicola

- We all know our industry is about taking your guests on an emotional journey that leads to transformation. Why not apply some of those lessons to a conference session?

Cynthia

- SO. Welcome to the first reading workshop of FROM ZERO TO HERO: a darkly comedic, slightly jaded, occasionally pointed look at inclusion, diversity, equity, and access in the project pipeline.

Nicola

- Meet your dramatis personae!

Jesse, prop to be determined if desired

- Project Development - building client relationships, planning and bidding with profit in mind, and getting the greenlight. But more often than not, I'm educating a client or IP holder new to our world on how a project goes from day one to first day of business.
- Razor thin margins, stiff competition. IDEA costs are the first to be cut. Clients don't always see the value.

Wendy, prop is stacks of fake money, quick change, and bell.

- Legal, baby. Those contracts? Mine. But more importantly- I'm at the table as you're developing the relationships, strategizing the investment, and figuring out the dollars.
- You've got choices: be motivated by fear and do just enough to avoid claims from employees and guests or PR nightmares that cause reputational harm, or actually meaningfully and comprehensively engage in this work because the ROI is huge-attracting better talent, investment you can amortize, increasing your market size by making an experience more people can actually enjoy and that means more sales more money. Be short-sighted and spend money badly, or take the long view and increase your ROI. Choose wisely.

Sina Bahram and Corey Timpson, props to be determined if desired

- We're your accessibility and inclusion SMEs. Yes, we exist. We're not unicorns.
- (insert dark and grim worldview here)

Cynthia - points to Laptop/photo

- So... our creative director couldn't be here today. They're on a
- Cynthia spins a whiteboard spinner and reads whatever reason comes up. (insert wild yet typical reason in our industry)

Erica McCay, prop to be determined if desired

- All those dreams of interactivity and personalization in your experience? I'm the interactivities designer and I lead prototyping and playtesting.
- Guest interactivity that ultimately does nothing and has no impact is meaningless. When it excludes people then it's actively harmful.

Nicola Rossini, prop - Punching Clown Boogie-Man

- If you've ever said "We'll figure that out in the field" I am your conductor in both the Rail and Symphony senses. Air Traffic Control of Priorities- project management, production, budget, schedule, intent all those decisions you make or don't make, they will have to be managed in-flow which will cause us all tonight ride the chaos not stop it.
- Show me your budget, scale, and timeline and I can discern your priorities from pre-feasibility. Before you've even considered the topics today, our projects have typically leveraged those first three on a guarantee of employee burnout, injury, lack of access at opening, and exclusion of many of our top talent in the design & creation process.

Cynthia Sharpe, project schwag

- Me? I'm the project exec. I have opened dozens of Big Name Projects you cite in charrettes all the time, and I have all the team jackets, hats, t-shirts, THEA trophies and airline elite statuses to prove it.
- All of this is nice, but I've got quarterly investor calls, a bunch of higher-ups to keep happy, an mcomm department that wants another THEA, and a bonus structure to meet.

Scene 1: Get the job

Jesse

- Team. Huge project. Game changer for us and the industry if we can get the thumbs-up.

Company

- What is it?

Jesse

- It's a one-of-a-kind multi-use and multi-generational diversified development that in addition to work-live areas also has a multi-land, fully immersive and interactive theme park, prototypical AR/VR experiences, reactive and customizable to individual guests at scale, new standard in destinations that drives a multi-day stay. Oh, and there's an IP

Nicola

- What's the opening date and what's the budget?

Jesse

- Way too soon and way too little money for that number of descriptors.
- We need to propose a team and give them a schedule and budget breakdown.

Sina and Corey

- Don't forget to include accessibility SMEs from early in the process.

Erica

- Don't forget to leave time for lots of rounds of prototyping and testing

Sina and Corey

- Include us in that, too

Nicola

- Where's the worksite? What's their schedule?
- A failure to plan schedule breaks is a plan to break the schedule

Cynthia

- Huh?

Nicola

- Everyone's important holidays, planned family leave, family/dependent relo, team home visits.... Both local AND our company standards must all be followed. It affects proposed team and schedule.

Cynthia

- We don't even have green light yet and you're thinking about scheduling vacations?

Wendy

- Can we set this all up with an eye toward a positive relationship so when things get tough it's not a dogfight? Don't make this all about the contract right now it'll just cost you money.
- ALTERNATIVE FOR WENDY: Radical thought, what if we went about this in a mindset of shaking hands, rather than the good old 'one throat to choke' attitude about contracts.

Cynthia

- Whoa whoa whoa. Look. We'll do what it takes to be on time and on budget! It always works out!

Nicola

- We hemorrhaged employees from the last project, more than half to other industries entirely.

Erica

- Most of the interactives didn't work, some were VE'd to buttons that did not affect anything, and we had to table parts of the experience to phase 2.

Nicola

- We also still have two legal actions in progress against us from subcontractors so we can't rely on them for review & scope documents this time.

Wendy

- Can I remind you how many very expensive calls with many lawyers happened and are still happening?

Jesse

- The local community was up in arms about the project and how we promised to engage them and then didn't.. There was tremendously bad word-of-mouth and press.

Sina and Corey

- You got savaged in the disability community for how lousy an experience it was, too.

Erica

- And then we stuck the Creative Director in front of cameras to try and spin things positively!

(whoever is closest to laptop please pat it consolingly and say 'I'm so sorry, CD')

Cynthia:

- Don't be so negative....anyway, let's talk team! If they want to start in January, our current big project wraps in December! We can roll the team right onto this new one with no downtime, no hit to overhead!

Nicola

- That's a horrible idea.

Cynthia

- We keep the team busy!

Nicola

- Resilience cannot begin until we've rested and recovered, they all need at least six weeks just to catch up on doctor visits and heal their site injuries.

Jesse, jumping in

- If we go right from project to project, we lose the 'lessons learned'
- We (project dev and production) need the team's actual input to inform this budget, schedule & process not just 'lessons-listed' document to go into a hard drive somewhere

Erica

- Project teams are not hot-swappable. Just because a team is finishing in Japan doesn't mean they're the right team for the next China or even US project, or they at least need a chance to reprogram their thinking to consider the nuances of the new audience. Treating projects like they're interchangeable and don't need their own thoughtful approach is profoundly wrong and sets us up for failure time and time again.

Jesse

- Different content, different IP, different target visitors and cultures- you need different SMEs. And this project involves a very specific place and cultures that aren't ours.

Cynthia

- I love that place! Big fan. Look I went on vacation to the proposed concept theme and took a bunch of photos. Cultural consultants are a budget burden. We can just google it and use what people know already from going there.

Sina or Corey

- Do you want to get dragged on social media? This is how you get dragged on social media.

Nicola Punches the clown -

- We literally had the last site picketed because of this and had to change transport vendors three times. Next time they'll crash the reservation system with a bot - Let's give them something that we sell out in minutes because our audience is so EXCITED to come instead.

Wendy

- PR nightmares cost big money.

Jesse

- AND cultural consultants are not the only kinds of SMEs we need early on.
- We need to engage the community and really listen. There are specialists who facilitate those conversations and feedback sessions so it's meaningful.
- And, of course, there's also...

Sina and Corey

- Hi, we're the disability access and inclusion specialists.

Cynthia

- Look we're good- we know how to be ADA compliant. Our experiences are welcoming to people of all abilities! Besides, only a small percentage of patrons are disabled!

Sina and Corey

- Really?

Cynthia: smile dimming, really!

Sina and Corey

- Percentages of the population that's disabled, \$\$\$ you are potentially missing out on as a result

Nicola

- Reminder- that means you have disabled people on your staff and at your vendors, whether you realize it or not.

Sina and Corey

- Also, do you even know what it's like to go to a theme park as a disabled person?

Cynthia

- Uh. No?

Sina and Corey

- Allow us.
- Corey and Sina re-enact their typical visit to a themed and location-based entertainment site or museum/science center. Corey and Sina walk through the space with Corey describing everything. Corey is exhausted. Sina is bored. Both of them leave and go eat a good meal to raise their spirits.

Cynthia

- That is a terrible experience.

Sina and Corey perhaps with some enthusiasm that Cynthia might be getting it

- Yes, yes it is.

Cynthia, with a note of hopefulness

- Is that restaurant at least on-site?

Sina and Corey

- NO.

Cynthia

- Okay okay okay. So we bring you in at the end of design to review, right?

Sina and Corey

- If you bring us in at the end of design to review and we find stuff that you need to change, what happens?

Cynthia

- We pick what's fastest, easiest, and cheapest to change and kick the can down the road on the rest of it.

(I would encourage everyone to look displeased and make noises to that effect)

Sina and Corey

- Let's spell this out.
- X amount of money now
- Or Y amount of money in DD
- Or Z amount of money and a boatload of complaints, bad press, and uncaptured audience to remediate after opening.

Wendy

- Same reason to really engage the community from the start, rather than later. What's it going to be, spend the money now or spend way more money later?

Jesse

- I can show you actual examples of how spending now results in savings later- it is the best use of the money you have available, just spent up front, early on.

Cynthia

- But... then we won't hit budget targets for this phase, the higher-ups will be in our faces, and bonuses will take a hit.

Nicola

- What if I told you a bonus structure that rewards short-term savings and pits us all against one another instead of considering the overall good of the project and the long-term viability of the end product rewards the wrong thing?

Cynthia, stares

- Say what?

Jesse

- I can talk to the powers that be about how much more it costs to fix all this stuff later.

Wendy

- Think of the ROI. A better experience for *everyone* means bigger audience, more attendance, higher ticket sales, better word of mouth. It pays off down the road in so many ways in a positive way, not just avoiding the negative.

Cynthia caves

- Fine. The accessibility SMEs and the cultural experts are in from the start.

Erica chimes in

- And not just in the meetings! We'll want them involved in all of the playtesting!

(Wendy grabs some money, Cynthia sighs heavily)

Scene 2: Do the dance, do the dance, do the contract dance

Jesse

- We got it!

Everyone: yay!

Jesse

- Verbally. Now we have to agree to terms and a contract.

Everyone: noises of disappointment, despair, agony

Wendy: cracks knuckles, hair flip, it's her time to shine.

Wendy

- OK, so, I-

EVERYONE yells their wishlist

Sina and Corey

- VPAT documentation!
- 3rd party auditing of accessibility design!

Erica

- Playtesting consistently throughout the design process not just all lumped at the end where it'll inevitably get hacked in half when the schedule runs late!!

Jesse - spins wheel

- The CD is (excuse) and thus can't weigh in.

Wendy

- Hold up. The contract is the end point of a process. It's the ring on the finger at the end of dating. If we treat the contract like the thing that saves us when shit goes wrong, we've gone about this entirely the wrong way.

Cynthia

- What do you mean? The contract is our protection!

Wendy

- The contract is what codifies our mutual understanding.
- Everything in it should be an expression of the values and culture, in addition to business and performance parameters, that we have developed together.
- It's the outcome of a long, long relationship build. You don't think I'm sitting in those investor meetings and client discussions just for billable hours, do you?

Cynthia

- Now that you mention it...

Jesse

- Look. If there's not an understanding behind why something is important, then it's all too easy to ignore or cut when the budget or schedule gets tight.

Erica

- Like last time when I discovered the character script contained stereotypes offensive to my identity but because I wasn't shown the script until after the recording session and you didn't want to pay to redo it, you instead scrapped the only female character entirely! S!)

Cynthia (everyone can make noises of increasing disgust or disagreement as Cynthia rattles off an array of standard dodges)

- Those were reasonable steps to take at the time given the lean scenario we were facing. Every project is different. That team of decisionmakers didn't see the value, and we had never approached a project that way before. The project budget was astronomical compared to what it cost to build the entire gate...20 years prior.

Wendy

- Everything you just said shows how important a shared understanding and trust is.
- Imagine if, before we got to the point of writing a contract, we discussed inclusion with the team and how it comes to life on a project.
- Picture how much more smoothly vendor visits and the job site would run if we established a shared vision of accessibility, including ramps, bathrooms, and more.

Nicola

- There's talent I'd love to hire that isn't inclined to work on our sites or even in our projects because the cost of participation is too high for them in time, energy, and their own money. When we trot out ramps only for exec visits, what's that say about how we treat people the rest of the time?

Cynthia

- Wait hold up. You're telling me there are people who won't work with us or on our projects because...

Nicola

- Because in a variety of ways, we haven't made a welcoming, safe space where they can exist, much less bring their whole true selves and thrive. And that's not just about disability.

(Cynthia note- I would love a super uncomfortable pause here- rustling, looking away, clearing of throats. Like let's lean into the awkward and the too-often unspoken)

Cynthia

- If you're saying what I think you're saying, our social media team is doing great work around Black History Month, Juneteenth, Pride, Hispanic Heritage Month, and Ramadan.

Everyone makes are you bleeping kidding me noises and gestures.

Cynthia

- And we put out a memo!

Everyone makes more are you bleeping kidding me noises and gestures

Cynthia

- And we've been working really hard on recruitment and hiring, but diverse talent that's qualified is really hard to find.

Jesse

- How we as an industry define 'qualified', recruitment, and hiring would make this session run longer than The Cursed Child.

Wendy

- A healthy workplace increases employee engagement and retention. A shitty workplace... well. Enjoy the expense of employee turnover and the cost of a workplace where people feel like something's wrong. Anyone can sue anyone, the way to get someone to not sue you is to not create an environment where they really want to stick it to you regardless of the validity of their claim. Do you want to spend your money in a positive way or on a labor lawyer? People don't sue when they're happy even if a lawyer could convince them they have a valid claim. People sue employers all the time without valid claims because they hate them. Try not creating a workplace that people hate.

Cynthia

- But our workplace is a family! We give out turkeys at Christmas!

Nicola

- What if I told you not everyone celebrates Christmas?

Erica

- What if I told you not everyone eats meat?

Sina, Corey, or Jesse

- What if I told you some people like to keep a work-life balance?

Wendy- forcibly, perhaps raising her voice

- Getting back to contracts!. Think about what it would be like if we collaboratively discussed a code of conduct for everyone on a project, including subs, and established anti-bullying and discrimination policies as well as a clearly defined reporting process.

Nicola, dreamily

- Policies and a reporting process that I could share with site teams and present to vendors....

Wendy

- And the more we build a shared understanding of inclusion and accessibility, the less likely those things are going to be seen as 'nice to haves that we can cut' instead of 'this is a core part of a great experience and it's a must do'

Sina and Corey

- You can even make accessibility a mandatory criteria for success parameters, buyoffs, and payments, including with your vendors. You'll have contracts with them, too.

Erica

- And you can build an understanding that access and inclusion goes beyond disability. It's about age, gender, lived experience, and more.

Cynthia

- We can get all this in the contract?

Wendy

- We have to talk about it with them and build that shared vision, THEN it goes in the contract.
- Note of caution thought: when you put it in the contract it must be clearly measurable. For instance, we have to state that playtesting must involve the following groups. We have to state what constitutes the accessibility that is tied to buyoff. You have to be able to measure it- otherwise you're in a dogfight of interpretation.

Wendy blows the horn, stuffs money in jar

Scene 3: Let's Stop and Taste the Flowers

Sina and Corey time!

Sina and Corey

- Soooooo before we get to the milestone review, we have some notes.

Cynthia

- Well, since the CD is... (spins the wheel)... trapped in a quarantine hotel with spotty wifi, you're going to have to share them with me.

Sina and Corey

- We were reviewing the narratives and art, and we noticed that a number of the experiences rely on a strictly visual modality. Like, color to indicate where to go and where not to go.

Cynthia

- What's wrong with color coding? That helps guests who can't read English, right?

Sina and Corey

- Think of it like a yes and. Think about a cafeteria, and you go to clear your trash. There's a black bin for trash, a blue for recycling, and a green for compostables.

Cynthia

- Makes sense.

Sina and Corey

- How's a blind person supposed to tell which is which?

Cynthia

- Um

Sina and Corey

- Or a colorblind person?

Cynthia

- Well, shit.

Sina and Corey

- Now, if we make the shapes of the openings of those different, label them, and have Braille, now there are multiple ways to tell which can to use for your stuff.

Cynthia, slowly, as if the light is beginning to dawn

- So we have to....design things 2 ways?

Erica

- Think of it as 'more than one way'. We can use sound, light, vibrations, shape, materiality, visuals, text, all kinds of things in combination to help communicate and reinforce something.

Sina and Corey

- Using those multiple modalities make for a better, richer experience for everyone. You're not just seeing something, you're hearing it and feeling it too. It's immersive.

Nicola

- Just remember, the more complicated and multi-faceted the design, the more vendors, time, and money we're talking about.

Sina and Corey

- I mean, sure, if you were only planning on building scenic flats and now you add a soundscape, that's more cost and more vendors to deal with, but...

Jesse

- But the whole project is envisioned as being immersive, with a gamified environment and richly detailed attractions that bring the IP to life.

Awkward staring and clearing of throats.

Jesse

- Look I have to write that tap-dancing bs sometimes too.

Sina and Corey

- So the upshot is, we have to use different modalities to make the best possible experience and in doing so we also make it more accessible if we're smart about it.

Erica

- It makes for way better interactives, too.

Wendy

- And a better experience can contribute to a better ROI

Jesse

- And increase the likelihood of Phase 2 even happening.

Cynthia

- OK OK I get it. But I feel like there's a catch, there's gotta be a catch.

Sina and Corey

- Well, if you want to consider 'how to do things so they don't suck' a catch, sure, there's a catch.
- Think of some of the newest, most high-tech experiences out there. There's amazing visuals! There's super cool audio! There's those thingies in the seats that move it!

Erica

- Buttkickers

Sina and Corey

- That's what they're called?

Nicola

- It's a classy industry

Sina and Corey

- Right, moving on. Here's the thing- if those multiple modalities- sight, sound, touch- are viewed only through the lens of experience, and no one stops and thinks about how can we also leverage this technique for someone who's blind, for someone who's deaf, for someone who's both, then that's a huge opportunity missed. You're investing all this time and effort already in a soundscape and directional audio, you can use it to make it a better experience for a blind person at the same time with practically no added cost or impact to the schedule, you just have to think about it and embed it in your design and process early on.

Cynthia

- So not thinking about it from the jump means we're missing a way to be inclusive without spending a ton of money and time, or having to involve significant new resources or vendors.

Sina and Corey

- Exactly. But, here's a way things get screwed up, If you don't think about affordances and include space in your budget, schedule, and process to develop them, then it's going to be a scramble to include them. Whether those affordances are captions, ASL interpretation, no barrier entries to ride vehicles, you don't know what affordances will make the most sense in a given interaction early in the process because nothing's designed yet. But if you don't leave the money, time, and capacity to develop those as you design, you're in trouble.
- And last but not least- if you value engineer things but you don't do it smartly, then you end up with a weird mix of affordances across your entire experience, and you force guests to guess or relearn over and over how they are supposed to interact with a thing. That's frustrating and exasperating.

Erica

- And so people stop playing or staying.

Sina and Corey

- Right.

Nicola

- How about we have a fun workshop tomorrow to go over all of this and figure out what needs to change and how?

(Wendy- this is a positive money move on Nicola's part)

Erica

- I will bring my paper, tape, and scissors. We can test ideas as we go.

(Wendy- this is a positive money move on Erica's part)

Cynthia, musing

- I wonder if we can spin this for a puff-piece in the intra-company newsletter...

Scene 4: Throwin a playtesting party!

Erica takes center stage

- I've got snacks, I've got post-it notes, I've got clip boards, I've got cameras. It's playtesting time!

Cynthia

- I thought you already did that? With the paper, and the tape?

Erica

- THAT was paper playtesting, roughly testing out ideas way back in the earlier design phases for the interactives.

Cynthia

- So, it's done...right? You proved all of our design assumptions were correct? We don't need to spend more money on testing?

Erica, perhaps with a tinge of 'silly rabbit, trix are for kids' or 'oh you sweet summer child'

- THEN we made adjustments using what we learned and partnered with our research team to test specific features ... now it's time to playtest mockups of entire interactives in a space that models the actual experience!

Nicola

- Um, are you doing this on site?!

Jesse

- You know we're under the most hellish NDA ever about that IP, right? The penalties are larger than the gross domestic product of entire countries.

Wendy

- Calm down. Erica reached out to me way back in the beginning. Teamwork makes the dream work. Or at least keeps us from getting sued into another dimension.

Erica

- Yep! Think of playtesting like a party. I've got activities and snacks, but you need a location and attendees. And a really good party has an interesting mix of people, right?

Cynthia

- Theoretically, sure

Erica

- It can be hard to get a wide range of people for playtesting- getting them into the park or the warehouse to test, issues of NDAs and that gets even more complex with kids, and

you don't want details about the experience to leak on social media. There's risk involved with letting people get hands-on. You can hide or mask IP, but that takes time and costs money.

Nicola

- Two things which are in short supply.

Erica

- Right. So, sometimes we have to sub-optimize, but if we can plan ahead and work with legal on releases, and build a budget that allows us to mock up such that we don't have to try to get people into an actual park or to hide IP, we can get better data out of playtesting.

Sina and Corey

- And that increases your chances of getting a really diverse and inclusive group of playtesters, which is crucial.

Erica

- Absolutely. Playtesting: Do it early, do it often, do it with as many people as possible!
- Sometimes one person can be extremely illuminating - I worked with a wheelchair user from our Finance department who gave me incredible notes and insight. But no two people are alike, so it is helpful to get several testers rather than relying on one to be the end all and be all.

Cynthia

- So you're using company employees? That's cheap and avoids legal issues, yeah?

Erica

- Yes but we still need kids, so employee families are useful if it's too challenging to bring outsiders in.

Jesse

- Some projects that's less of an issue. We work with a vendor who also does museum work- they have relationships with their local boys and girls clubs, scouts, the local School for the Blind, Girls who Code, Big Brothers Big Sisters, and they playtest with those groups.

Sina and Corey

- And playtesting is a great opportunity to test those affordances we embedded in the multimodal design and really figure out how best to surface them.

Cynthia

- Surfacing? Wha?

Sina and Corey

- Like if we know we need captions, but we need to figure out the optimal places, sizes, and deployment of them within an experience, and what kind of information the caption absolutely must convey including tone and emotion.

Erica

- We can test for and iterate all of that- but we need the time and the space to do it.

Nicola

- And ops people, natch, which is a whole other scheduling juggling act.

Erica

- Right. And, like, you want your party to be in the best PLACE for a party, right? So shoving everyone in a conference room works for a while, but eventually, that's super boring. Who wants to sit drinking punch in a plain room? We want to build mock ups that tell us what it's really like to play with that interactive in the context of the space- is there a wall that someone doing an activity might hurt themselves on, is there a ride nearby making a lot of noise.

Wendy

- Please no designing things for people to hurt themselves on. Please.

Erica

- And all of this works SO MUCH BETTER if you've sent out the playtesting equivalent of Save the Dates. Playtesting impacts and is impacted by all the other disciplines. Show set needs to know what we're doing and vice-versa, so they don't move things around and ruin all the optimization we've done based on testing. Lighting- who lights the interactives- can be a huge scope gap if you don't have people involved early.

Nicola

- You'll be delighted to know Erica reached out to me and we worked on this from the get go, just like she did with Legal.

Cynthia

- So that was already accounted for in the budget.

Nicola

- Yep.

Jesse and Wendy

- You're welcome

Cynthia

- So we actually... planned ahead, were proactive, and things are working... well?

Nicola

- I know, right?

Cynthia

- This is great! . What could possibly go wrong! (Conflict)

Scene 5: Answer: Everything. Everything can go wrong.

Nicola

- Well. This is fun.

Everyone

- Uhoh what

Nicola

- Let us just say that

(as Nicola ticks off, everyone else should respond- wince, make oof and ow noises, both visual and auditory escalation of 'oh shit')

Nicola

- Transportation strikes
- Increasing fuel costs
- The fact we're still calculating shipping using 2018 metrics
- The wholesale disruption to the delicately balanced shipping chain now that China's not taking our recyclables
- Spiraling costs of materials
- Manufacturing having not recovered to pre-COVID status
- Equals we are on a budget and schedule that were determined based on wrong data and are unreachable thanks to the very real, Real World.

Cynthia

- OK, so, given that, we can VE the—

Everyone, throat clearing, staring, arm folding, tapping toes, head shaking no, Wendy ringing the BAD CALL bell and taking money

Cynthia, in a questioning voice

- ...really fancy chairs in the sit-down restaurant and the super thematic outdoor lighting?

Verbal and visual expressions of relief from everyone but Nicola

Nicola

- It's almost cute you think that will be enough to mitigate this. Almost.
- This is a 'cut whole attraction' level bad.
- As if all that wasn't enough- everyone is burned out and fried. The past 3 years have taken a toll. People are quitting. I can't revoke approved vacations so that we have the bodies to get us through this- more people will quit and we can't possibly hire and onboard fast enough to mitigate that.
- We can look team by team, attraction by attraction...

Sina and Corey

- We're already cutting it close as it is with the time we have allocated for writing and recording audio descriptions, writing the captioning, and recording the ASL interpretation.

Wendy

- And we are contractually bound to hit certain targets in order to get paid, so we can't undermine those.

Everyone except Cynthia- being sensitive but defending 'their turf' - squabble over one another

- I don't want to undermine the accessibility affordances but I don't see how I can cut stuff from my budget to help cover the shortfall instead.
- The affordances are in the contract, we can't cut them and they need to be there opening day.
- If we don't finish playtesting then we're finishing programming based on what we hope is the right choice, not based on data.
- I've got the higher-ups calling me wanting to know what we're going to do.

Cynthia

- Hold up. Everybody, just. Chill a second. It sounds like the right thing to do- everything all of you have been talking about and putting into practice this whole project- and the reality of the schedule and budget are like opposing forces. Fair?

Nicola

- Yes. A traditional schedule and budget like this certainly didn't take into account spiraling costs of materials, inflation, and supply chain. Those are curveballs.
- EVERYONE on the project needs us to successfully finish our part. But no one wants all these problems to hit their budget. Even though doing it is the best possible thing for the long-term operation and success of the project, no one wants to be responsible for being over budget on their part of the project, and so it's getting shoved entirely onto ours.

Wendy

- We could try having that discussion, encouraging them to look at the holistic project budget and not just our budget in terms of finding solutions.

Jesse

- We know from the conversations we had way at the start that long-term operations and uptime is really important to them, we could play that angle.

Nicola

- I don't want to touch accessibility affordances. I really don't. But stuff like the ASL interpretation and foreign language tracks are in as line items, and line items are really easy to cut so they're vulnerable if the higher-ups start making the decisions.

Sina and Corey (feel free to make we get it, thanks gestures and sounds)

Erica, musing

- It's not much, and we still need to pay them, but we could use interns to help run some of this. Maybe I can bring resource costs down that way, while still preserving the length and depth of the playtesting.

Cynthia, slowly

- I think we need to come together as a team and decide which attraction to recommend moving to Phase 2. Which has the least impact on guest experience but also ancillary costs- contracts sliding, penalties, shared costs it would have to bear alone in next phase... Where's the CD?

(Someone spins the spinner, reads)

Nicola

- Can we get you a recommendation in 2 days?

Cynthia

- Yes, but be aware- I've got a meeting in the corner office the next day after that, so... either I come in with a plan or they will come in with their own, uh, 'solutions'.

Company: looks glum, yikes, etc.

Jesse says, not in character, after handing over recommendations to the project exec, the team waits. And worries.

Cynthia

- I got good news, meh news, and bad news

(Everyone blurts what they want first)

Cynthia

- The bad news is... we get no schedule extension

Everyone react how they want

Cynthia

- The...meh? News is we are shoving that attraction into phase 2, and we are getting a *little* additional budget from other budget buckets. They did take the advice to look at the project as a whole.

Wendy (moving money around)

- Relationship build for the win

Nicola

- Thanks for bringing that to them. But you know I'm gonna ask: how little is 'a little'?

Cynthia

- Little enough that Erica needs to look at reducing staff costs in prototyping

Erica

- All right, we'll get creative!

Cynthia

- And the really fancy restaurant seats are out. Except for the exclusive members-only club.

Sina and Corey

- Did they hit any of the affordances?

Cynthia

- I talked them out of it. They're not cutting the budget lines for the ASL interpretation, Braille menus not just qr codes, any of that. They're also not cutting the inclusive restrooms in each land.

(Company murmurs of hey that's not all bad)

Cynthia

- I know none of this is a magic bullet, but. The team that's been back for 2 months is available to pitch in, so you now have access to them rather than trying to hire in and train new talent on the fly.
- And... based on what you all have shared over the past several months, when we talked about Phase 2...

Everyone- respond how you want- fear, concern, tell me more

Cynthia

- SMEs, cultural and accessibility, are embedded in the budgets now, they're not line items. Same with playtesting, and professional translators.

Sina, Corey, and Erica- express whatever level of delight you want

Cynthia

- Production, they've asked that you and I work with Legal and Project Dev on responding to early proposed budgets and schedules so maybe we can shape them a bit better.

Jesse

- Humane and realistic schedules given the new reality?

Wendy

- Budgets from the jump that are structured to reward long-term thinking and not short-term penny-pinching?

Cynthia

- And, maybe this will make this a slightly better place to work, people including vendor team members, will be able to say they worked on the project once it's open, and MComm will be reaching out to make sure we have comprehensive and accurate lists of everyone who touched the project for the THEA award they're sure we're going to win.
- ...I also brought up vegetarian turkey alternatives but that didn't go anywhere.

Erica

- Tofurkey is not everyone's jam.

Everyone

(whatever level of satisfaction you wish to express)

Nicola

- I know you were taught to be all 'the buck stops here, my way or the highway'
- You did a good job being an hourglass, bridging us and C-suite, instead of a choke point.

Cynthia

- Aw thanks, but it's not just me. It's all of you. There's no I in team!

Nicola

- You sound like the successories poster by security.

Jesse

- Hey team?

Everyone: yes?

Jesse

- So... another division called. They want us to clone this for the Korean market.

AND SCENE