Hadley Presents

COVID-19 Tips

Presented by Ricky Enger

Ricky Enger: Welcome to Hadley Presents. I'm your host Ricky Enger, inviting you to sit back, relax, and enjoy a conversation with the experts. In this episode we discuss managing successfully during the COVID-19 pandemic from a blind or low vision perspective. And joining us is Hadley access technology specialist. Lisa Salinger.

Welcome to the show, Lisa.

Lisa Salinger: Thank you. I'm very glad to be here.

Ricky Enger: So it's not necessarily the best time to be on the show. If you follow the news at all, you know that the COVID-19 pandemic is something that's discussed fairly frequently. There're orders to stay inside, to stay at least six feet away from people. And not a lot is done from the perspective of those with disabilities. Oftentimes we'll see, again, staying a safe distance from people. But what happens, for example, when you actually need to be guided by a person, how do you navigate that issue successfully? So there's a lot to really explore here. I thought we'd just take the opportunity to do that and to kind of put some of those resources all in one place.

So let's start then by talking a little about who you are. Since some of our listeners may not be familiar with you.

Lisa Salinger: As you said, I am the access technology specialist at Hadley. From a technical standpoint, I am the person to help you. Personally, I am a lover of technology. I enjoy exploring new stuff.

Also, personally, right now I am not in ideal health. I have been self-quarantined since March 8th, so I am living with and experiencing some of this. I have not been tested because there are not enough tests available. Thankfully, my situation is not critical enough that I would need to be admitted to the ICU. Not by a long shot. We are presuming I have it, but we don't know, but I am holding my own. But I have had some interesting interactions as it relates to all of this. We'll get into that more, I'm sure, as we go on.

Ricky Enger: This is all hitting pretty close to home for you as a person with a disability and potentially a person who has actually contracted the virus. So what does this mean for how we navigate things differently than someone who is in their 20s and can see perfectly. I think there are some differences. One of which is that the access to information can be a little different. I know that on the news often there are infographics that show the spread of the disease and the number of cases that are in each country. Those things are graphics. We may want to know that same information, but how do we access it?

Lisa Salinger: My state has a really good demographic breakdown. Couple of days ago, I went and I looked and it said, "View a map by county" But then I looked a little more and it said, "View a list of cases by county." So I would encourage you to, if you see “map” or “infographic,” not to just give up but to try tabbing or arrowing down past that. There is also an individual who has put up a wonderful, wonderful resource and it's really neat because you can drill down. So you can see the cases for the entire world and then you can see them by country. And I think by state or province.

Ricky Enger: Now it doesn't do that by county. So for that it may be important to watch the local news and get your information that way in terms of what's kind of right near you. But I think, again, it is important to have access to the same information that's often presented visually. So I'm glad that there are a couple of ways to do that.

The one thing that is on everyone's mind is how do I stay fed? How do I stay clean and sanitized and all of that stuff when we either aren't supposed to get out and about or because it's a challenge to get out and about whether it be a transportation challenge or any number of other things.

Lisa Salinger: We basically have two ways to approach this. So there are services for deliveries of groceries and household items. You have services like Instacart and Shipt. You also have local grocery stores with apps and online delivery services. One thing I would you to do with any of these apps, if you are using a smartphone, is to keep them up to date. You wouldn't think that's important right now, but it is because information changes, availability of stuff, changes. Information about contactless delivery has been added. You might actually have a harder time if your apps are not up to date.

For restaurant foods. There are services like DoorDash and Uber Eats and Grubhub and Postmates. And it's very interesting because you may be using these services for a long time or you may just be new to them. It's very easy to get started and say, "This looks different than it did two days ago. I must be doing something wrong." Not necessarily. For example, when I go into DoorDash, I find that about half the restaurants are closed. I suspect this is because they just don't have enough demand or there is difficulty with workers, so they have closed. So there are fewer restaurants from which to choose. The other thing is the kinds of things restaurants offer is changing. Sometimes they're changing from day-to-day. It's not just you. Just because you're not seeing something doesn't mean you're not doing it correctly.

Ricky Enger: What can we do for people who are less tech savvy but still needed these things now?

Lisa Salinger: So there are two main resources I can think of for you. One is to check with family and friends and others. I think sometimes in the blind community we are used to being the recipients of help. If you have technical knowledge you can be a giver of help. I have reached out to a few older neighbors and friends and relatives and said to them, "If you need me to place orders for you, I can do this." So if you have those skills or you know of someone who could help you, certainly be in touch with them.

The other is something I have not used, but I have talked to people who have, and I've had very positive experiences. This started as a company called GoGo Grandparent. So you have to sign up for GoGo Grandparent to use the other two. They have GoGo Grocery and GoGo Gourmet, which is your food delivery. You do not pay anything to sign up initially. Basically, what you are doing is speaking with someone over the phone who will, in the case of GoGo Grandparent, facilitate a ride for you with Uber or Lyft. Or in the case of grocery, will help with grocery delivery. And Gourmet is for food delivery. But if my understanding is correct, you need to sign up first with GoGo Grandparent. That's just giving them your name and your address and any particulars so they know who you are and how to assist you. Now there is a little bit of a cost for these services. I know, for example, with GoGo Grandparent from the start of the ride to the end, I think it's 27 cents a minute. More on top of what you are already paying. But if you're paying someone to do this for you, it may even out. If you need an option, it does exist.

Ricky Enger: And that is, of course, in addition to the tried and true methods, which are to call local restaurants who may offer delivery on their own. Even if they haven't done so before, they may be instituting those policies now in order to be able to keep the doors open, since in many cases dine in is completely closed, but many restaurants still want to provide that service. So there are absolutely options that don't depend on technology where you can still get your provisions, your food and what have you.

Of course, the world doesn't stop during a time like this and you still get bills. You still get junk mail. You still get paperwork that you have to deal with. For a lot of us we're accustomed to having a reader or perhaps a friend or family member who comes over a couple of times a week and assists with that.

With social distancing in place and people being asked to stay home unless it's absolutely essential, what do we do then to still manage that paperwork and those other things that are coming in or even just visual tasks like, "I forgot which of these is the Advil and which is the Tylenol." What's available to provide any visual assistance that people might need?

Lisa Salinger: Well, I think the first step is to clarify what kinds of things you're to be able to get help with and what kinds of things you aren't. For example, I have a box I want to send to a friend. It is all ready to go and sitting in my closet. It needs an address. It's going to have to wait. I was able to pay my federal and state taxes. My local taxes need an honest to goodness check. That too is going to have to wait. I don't write legibly enough to send anyone anything that is written by my hand. That is going to have to wait.

Now, if it is bills or checks, things of that nature. I would encourage you please to not just hide your head in the sand. Let's say that you always paid your electric bill by check. Maybe you can't do that now because you don't have someone to write the check. But you can use an over the phone kind of visual interpreter service to get them to read your check number. So it could be read to someone over the phone to take your payment information to automatically deduct that. Or they would give you an extension say, "Okay, in 60 days we need this check." It may have to be for the full amount due, you don't just get off paying it but that can buy you some time.

We have mentioned about some of these visual services. Now unfortunately for these you do need a smartphone. There are services like Aira, which allows free five-minute calls and there are services like Be My Eyes. There are also apps that you can use for your smartphone that will help identify objects. They can read barcodes, but you can often use a scanning app to get the idea as well. So there are lots of ways to come at this.

Programs like Aira and Be My Eyes can be very helpful. I, because of lung issues with this whole thing, I have been taking steroids. My hands are swollen so I've got a bit of butterfingers and the other day I dropped one on the floor. I was kind of freaked out because I have a very small dog and one of these would not be good for her. So I told her to go into her crate, which she did immediately. I was able to call Aira and get help locating that pill. There are very few limits to the kinds of assistance you can get. Services like that can really be lifesavers.

Ricky Enger: Agreed. And the cool thing is that Be My Eyes is a service with volunteers and it is completely free. You probably will have more available volunteers than ever because many people are now at home and may have a little more time for that. Aira has calls where the first five minutes are free. So even if you don't have a paid plan with Aira, you can either use that first five minutes and you can get a lot done in five minutes, like find a pill or sort the junk mail or whatever. There are access locations where the business itself has paid for minutes. So Walgreens is one, Target is one. Those are places that if you do have to get out, you can have access to that visual interpreter that's not only helping you navigate where you need to go, but also helping you to keep that social distancing. Of course, as you mentioned as well, if you don't have a smartphone and you still got to pay your bills, just calling customer service and asking them to process things over the phone can be a great way to get that done.

So speaking of places like Walgreens and pharmacies and things like that, what can we do right now to get access to perhaps prescriptions that we normally have to go and pick up and maybe shouldn't be venturing out to do that? Or even things like wanting to keep track of temperature and blood pressure and things like that at home. Are there accessible ways that we can do that?

Lisa Salinger: There are some things you can do. Ricky and I both, ironically, have the same thermometer. It is currently unavailable on Amazon, but there are lots of places you can buy these. You can buy them from the blindness companies. Some pharmacies have talking thermometers. You can always get yourself a standard thermometer and take your temperature and then use one of these services to look at that number for you. Reach out to your people in your network and see what they're using and what they like.

Ricky Enger: If you either can't get to your pharmacy to see what they have or you just don't want to venture out there, there's at least one pharmacy that is doing a free delivery of prescriptions that being CVS. They will probably also deliver other things from their shelves. So it is certainly worth contacting your pharmacy by phone to see what they do offer. I know that many pharmacies have a mail order service such that you get three months of your prescription by mail. If you're already set up with that, then you're good to go. But if you have been accustomed to going out and grabbing things yourself, be aware that there may be options for getting those things as well as other things from the drugstore shelves delivered directly to you, which is pretty cool.

I think a lot of people now are discovering two things. One of which is that you can indeed communicate with people without having to be face-to-face. The second thing is that we all do need that human interaction from time-to-time. Sometimes for things that actually do require something to happen in person, whether it be lifting something or picking up something from outside or whatever. So what are the options both for keeping a network of people that you can talk to that may be far away from you? Perhaps even getting familiar with people who are closer to home.

Lisa Salinger: The service that comes to mind is Nextdoor. So it's a way for you to both give and receive help. I live in an apartment building, so I had two things that I could offer. I had an auto ship order go wrong and I have enough dog food to last me till the end of time. So I sent a message to our apartment manager saying if anybody needs dog food either because they can't get it or they can't afford it, I have some and I'm happy to give it. So she was going to print that out and put it on our bulletin board. She did that and people are writing comments and attaching things to it, and ways they can help. Someone contacted me and they are now calling me every day from the lobby because they still have to go out to work. When they come in and they're contacting me and reading me the updates from the comment sheet. Family and friends that you just talked to on the phone, we have wisdom to share and we have wisdom that we need. They keep talking about social distancing. What we need is not social distancing. We need physical distancing more than ever. What we do need is social closeness.

Ricky Enger: So connecting with people, whether it be through things like Nextdoor or whether you're using technology like Zoom to connect to people who aren't in your area, or whether you're just picking up the phone and contacting those friends and family members that you don't always speak to every day. It's important to continue reaching out and doing that. With regard to Zoom, everybody likes free. It is worth noting that you can create a Zoom account and can have a meeting of up to 40 minutes without having to pay anything. So that is an option where people can call in via phone or they can join a from their PC or a smartphone app. If you've ever attended a Hadley discussion group, you'll be very familiar with this. And it's a nice thing to have to keep in contact with people that you might not be near.

Lisa Salinger: Normally, we feel a little awkward sometimes about reaching out. Is this inappropriate? Am I going to be infringing on someone's time? But right now everybody's doing it. Everybody's going a little stir crazy. Everybody's feeling a little vulnerable. I just want to say again, there are so many things we can do. If we have money, we can donate. Did it help anyone? I don't know. Was it a morale booster? I think so. But we can give our time and we can accept it too. I had someone take my dog for a walk yesterday. He was a complete stranger. I was really moved by the kindness. I think that this is really an unprecedented time, especially if you are feeling isolated to reach out and make those connections because everyone is doing it and it's never been more socially acceptable than it is right now.

Ricky Enger: If you are looking to connect on a specific topic, there are certainly resources out there for that as well. We do have a lot going on. There is a discussion group for maintaining fitness and how do you keep moving, how do you stay fit, how do you exercise excessively. We have the technology discussion group. There's a crafting discussion group, a writer's circle, many number of things.

Lisa Salinger: Cooking. I saw this thing on Twitter the other day where somebody said, "I went to this new restaurant. It's called the kitchen. You prepare everything yourself. I have no idea how it stays in business." But if you're not used to cooking, if you are used to having somebody cook for you and they can't come or you've done Meals On Wheels or you've done a lot of convenience foods and you just can't get them and you don't have enough reserve room for an adequate supply, you might want to need and learn to do some of this a little more from scratch and safely.

Ricky Enger: Exactly. So we do actually have a cooking discussion group as well. I think for a lot of us coming together and talking about the new challenges that we're facing during these times, which are far stranger than anything we've seen before, everyone is in the same boat. And it's okay to connect with each other and share the things that we're good at. Ask those questions that we've always wanted to know but felt a little bit embarrassed about, I really should know this by now. I think we're realizing that people want to connect with each other. People want to give to each other. People want to feel that sense of community. So definitely come and join Hadley discussion groups. I want to point to American Foundation for the Blind. They are gathering a number of posts about games that you can play accessibly. There is even a post about how cool Nextdoor, the service that we just recently talked about, how cool that is and how to get started with that. Then what if you're discovering right now that your tech knowledge just isn't what you want it to be. You've got all this time and you really want or maybe even need to learn technology, but you're really not sure how to go about doing that. What resources are available for people who need that training or just need somewhere to go to learn what's available?

Lisa Salinger: Well, there are both free and paid resources. Each have their advantages and disadvantages. We do have quite a lot of information on Hadley's website. We have videos on iPhone and Android and Windows and all kinds of things like that. You can also do the phone a friend option, if you have friends and they have time. You don't maybe want to put on one of them, I need to learn how to use my computer, but someone might be able to help you with, "Hey, how do I do this grocery ordering thing?"

The other option are companies like Mystic Access, which provides free and paid training. There are group classes, there are audio tutorial downloads. There's one-on-one training. That can really be nice, the one-on-one training in particular. And there are some free resources also. National Braille Press notably has made three books available for download right now, which are especially timely. In no particular order, they are books on delivery services. It's called Dinner Delivered. It's written by the people at Mystic Access about food and grocery delivery services. Judy Dixon has written a wonderful book about these visual assistance kinds of programs like Aira and Be My Eyes and things with an iPhone. Debra Kendrick has written a wonderful book. I have read all three of these about navigating the healthcare system. I forget the whole title, but something like when all they can see is that you can't. So it is a wonderful resource whether you are the one in need of care or whether you are responsible for the care of a loved one.

Ricky Enger: One last free thing, which is pretty cool to mention is that Freedom Scientific, makers of the JAWS screen reader, I believe they are also offering ZoomText. Those things are going to be available for free up until June 2020. So if you wanted access to these things which are traditionally paid access. You buy a license for a year. You will be able to use those things without a license up through June 2020. So as we wrap up, do you have any final thoughts that you want to leave listeners with?

Lisa Salinger: There have been questions about sighted guide. You made a point of remember that you're holding the elbow that people have been coughing into. I think my main thoughts on this are to protect yourself and protect others. I was able to net a box of small latex gloves. But when I have to go to the trash shoot or go down to pick up packages, I put on one glove and that is my touching glove. People talk about using your elbow to push elevator buttons, but I have not arrived at the level of skill yet where I can read braille with my elbow.

You can do other things. If you have those little sandwich bags or pickup bags, if you're a guide dog user, you have lots of these around your house. Put that on your hand and use that to touch common and public surfaces. And then still disinfect.

My opinion about sighted guide is probably unpopular, but if you are going to pick up a prescription and you have a spouse or a partner or a neighbor or friend who is going to pick it up for you, is there really any purpose in you going? If you must go out and go with someone, you have options. You can do sighted guide and just try not to breathe and disinfect. But understand that the person guiding you may not be comfortable with this. I even hesitate to say this because it makes even me cringe. But if you use a cane, you could say, "You can take the tip of my cane." This is normally never done. This is very, very bad. These are not the times to worry about that. So you could have someone lead you by your cane. It is a rigid object that will work. If your dog can follow, take your dog. Your dog will be thrilled to get out and then you won't have to be touching someone.

The other thing is even if you're not a confident traveler, this might be the time to let someone guide you by voice. Okay, you're slower. You may walk into something. It bothers me the idea of people wanting to go along with a friend to pick up a prescription, for example, when they really don't need to. They're putting themselves, their friends and others at risk for doing it. Sometimes there is a time and place to gently place our independence or our perception of it on a shelf for the good of everyone involved.

Ricky Enger: Yeah. I think if there's one takeaway that I'm really getting during this time, it's that interdependence is key for everyone. Not just if you have a disability, we all depend on each other to some degree and that's okay.

Well, thank you so much, Lisa, for joining during this interesting time. Perhaps this will be one of many. We shall see. Again, thank you for sharing your wisdom and your expertise and just your experience as you kind of go through this yourself. Thanks for listening.

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