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## SPED 510 Podcasts Episode 11: Cassandra Maloney

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Amy: Hello, Kassy?

New Speaker: Hi.

Amy: Hey. Well, welcome everybody. I'd like to introduce a special guest today, who is gonna tell us a lot about the exciting work that she's doing for orientation and mobility specialists. Kassy, introduce yourself, and tell us a little bit about who you are and how you became an orientation and mobility specialist.

Kassy: Hi, everybody. I'm Kassy. As you know, I am a certified O&M specialist. I'm also a yoga teacher and a mom of two. Last year, I founded the International O&M online symposium. I got into orientation and mobility gateway through my TVI program, and truth be told, I was like 20 years old in my TVI program, and I went out one night with one of my friends who is visually impaired and a couple of other friends, and I got in to the club because he had a cane. So the next day I signed up for classes, and here I am many, many, many years later and much more grown up. But, that's actually how I got into wanting to become an orientation and mobility specialist.

Amy: I think that is a great story Kassy, just getting into this work through a friend and through getting into a club and having a good time. I can't really think of a better way to realize the importance of orientation and mobility. It's about access and participation and freedom so, it's a great story.

New Speaker: Yeah, yeah. It's been quite a ride ever since.

Amy: Very cool. Well as you know, Kassy you're talking to students and listeners who are located all around the pacific north west. Many of whom are teachers of the visually impaired, although some folks are working in rehabilitation settings and are adding on orientation and mobility certification. So, tell us a little bit about some of your journey and working as an O&M, and maybe some advice that you could give those who are just starting this journey, and adding on these classes and adding on this focus like you did.

Kassy: Of course. So, I did my orientation and mobility piece, along with my TVI, and I got my masters in it. Then I jumped straight into the working world, so this is a first career for me. I was lucky enough to get a job at the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired. I've enjoyed working there for 11 years, it is a dream I think [inaudible 00:03:10]. But one thing that always kept me going you could say, is the ability to be flexible and the ability to understand that we are not at the end of our journey, we are just in the middle of it.

Kassy: I remember going through school and honestly Amy, my first day of actual Cane Class, when you have your cane in hand, and you actually do a walk outside and use the skills we've been practicing, I sat down for three hours. It was so hard. But the next day I showed up, and I did not sit down for three hours. But I kept going, and I kept going.

Kassy: I remember when I was a college student thinking that this was so hard, being able to live in my visual world, and then switch that to a tactual auditory, more of those other

senses, and being able to focus on all of the information that my future students would be getting, was really difficult. And so, I'm glad that I was able to keep that perspective and that just because I sat down on the curb for three hours on my first day doesn't mean that, that's the end of the journey. Just means that we're in the middle of it and we have to keep going.

Amy: You know Kassy, that is such good advice. It's good advice because I just conducted our very first cane class at Portland State University this past summer and I worked with clinical partners to do it. I remember my own cane class at Texas Tech and feeling overwhelmed and stress in that process of learning. I have a sign in my office that says orientation and mobility is 10 percent cane and 90 percent brain, and it really is. As you were talking about, a mind shift into using our other senses and really being confident in those senses and putting together the world in a different way. So I love that advice that you offered the students. Tell us more about what you've learned along the way through your work.

Kassy: I've learned that every body is different. I've also learned that every orientation and mobility is different and they teach things in a different way, but that doesn't negate the way that any one of us teaches. Even if you are just starting in this field or maybe are just a couple of years in, it's important to know that every thing that you're teaching is valid and it might be different than the way that people who are 30 years your senior are teaching, but it doesn't mean that it's not a tool that your students can use. Of course, if it's the correct way to do things. We don't want to go against what you're supposed to be doing. But I think that it's important that every student be recognized as an individual and we focus on what that student needs. Minute to minute, lesson by lesson, maybe day by day.

Kassy: It's also really important that we understand that we are just giving the students tools for their tool belt and it might be a little different than what their previous O&M teacher had taught them and in most cases, as long as it's a small nuance, that's okay.

Amy: Right. Well, you know, in this particular class that will be listening to your podcast is our foundations course and you know, I'm sure like in your program of study, you learned about the orientation of mobility history and the timeline and O&M loved their history. You know? They love the fact that we started after the war. That really we got going, kind of as a result, of veterans coming back home, and our field has really evolved and changed since then. The population of students has changed. And I see you reflect on that.

Amy: Can you talk a little bit about, you know, learning from the traditional ways of doing orientation and mobility and then learning some of the new ways of orientation and mobility? Maybe through innovation or technology or just being open. Can you talk a little bit about that?

Kassy: Yeah, yeah, absolutely. I think one of the best things about our profession is that we're less than a hundred years old. I cannot think of another profession that's so new. The way that we started was very top down, but the way that we have to teach is very

bottom up and so what I mean by that is when we started with teaching the veterans and then [inaudible 00:08:30] mobility grew from them down to students down to early intervention and then to people with multiple impairments. So, we started at the top and then we worked our way down, but where we are as O&M specialists is really meeting everybody where they are and mostly they're coming from the bottom up, meaning that they're born with a visual impairment and we have to meet them where they are.

Kassy: The cool thing about our profession is not only have we spread out in who we're teaching, but how we are teaching them. We started off with teaching skills that we were still teaching in the university setting or in the vocational rehabilitation setting, whichever route you go through, and I know your students are going through the university setting, you have certain skills that you teach, and they're not going to change. That is your foundation, but you don't always have to be in the exact geographical place to teach or to learn and more. I think that's one of the things that's most exciting, but I think that not only is it really exciting and innovative, but it brings us all together.

Kassy: As O&M specialists, we are not all in the same place. Once you raise your university, you may not see another O&M specialists for days, for weeks. Most of my friends, now that I'm a contract O&M specialist and I'm leading at their conference, they have no idea what we do. Nobody really gets it and so you have to be able to come together with other people and rejoice in your student successes or be able to ask them questions. You need to be able to do this in a way that is convenient to you. Or else you're not going to be able to see it. Luckily we have the internet, we have phones where we can see each other from now, we have ways to teach even when we're off of WiFi now, we have so much access to one another even if we're not in this geographically exact same place, that it's a really exciting time in our profession.

Amy: Absolutely. I think you bring up ... you were talking really, Kassy, about professional learning community and your passion around staying connected and being able to teach and influence each other and to grow together in this learning journey.

Amy: Can you tell us a little bit about that? In that, I think that's how you started the International Orientation and Mobility Symposium. You told me a really cool story about how that idea actually emerged. Do you mind sharing that now?

Kassy: Now that all. I worked at GCI for many years and it's a residential school, so I did have people around me who were in my field. One of them had put in a [inaudible 00:11:42]for the conference in Dublin and I was so envious. You know how you should be really happy and excited for your friends when they're doing great things? I was, but I also felt so attached to my home. I had just had two little boys in 19 months and not that I recommend that to anybody ever, but that's the situation that I was in so I couldn't leave.

Kassy: I can't leave my house without somebody wondering where I'm going. Let alone, trips off to anywhere else in the city or in the world. I was feeling like I wasn't a good enough

O&M instructor because I couldn't leave my house. So I had some friends all around the world who were teaching O&M and another thing that I absolutely love and I owe the total penchant for is analyzing intersections. Anywhere I go, I just absolutely love it. How about my husband for following me all around the world and analyzing intersections with me. So I decided that we would all get to cover over, you know, over video conferencing. We would have 30 people and we would analyze intersections all together, because I do think that community is a really, really big thing that we need as individuals and especially as people who work one on one with other people and most of the time with them we, we're silently following behind them. It's not like we're chatting a lot with other people all day long.

Kassy: What ended up happening with the symposium is that it filled this need that a lot of O&M specialists out in the world have, and that is the need to come together and be able to chat and learn without having to leave their homes or their offices or their cities. A lot of people actually got together and had watch parties if they had a regional service center. It really drew people from all over the world into one wonderful community. It was kind of like the resurgence of the communal aspect of O&M. We had kind of started to get into like, but this is my territory, or like, I do this part and not sharing. With the symposium, people felt if they wanted to share not only the things that they were doing that was working with their students, but also their experiences and the areas where they needed help. I think that is huge for our profession and for becoming better professionals.

Amy: I think that's a really good point about the spirit of the community in orientation and mobility being one of sharing. I've certainly experienced that and I also know, you know, on the flip side of that, that many orientation mobility specialists are entrepreneurial. They start with innovations and ideas and can sometimes be entrepreneurial.

Amy: Can you talk a little bit about the differences that you see in people that ... maybe the changes that you see. People that are becoming more willing to share innovations and to share information and to develop things as a community versus maybe even as a sole business. Can you reflect a little bit on that

Kassy: Yeah. Locally I would say, maybe like this past five year lifestyle, our social media has gotten bigger. We've been able to allow our creativity to grow and there's not just me in this area of having a blog or sharing our ideas, because I love to hop on Facebook live. It's my jam, and share whatever things I'm learning, whatever tidbits I come across, just really short snippets. Some people have full blog, something like, to do. I think that through social media and honestly good generations need arise. I think that's what they're called. I don't know exactly.

Amy: Yeah, that sounds right.

Kassy: The generation years. Yeah, I'm only 47 days into being a millennial, I think, and I own every single day of that because I love technology and innovation, but I barely make the cut off, so I don't really know exactly the name of the next generation. Forgive me for that.

Kassy: People in that generation, they just have a knack for understanding progress and where things are going and they really want to showcase their ideas and I mean everybody has such great ideas, but they have an ability to be able to present it and to gather their friends and their community around that idea. [inaudible 00:17:29] Compass is doing a great job. Rock the Cane campaign is also doing a great job and those are all entrepreneurial in the way that they run their Facebook or their blogs.

Amy: At the same time, those entities are sharing a lot of information freely. It seems like it's a balanced ... kind of a balanced way of giving and receiving and sharing at the same time, that they're growing small businesses too. Would you say that that ... is that true?

Kassy: Absolutely. I don't think, especially in this day and age, transparency and giving are key. You cannot just ask for somebody's money or their email address. You have to be able to give them valuable information. You have to be able to solve their problems for free, out of the generosity of your own heart and in goodwill. Then once they get to know and trust you, then people will help you pay for your website and other things like that, and the software to run. Like for us, the software to run the conference is pretty pricey and so we give a lot of content away for free, before we even asked for any email, any money or anything like that.

Kassy: That's really the key to success in any sort of online entrepreneurial journey.

Amy: Cool. Very cool. Well, tell us more, Kassy, what's up with this international O&M conference? What do you want people to know? How can they sign up? I mean, we'll add a link to it to get people, students who are interested in attending perhaps as a part of their professional development or sharing it with their networks. What do you want people to know about it?

Kassy: That would be wonderful. So you guys, we are hosting a three day conference. It's called the International Orientation and Mobility Online Symposium. We usually just call it O&M Symposiums for short, because it's a really long name, and you can go to our website: <https://www.orientationandmobilitysymposium.com> for more information, but we are a fully digital conference and so you don't have to go anywhere.

Kassy: You can do it all from home or from your dorm or wherever you are in the library or whatever. You don't necessarily have to attend live, although that is where most of the community stuff happens. You have a certain amount of time to watch it afterwards. Right now the planning committee hasn't decided on exactly how much time that's going to be but once they do, then that information will be on the website, and just like I was saying, we follow the give, give, give, ask, way of doing things. So we are giving away a free webinar in November. I don't have those exact dates, but it will be on the website, so you're welcome to come to that. It's all [inaudible 00:20:55] accredited. Although you would totally show up, even if it wasn't, I know you. You would totally do it, but just for us saying thank you, we are offering ACVREP credit and we are having presenters from all over the world, again, come and present their information, the things that they're working on, the success stories, mostly to help you make your job

easier, help your students get to their best mobility skills faster, and to give you a little bit of insight maybe on how other mobility instructors do things.

Amy: That sounds really good. Now, just for the students that are on this journey, you won't be eligible for act or ACVREP credits because you're not O&M yet, but you don't benefit from attending. There may be some ways that you can actually earn extra credit for going to the conference or it may be something that you're willing to invest in.

Amy: Before we get to all of that, you can look it up more online as kassy was explaining, you can join in the community. I want you to know about it just as a resource, as something that will be out there when you do graduate and enter your practice. Now, if we can shift gears a little bit, kassy, if you could just tell us ... what kind of advice would you give to orientation and mobility students, and again, many of these are professional people of all generations. Some are millennials, some are Gen X or some are ... I don't know that we have the greatest generation, but some are baby boomers even, that are just adding this onto their career. So we have people of all ages, of all stripe, working, serving kids already in different roles or serving adult. What advice would you have for them as they think about becoming an O&M, taking on this really important role?

Kassy: I think the best piece of advice is to find your why and just start with that. For every single one of you guys, there's a reason that you're even thinking about the program or that you've joined or that you're starting your profession. There is a reason. Find that reason and hold onto it and stick with that, hold it close to your heart, through the days where you're outside, maybe in the snow or maybe it's blistering or maybe it's raining or maybe student sits down five for three hours or maybe you're just having a really hard day. It all happens and you can be flexible through it all as long as you hold onto the reason why you love this profession so much.

Amy: That's excellent advice for anybody. Find your why. For you, Kassy, what is your why? What do you love about O&M?

Kassy: Do we have time for a quick story?

Amy: Are you kidding? Yes, we love stories.

Kassy: Okay. So, I'm just going to give you one example of my why. Just about anytime you're lining up to cross the street with a student who has never crossed the street before, you as the O&M specialist, you are taking that student to the very edge of who they are and who they believe themselves to be as a person who exists in the world and as we mentioned earlier, for them, they are just looking at the very end of their journey, but you have already gone through that journey. You've crossed the street under blindfold before, you know they're going to be safe. You know all of this stuff so you have that perspective, but they don't. They just have this almost ... scared to die. It's really scary for them to do that and then the moment that they take that first step and they cross that street, for the first time, and they can see new parts of themselves and the world opens up, even if it's just a little bit, there's a smile that comes across their face. Maybe

it's not huge, maybe their teeth don't show, but it's just like this little perk at the very end of their mouth where they smile, because they are so proud of themselves.

Kassy: That is my why. That smile, every student, every single day. That was what I promised them and myself every day.

Amy: Well that is a great story and great advice for us, for our students, for me, in continuing this journey, to see the freedom that we can provide through that why. That's great, Kassy.

Amy: So again, thank you so much for being with us today, for sharing your insights and your time and we look forward to staying in touch with you and checking out the O&M symposium.

Kassy: Thank you so much. I look forward to hearing from you guys.

Amy: Okay, take care now. Bye.

Kassy: Bye.