

Aloha. My name's Anthony Akamine, and I'm from Honolulu, Hawaii. And of course, it's home of the 50th state -- Great, amazing beaches, and of course, the only royal palace on U.S. soil, as well as home of our beloved Warren Toyama, Filo Tu, and of course, can't forget the president, Art Cabanilla.

Hawaii is known to be the Aloha state. Aloha means welcome, means love. And we definitely try as one of those states that is very inviting, very loving, very friendly, and very enthusiastic. We do have our challenges and things like that, but we're definitely welcoming. And yeah, it's a very unique state in a sense that it's surrounded by water. We have several different islands that make up the 50th state, but it's a great place to visit; it's a great place to live. It does cost money to -- a little chunk change to get from Honolulu to the different parts of the states, but it's great.

My first experience with vision loss was when I was in Intermediate School. That was when I was just headed for high school, and you had to think about image, you had to think about trying to get your drivers license and things like that, and think even checking out chicks.

I went to a vision screening test. And I guess obviously my back was good and everything else, but they said, "You need to go get some glasses." Little did I know it was actually a lot more than glasses. To make a Long story short, it was determined, after several months, that I have optic atrophy, which is a eye disease where your optic nerves

gets damaged and affected.

At that time, I was not a happy camper. Matter of fact, I recall getting upset at my parents and getting upset at my siblings. And I'm cursing and cussing, and I'm very upset. That's part of that journey. And one of the most interesting things about that journey is 10 years prior to that, I was like a little kid in the Candy Store, seven years old, helping my older brother who was about 15 at that time, and he actually started losing his vision. And you know, I help him, positive family support. Through his journey of blindness, I got to meet some of his friends and his newfound acquaintances. And you know, it's good for the little kid to hang out with his brother that was losing his sight and trying to support him, trying to crack jokes. Wasn't good enough for me, but like things, That's like things, like challenges. With every challenge, you know, there's opportunities. In many ways, I really, truly am blessed by this journey.

I mean, when I was in Community College, I got to experience some -- meeting a lot of folks because of different programs I got acquainted to, and in addition, became president of my Community College, which was pretty awesome experience along my college journey, which was a little... I met a lady, and we got to have a good time, get to know each other. But along that journey, we both got assaulted on a beach -- brutally assaulted. I got stabbed multiple times and was able to live to tell this story. But you know, like I said, with every challenges, you have opportunities. And 15-20 years down the road, I was able to realize and even share how I forgive the individuals who assaulted me, and

that was very healing, very refreshing for myself to do that. You know, for myself.

Forgiveness -- it's not for everybody, and it takes a while. But for me, I guess at first I give my thanks to my Lord God for keeping me alive. And I realize that forgiveness, it's something that you can give. It's something that may not be reciprocal, but it's something when you come to a point that you forgive someone, it allows you to be able to release the anger, the frustration, the guilt, the shame. It's very, very powerful. Like I said, it took a lot of time over time, and you know, prayerful thoughts. But at the same time, just realizing that it's a part of the ability to forgive can be a amazing, redeeming feeling.

Along this journey, through family support and a great love from the community, and you know, I said I hated my blindness. I was upset at my family, but that was that. That's not now. Because of my brother, I met a lot of great folks. During my college years and during my community service and different jobs that I have done, you know, I did a lot of things in the Community involving people with disabilities. One of the things that I did was involving a camp for people with all different disabilities and all different faiths. And I just was a little tired of doing things.

My wife now, Terri, I shared with her about the Hawaii Association of the Blind. It's kind of funny. And I told her, why don't you go meet these people? And why don't you go and see if one of your students -- because she was a job coach to people with developmental disabilities -- she was a job coach, and she introduced some job coaching with some of the vendors there. To make a Long story short, she became a member of the Hawaii

Association of the Blind, and I was just too busy with things.

But as life would have it, thanks to a gentleman named Norman Ota, the Vice president of the Hawaii Association of the Blind, and Amilia, who was one of the Treasurers, I went to a Thanksmas event. And this Thanksmas event is like a cross between Thanksgiving and Christmas, and was started by our beloved Warren Toyama and Julie, who's always thought of opportunities to bring folks together, especially for those that may not have had families or just bringing people together. What they did was they opened up an opportunity.

They asked me, when I wasn't a member, "Do you want to be Santa Claus? We don't have anybody to be Santa Claus."

To my gullible self, I just shook my head. And I was like, "Yeah, I guess. Whatever is what you would like me to do." They had me put on a Santa Claus outfit, play some bells, and come out, and we passed out little goody gifts to all the members. You know, it's like a gift exchange. Since then, I've been their Santa Claus for, I don't know, quite some time. And in addition to that, on my own, I decided to pick up my own Santa Claus outfit and go to some of the care homes, some of the hospitals, and even provided some warm Christmas cheers and little rendition of Santa Claus at hospice. And that was -- it's when you provide that opportunity, it causes people to open up, just like a parachute. And you know, just like myself, I opened up.

And you know, one of my first things that I actually go on vacations. Just so happened, I don't know when it was, but I recall going to a convention, or at least a part of a convention. Because I happened to be in California and visiting some family in Nevada. So I stopped off at some convention in Las Vegas for a little while. And it really caused me to just wanting to dig more, dig more, and dig deep. And I think that's one thing about the Hawaii Association of the Blind. I mean, it's always a very welcoming organization. We accept people where they're at, and we look at ways of how we can encourage folks, love on folks. But we're definitely a very generous organization, and we definitely do a lot of advocacy. Right now, we have an advocacy committee that are advocating for accessible audio.

When you get excited about something, you just continue to just research, just continue to want to dig deep. And as John Maxwell, you be a 365 degree leader. I mean, you lead wherever you are. And I guess for myself, I pitched in wherever I could. I helped out in advocacy. I helped out in the students of Hawaii. I help out with fundraising. One time, they needed somebody to help out with the walk, so I co-chaired the walk committee, and co-chaired several years ago the coordination of several angels of our members that passed away. It's a matter of identifying opportunities and just saying yes, how can I help? I want to help. I want to serve. And that's one of the greatest things about Art Cabanilla and the Hawaii Association of the Blind is we're truly an organization that is truly welcoming.

Yeah, it's a little challenging sometimes living in Hawaii as the time zone, you know, the time difference can be between three hours to six hours, depending on who you're trying to engage with. And for myself, I had the opportunity of being a JP Morgan Chase Leadership Fellows recipient in 2017. And to travel -- I remember the first traveling experience that I went to, that took about eight hour flight. By the time you get there, you're already tired. But you know, it's one of those amazing things. I mean, just being a JP Morgan Chase leadership recipient has truly provided me an opportunity to really understand about the rich history of ACB, to really, truly meet a lot of great, exciting folks, and network. But also develop some of my leadership skills. And you know, for myself, I'm one of those that, as Kenneth Semien says, try to identify, or carve out, a personal development day, you know, in your week. And you know, when you're able to do that, you're able to refresh yourself, rejuvenate yourself. And that's something that I wanted to learn more for myself.

Because I wanted to give so much more, I wanted to develop so much more, and even mentor so many folks, you know, in my affiliate, I decided to become a part of the mentoring program, the first pilot project, the mentoring. I ended up being a explorer, which is a mentee. And I was hooked up with a guide from Michigan, and that's about six hours time zone difference. And yeah, to say the least, we had our challenges at first, you know, with the time zone. And my guide, she had some thoughts like, "Is this really working out?" But to be quite frank, my experience of being a mentee, an explorer

through the ACB mentoring program, they call it INSPIRE now. And my relationship with Lucy Edmunds, I mean, I couldn't have asked for a greater mentor than Lucy. And you know what? She taught me so much, just about giving back, about cultivating community, about developing your personal growth and personal development. But you know, she helped to identify some of my hot points and some of my love.

And we even had some great times of providing several community calls on leadership development and areas of books that we read. Some of them was like, "Who Moved My Cheese," and relationship books. And it was just an amazing time of just growth. You know, if anybody has an interest in leadership development or learning more about the ACB, consider being on the lookout for information on the first-timers program as well as the ACB JP Morgan Chase Leadership Fellows program in 2024. So more information will be coming out in the announcements. And of course, if they have questions, they can always contact the chair, Kenneth Semien, Sr.

My involvement with ACB continues to evolve. And I've been honored to be a part of the Durwood K. McDaniel Fund Committee, and we're always has that opportunity to select individuals to be the the first-timers program, where we select one individual from the east of the Mississippi and one from the west. And we also select the ACB JP Morgan Chase Leadership Fellows program recipients as well. And we help to make sure that their experience is a very enriching experience. And one of the things that I've been very grateful to be able to do was engage with many of the folks, just finding their hot buttons,

finding things that they love to do, and just allowing them to dream, and just allowing them to really understand about the rich history.

And you know, I talk about the rich histories. There was a book, "People of Vision." And if people want to, you know, start learning about the rich history, I would really highly recommend reading that book. It's on BARD, and definitely on audio. Also decided to read "15 Ways to Maximize Your Membership of ACB." And my gosh, whenever you start digging into the different resources, you know, the newsletters, the books, the listening to audio recordings that was of the past, it just makes you have that hunger just to be able to experience.

You know, as my mom would say, "Your life is like a box of chocolates." You know, there's so many different flavors. You be thankful, you be humble, and you have an attitude of gratitude. And you know, I am truly so grateful for the opportunity, whatever comes my way. Bringing people together, identifying ways that we can solve issues, resource people, engage in the community, raise funds in areas of cause. But also just showing folks that, you know what, there's a home, there's a place in Hawaii as well as there's a home and a place in ACB.

You know, if I were to -- and I think my life, the way it is now, 20 years later, and I look at myself where I am now, my involvement, my love and joy for the national affiliate as well as Hawaii Association of the Blind, you know, I would tell myself, you know, my



15-year-old self, it's okay. It's okay to feel sad. It's okay to cry. It's okay to feel like everything was stolen and taken away. But you know what? There's always a time and a place. You be the best you that you can be now. You try to find some mentors to your life. And you know, I've had a lot of great folks that poured out love upon me, just allowed me to be myself. And you know what? I find a source of faith. I mean, and you know, I must say that I have a great life. But you be the best you. And when you feel ready, and when you jump out of that plane and your parachute opens, and you say I want to get involved in a greater way, not only in the state of Hawaii, but in ACB, there will always be an opportunity.

In the beginning of the year, I took a trip, a ferry trip to Seattle. And you know, I like ferries. You know, just to listen to the sounds of life and sounds of the ferry just going by. I mean, you don't hear that in Hawaii, and just the cool breeze, you know? You know, I just definitely start realizing that life can be filled with so many challenges, moments. At the same time, like I said, I mean, it's great opportunities. I mean, whatever small opportunities that you may be ready, every opportunity leads to another opportunity to develop yourself, to identify ways that you can encourage somebody, other ways that you can help others to mature in their own journey, to allow others to dream in their own journey.

But yeah, I saw this quote of eight positive words at a hotel. I mean, I don't know who the author is. Believe in yourself. Believe you can, and you will. To stay strong, dream,

believe, achieve. Never give up. A little progress each day makes a big result, a big difference. Be grateful. And have a grateful heart is a magnet for miracles, having that attitude of gratitude. Work hard. Good things come to those who wait. Be patient. Stay humble. Work hard in silence. Let success make the noise. Be kind. Kindness makes you beautiful. Keep smiling. Because of your smile, and you make life more beautiful. That in a nutshell.