



Laura Silva is an intersectional strategist and professor focusing on innovation through inclusive design methodologies and principles. She is currently Vice President, Sr. Inclusive Design Lead at Bank of America. Previously, she worked at Amazon on the Global Search team as Accessibility and D&I UX designer. She's originally from Bogota, Colombia but the U.S. her home.

Laura is a Writing and Service Design graduate from the Savannah College of Art and Design. She's passionate to share her work at international design conference in Chicago, Women in Design in San Francisco, Women in Color in Tech in Houston, State of Womxn of Color in Dallas, Thought at Work in Rochester University in New York, Lehman College in the Bronx, New York, Girl Who Code and FinTech programs and many others; as well as an array of multilingual podcasts interviews and University classes focusing on intersectionality, immigration, and self-identity in tech.

Her experiences as being “the first and/or the only” are what inspire her to understand the business and cultural benefits of embracing who our customers are at their core.

linkedin : <https://www.linkedin.com/in/laurasilvah/>

The Fallacy of *Nice*

Op-ed by [Laura Silva H](#) (she/her), Sr. Inclusive Strategist.

The concept of *altruistic* design has always puzzled me. The belief that creating experiences and spaces that welcome and adapt to people (plural) is a “nice to have,” does not align with the reality of human patterns of migration, with the human fragility of our bodies, with the multicultural and multidimensional house holes we live in or come from - it simply doesn’t align with time itself.

I’m not talking about philanthropic efforts that impact causes or communities directly *and* indirectly associated with companies. Nor am I referring to the thousands of people that volunteer one of the world’s most valuable assets, which is their time to food banks, toy drives, scholarships and mentorship programs - all those are beautiful examples of action-driven efforts that should continue and proliferate. Today, I want us to focus on inclusive design, and the fallacy of “nice to have.”

Inclusive design is the product of following a design process that produces services or experiences usable for everyone by focusing on groups or characteristics of people that are traditionally excluded. It goes beyond feelings, it looks at the areas of design that are intersectionality personal, yet available for enjoyment universally.

According to a recent U.S. Census Bureau report¹, “nearly 68 million people in The United States speak a language other than English at home. The number of people in the United States who

¹[census.gov](https://www.census.gov)

spoke a language other than English at home nearly tripled from 23.1 million (about 1 in 10) in 1980 to 67.8 million (almost 1 in 5) in 2019].” - I can attest to this because the Colombian-native, immigrant household I grew up in spoke primarily Spanish. For a few years, after I immigrated to the U.S., every concept I knew or wanted to understand had to be interpreted, then translated to my language or the language of others - it was a constant movement in which meaning got lost. Experiences in the language that people can fully understand drives trust, consistency and business growth when adapted to meet the needs of our users.

Tip #1: When you’re thinking about your experience, your users and personas, you must have in consideration of how an experience would be if the texts needed to be longer, or if the meaning ought to change, as it happens when one localizes texts to fit cultural meaning.

Because inclusive design is fueled by the power of intersectionality²accessibility is at the center of this design process. Accessible design involves understanding the user just as much as the tools they utilize; wheelchairs, scooters, walkers, canes, crutches, prosthetic and orthotic devices, JAWS, NVDA, Voiceover, these are examples of some assistive technologies that as a stakeholder in the technology, we must understand so that our products adapt to them, and consequently, our customers. The data on disabilities is just as large as that people that speak a language

² [globalcitizen.com](https://www.globalcitizen.com)

other than english; 1 out of 4, or 26% of adults in the U.S. have a disability³.

This include:

- Vision Impairment.
- Deaf or hard of hearing.
- Mental health conditions.
- Intellectual disability.
- Acquired brain injury.
- Autism spectrum disorder.
- Physical disability.

Tip #2: This means, for instance, that if you were to create an experience that relies on video, 5.7% of 26% of your audience would not be able grasp the information if you don't include subtitles and/or transcripts.

Tip #3: by focusing on the "if" you'll never get to the "how." Assume that anyone would like to use your experience (that's why you're designing it anyhow) and rather ask "how would anyone who lacks the ability to ____ enjoy what we are creating?"

Maybe it could be because my point of view, as an inclusive design strategist, is focused on access and equity, that I continue to be witness to the fallacy of "nice to have" in business, goods and services. The mistaken belief that expanding our experiences through the power of inclusive design is just a matter of feeling is not only incorrect, it is bad business. Questions like "well, are they really going to take advantage of this?", "who would really need this?", "Is there really growth there?", "is this worth it? Are

³ [Cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov)

examples of why expansive research and decision making based on data ought to be the standing ground for business growth. It might feel like the possibilities are immense, or that trying to appease everyone is impossible - which it is. You'll never be able to design something that works great for 100% of the population. But as the Rolling Stone's said, "if you try sometime, you might find that you get what you need"