



FROM LOSING SIGHT TO LEADING VISION

How Five-Time Paralympic Medalist Lex Gillette is Redefining Accessibility, Leadership, and Franchise Opportunity

by **Rick Mordin**, *Consultant, The Franchise Consulting Company*



At eight years old, Lex Gillette lost his sight to recurrent retinal detachments after ten unsuccessful surgeries. What followed was not the end of a story but the beginning of one: a journey that would take him to five Paralympic Games, onto the podium as a five-time

medalist and four-time world champion, and eventually into boardrooms across the country as a keynote speaker, leadership facilitator, and accessibility strategist. Today, as President of Trusted Voice Inc., Gillette works with Fortune 100 companies and organizations nationwide, translating the

lessons of blind long jump — trust, communication, and preparation — into strategies for business leadership and inclusive design. He recently shared his story and his perspective on accessibility, leadership, and franchise ownership.

DESIGNING WITH ACCESSIBILITY IN MIND, GILLETTE ARGUES, OFTEN CREATES A BETTER EXPERIENCE ACROSS THE BOARD.

A JOURNEY THAT BEGAN WITH LOSS

“For the first eight years of my life, the world was vivid, sharp, and full of color,” Gillette recalls. “Then one evening, without warning, everything started to look blurry.” An eye examination revealed recurrent retinal detachments, setting off a difficult fight to save his sight that included ten operations — each one carrying the hope that it might finally work. None did. A few months after his final surgery, he woke up and realized he could no longer see.

At eight years old, he couldn’t fully grasp what blindness would mean for his future. He only knew that the world he had learned to navigate through sight was suddenly gone. In time, he learned one of the most important lessons of his life: sight and vision are not the same. Sight reveals current reality, he explains, but vision allows a person to see beyond it into what is possible. Losing his sight forced him to navigate, gather information, trust, and ultimately compete differently — and athletics became the proving ground where those lessons came alive, eventually carrying him to represent Team USA on the world’s biggest stage.

FIVE PARALYMPIC GAMES, A CAREER OF RECORDS

Gillette has competed in five Paralympic Games — Athens

2004, Beijing 2008, London 2012, Rio 2016, and Tokyo 2020 — earning five Paralympic medals along the way. Across his career, he has won 18 medals at major international championships, including five golds, and holds two world records in the long jump for totally blind athletes, with a best mark of 6.73 meters (22 feet, 1 inch).

Those accomplishments are a source of pride, but Gillette says sport taught him something greater: what people can achieve when talent is supported by trust, communication, preparation, and the right environment.

BRINGING PARALYMPIC LESSONS INTO THE BOARDROOM

Gillette’s mission has extended well beyond athletics, into work with Fortune 100 companies across technology, hospitality, travel, financial services, medical, fitness and wellness, medspa, and quick-service restaurant industries. As a keynote speaker, leadership facilitator, accessibility strategist, and brand ambassador, he is often brought in to inspire and energize audiences, while other engagements dig into leading through uncertainty, building high-performing teams, strengthening trust and communication, turning obstacles into competitive advantages, and treating



accessibility as a business strategy.

He keynotes nationally and internationally for conferences, sales kickoff meetings, leadership gatherings, corporate offsites, and BRG/ERG events. His flagship leadership workshop, Connected Insight, draws on the relationship between a blind athlete and guide runner, giving participants a firsthand experience of how communication, listening, trust, and shared responsibility drive performance. He facilitates the program at the Olympic Training Center in Chula Vista, California, and brings it to organizations nationwide. In 2025, Gillette surpassed one million lifetime miles flown with United Airlines — a reflection of how central travel is to bringing his message directly to clients.

A BUSINESS LENS ON ACCESSIBILITY

Gillette’s more recent work has centered on accessibility, which he approaches through both lived experience and a business lens. He most recently served on FIFA’s Accessibility Advisory



Board, conducting on-site assessments during the 2026 World Cup. His evaluations covered the full fan journey — transportation, security, entrances, wayfinding, seating, concessions, restrooms, staff preparedness, and departure — identifying barriers and opportunities to improve the experience for fans with disabilities.

He brings that same perspective to organizations, helping them examine the complete customer journey. As Gillette puts it, accessibility isn't simply a question of whether someone can use a product, service, or environment — it's whether they can navigate that experience independently and efficiently.

ACCESSIBILITY AND THE FRANCHISE OPPORTUNITY

Gillette believes franchisors should think about people with disabilities in three distinct ways: as customers, as employees, and as owners. More than one in four U.S. adults live with a disability, and globally an estimated 1.3 billion people experience significant disability — a population, he notes, that is far from niche. It represents

customers, talent, and potential entrepreneurs alike.

Accessibility, in his view, tends to benefit everyone. Voice-controlled technology can offer independence to someone who is blind while also offering convenience to someone whose hands are simply occupied. Tools designed for limited mobility can help someone recovering from an injury just as readily. Designing with accessibility in mind, Gillette argues, often creates a better experience across the board.

For customers, accessibility can drive experience, loyalty, innovation, and growth. For employees, organizations should ensure their systems and culture allow people with disabilities to contribute at their highest level. And for prospective owners, Gillette raises a further question: are the training, technology, operational systems, and support needed to become a franchisee themselves accessible? People with disabilities, he emphasizes, shouldn't be considered only as customers — the conversation should extend to who can work in the business, lead it, and ultimately own it.

CONNECT WITH LEX GILLETTE

Gillette says the best way to connect with him is through his website or LinkedIn, where he is very active, along with his other social media channels. He welcomes conversations with leaders and organizations interested in learning about his work and exploring where their goals may align — noting that some of the best partnerships begin with a simple conversation.

LEX GILLETTE

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MORE ABOUT LEX GILLETTE

Lex Gillette is a powerhouse Paralympic athlete and internationally acclaimed speaker who shows the world that vision is not something you see — it's something you live. As the most decorated totally blind long and triple jumper in U.S. history — and the most decorated totally blind long jumper in Paralympic history — he's a five-time Paralympic medalist and four-time world champion. Off the track, Lex has inspired audiences around the world — from Google, Amazon, and Meta to Visa and beyond — helping teams lead with purpose and overcome limitations.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rick Morgin is a Consultant with The Franchise Consulting Company and alumnus of Santa Clara University. We assist clients with the educational process of researching and selecting available franchise businesses that best suit desired lifestyles and financial goals. Contact Rick at rick@thefranchiseconsultingcompany.com.