



ONE RISK A DAY

ACCENTURE LEADERS SANDER VAN 'T NOORDENDE & STACEY JONES DISCUSS ACHIEVING EQUALITY

Video Transcript

Stacey: I know many of you know Sander. He's a fixture in the New York office—he's actually known as someone, I understand, who roams the hall and talks to people. And I understand you've done that for a long time, in fact back since your days as CMD in the Netherlands... talking to everyone and saying hello to the receptionist is another hallmark of yours.

Sander: Well, my most favorite guy to check in, that was a guy called Martin, and he was in charge of the salary slips, so every now and then, "Martin, are we sure all the slips are going out?... to see if this month's...?" and he goes, "Yes, and you can go to bed."

Stacey: There's another thing that I think most of you know but just to make sure. You are a transplanted New Yorker, moving to New Amsterdam from Amsterdam, I believe, and I just thought I'd ask you since we're with this New York crowd, how was that move? What were your reactions landing here?

Sander: Well, first of all, it was all about love; it had nothing to do with Accenture.

Stacey: You love us, though, right?

Sander: No, no seriously, no seriously... I was in Resources before, doing the global role for Resources. My now husband—then partner—used to live in Florida.

Stacey: Oh, you got him to move to New York?

Sander: Well I lived in Amsterdam, so we said, "OK where are we going to live?" Miami or Florida, it's not in the list of qualified cities.

Stacey: Fair, fair.

Sander: Unfortunately, I would say, so we settled. We said, it's going to be Boston, New York or Washington, and we said, well, if we go to the US, if we go to the East coast, we go all the way; we go right there—Manhattan. I asked Bill Greene, who was my then boss; I said "Bill, I have a new relationship etc., what do you think?" He said, "You know, I actually quite like the idea of people moving around a little bit so go talk to Ellyn, and she'll take care of it." And that's what Ellyn did, and here we are and it's great; it's great.



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Stacey: I thought you were going to say Bill said you need to move to Boston.

Sander: No, he didn't; he didn't even make that attempt, no.

Stacey: OK, fair, fair...so other fun facts about Sander that I've learned in a little investigation over the past few days and some calculation...so when you were CMD in the Netherlands, your successors, in fact, were three women. And one of them is still in office; that was an interesting fact for me. I knew Manon, and I learned that you hired her during your time as a manager; you hired her as an intern and groomed her all the way up to the top spot. So, I'd like to hear a lot more about that.

Sander: Well until you talked about it, I'd never thought about it like that, that my successors were three subsequent women. And in a way that's not my, let's say, something that I did when I thought about who these women are, all three of them grew up quote unquote with me in our Utilities practice. So that was actually something, and I thought, no that's something I can be proud of because apparently, we had a good trajectory, we grew the business...

these were the days that the utilities in Europe were liberalizing, so lots of change, lots of mergers, lots of new systems. And we did great work and apparently, we had a good team, and we had a few good women on board, and they made it to the top, so to speak. It's quite phenomenal, and Manon actually moved on to become the CEO of one of our clients, and Anja, who was before, Manon is now... I think she's number 46 of the most powerful women in the Netherlands because she's a board member at a few companies, so it's fantastic, yeah.

Stacey: So now I know we're all dying to ask what kind of advice do you give? Obviously, you're a mentor to women and men, but clearly there is some magic Sander sauce that you're spreading.

Sander: I was thinking about this a little bit because, first, I would not give different advice to women than to men because we're all living in the same world, and we all try to do our best for our clients.



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I always have three pieces of advice: first, personal relationships—knowing your colleagues, knowing your clients and building relationships with them is the cornerstone of every success. I think that is really important, especially on the client side. If you have worked with a client on a certain project, and you move on to the next project, stay in touch. Clients appreciate that, they like that, and in a few years, you get promoted to manager or to MD or beyond that, and, you know, the clients get promoted too.

Stacey: So, I am going to interrupt you because I think that's great advice but how do you stay in touch?

Sander: Pick up the phone.

Stacey: You call them, ok.

Sander: Stop by for a coffee, organize events, dinners, so stay in touch and build those relationships.

Stacey: OK, that's one.

Sander: That's one. Then the second piece of advice is: Don't wait to get asked to do something. Have the energy to take the initiative to go beyond what's really needed, to do that little extra.

Don't wait until someone asks you or tells you to do something. Do what you think is best, take a little risk, and, with respect to this morning's discussion, if you take a little risk, also, there's also risk that you go a little in the wrong direction every now and then, but that's fine. And then the third one is: Deliver the results. Delivering results, whether that's your project results, your deliverable, if you're internally in Accenture, your, let's say, the reports that you're responsible for, or the HR team that you're responsible for. Delivering the results goes along a long way. Now, a special piece of advice for the women: I was just reading in The Financial Times this morning, there's a book, and the title of the book is: Why do so many incompetent men win in business?

Stacey: [LAUGH] Wow, that's a page turner.

Sander: This is a little bit about knowing the competition that you're up against, because I see it every day. You have some men, and they're continuously in your face—not that I necessarily like it—but, every now and then, speaking up and showing what of this you can do and be at the forefront of something is a good thing.



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Stacey: So, what if you're afraid to speak up? We've all been on the conference calls, right? There's 70 people on them; we've got a senior leader presenting; you want to say something; you kind of think about it; you hit mute; you go back on mute; it's easier to just go back to your email; you start to speak... It's not a magic formula but what is your advice for people who just don't feel comfortable to speak up?

Sander: One risk per day.

Stacey: Ok, you heard it here.

Sander: One risk per day. And what I mean by that, try something that you have not yet tried. And this can be a very simple thing. Try calling that client that you're thinking of. What is he or she going to say on the other on the other end of the line? Or ask that question in the conference call. Because, I know, I have the same thing — you are in these rooms; you want to ask the question; you stand up and your heart goes ding, ding, ding. It happens. You just do it, but maybe you ask your first question...you don't ask in a big conference call with the, David Rowland, the global CEO. Maybe you have asked your first question in the local community meeting with the Women's Network..

So, this is one risk per day, and what you will find is that, in 99 out of 100 cases, it is OK.

Stacey: Very good advice.

Sander: That's how you build your confidence.

Stacey: I like that. I like that a lot. I'm going to take you back to January. It's still very cold out, so that's probably not hard to imagine. But you were on the hillside at the World Economic Forum, and you were part of the launch of the Partnership for LGBTI Equality, a labor of love five years in the making. Tell us a little bit about that story.

Sander: We have had Accenture LGBT panels for 5 years. We've worked with Microsoft, EY, Salesforce, Mastercard, Omnicom to really progress the agenda now ultimately culminating this year in the partnership — in the business partnership — for LGBTI and with the objective to implement the U.N. global standards for LGBTI inclusion throughout business in the world. So that's the, that's what we're trying to do.

Stacey: That's awesome, I love that story and congratulations.



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Sander: Thank you [APPLAUSE].

Stacey: Very inspiring [APPLAUSE]. So back to the FT... you read the FT this morning. I once read the FT—it was about two years ago—but I read a special story that stuck with me, and it was profiling a manager at Accenture. And she was talking about how she had graduated from college where she was very open and out and felt really inspired and comfortable. She came to work, and not because of anything at work, but, just, it was a new environment, so she felt like she should shut down, not be herself, not talk about her personal life. And you counseled her when you didn't know you were counseling her, which I think is really interesting, and it's a message as we think about creating a culture of equality and being role models no matter where we are, and I'd really like you to tell that story because I think it will give us all inspiration to be that person in every conversation.

Sander: Yeah, so the story is, in fact, indeed more about role models and the fact that we are all role models all the time in every conversation that we have, big and small.

And the story is about a woman—she's called Katie—and I was visiting Atlanta, checking in with the local LGBT network. And we were just chatting about life, about work, how it is to be out at work...and she asked me a question, “So, you know, being out at work, how do you do that?” And I probably said something like, “Well, you don't have to sit everybody down and say, ‘Let me let me tell you something.’ [LAUGH] No, you just talk at work about your life, what you've done over the weekend, what you've done with your wife, your husband, your partners, your families, whatever, and people will figure it out, and it'll be OK.” And that's what she did. I didn't know she was not out at work. Literally, this was the conversation...a few minutes. And then, a year or two later, I got a call from the Financial Times, “I want to talk to you about this.” So, I guess the point, the most important point for me is here: We're all role models in every conversation, and not only if you're leading the team or you're leading the company, you're a role model now. Everybody is a role model for someone in your environment.



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Stacey: Yeah, I love that story, and, again, it's a perfect segue back to our research. I know you all talked a little bit about that this morning, but this whole notion of a culture of equality which isn't a static thing—companies are striving to get there, people are striving to get there—but the main driver is being in an empowering environment. You can't be yourself if you don't feel comfortable. None of this is going to happen. Then you don't get to innovation because you're not sharing a diversity of thought; you're not contributing at your highest level. And, Sander, it takes me back to the video—I think you may have seen it here today—but culture of equality in one word, and you said...

Sander: Comfort.

Stacey: And you are not the only one who said comfort.

Sander: No, I think Amy also said it, yeah, so, you know, great minds think alike.

Stacey: What was the moment that you knew you had comfort at Accenture? Is there is a story? Is there something you did, something you received?

Sander: No, well there's not...let's say, everybody has stories that give you comfort, and everybody has stories that don't give you comfort. One story that didn't give me comfort was, I was in a conversation, and I overheard two managers saying to each other, "Yeah, listen, if you're not married in this place, you are never going to get promoted to manager." I mean, it was not true, but let's say it was not a policy—maybe there was some truth in it—and, I mean, you have to imagine this 25 years ago—so that gave me discomfort. A story that gave me comfort, when I joined Accenture, after two weeks, then someone asked me, "Sander, in two weeks there is the office party, are you coming?" I said, "Yes, of course." But I also had to ask myself the question: am I going to bring my partner to the office party and everybody sees I'm gay? Well I just did it, and it was OK. It was my risk for that day. [LAUGH] So let's say we all have these, but why I said comfort is, if we don't feel comfortable 100 percent at work and be ourselves and be authentic and can talk about anything outside of work, we cannot be our best.



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And, at Accenture, I mean, everybody wants to be their best, but, especially at Accenture, you want everybody to be the best because if we are at the best, we do the best possible job for our clients. So, this is not just about some wishy-washy blah blah, no, this is about Accenture being the best company for our clients.

Stacey: If you're not comfortable, you are really worrying about all the wrong stuff.

Sander: Exactly, exactly.

Stacey: So, we are at that magical point where I have to share Sander with all of you...

Sander: Someone is going to take a risk.

Audience question: Do we speak up at the client site if we see something that doesn't align with our values?

Sander: Should we speak up? The answer to that is yes. Are we always at our best in doing so? Probably not because we're also not perfect. Have I been in situations where we've had difficult conversations?

Yes, I've been in a conversation with the CEO about diversity and inclusion, and this was specifically because it was a topic close to my heart about the LGBT agenda. And the CEO sat across the table from me. He looked at his HR lead. He said, "We don't have a problem here, heh. No, we have John." John? John was the communications lead who was gay. I said to him, "But are you really sure that Mary and Joe, when they show up at work in the policy administration, that they feel at home in your company?" And then he looked at me, "Well, you may have a point. Of course, we want people when they show up at work to feel at home. We cannot have that they don't feel at home." And so, I think with that one conversation, I helped flip his switch. It was not just my contribution, but now he's an ally. He goes to the Pride and everything. So, and I'm not saying that was just that one conversation, so don't get me wrong, but you could see...and so, every now and then you need to take a risk, and sometimes it works sometimes. Sometimes it doesn't but should we speak up if we don't see, if we see something that is not as it should be?



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Yes, I know of situations that Ellyn or other folks in HR have contacted people in HR at the client saying, “Listen, this type of behavior that your person has displayed vis-a-vis our employee— man or woman, doesn't matter—we cannot have that, and action has been taken.” So, we should always speak up. If it's not at the client, or you don't get the traction at the client, speak up at Accenture, and we'll help you deal with the challenge.

Stacey: Great question. I think your comments have highlighted there is such a need for education. I think it's another reason why we've been so supportive and so invested in research and putting facts out there that enable the conversation, so it's not a “he said-she said,” and we have been extremely vocal. I love that example; it's so personal and had a great result.

Audience question: How do we engage men in the conversation?

Stacey: We've created a video series that is featured online. It's local market videos. It's our GMC leading from the top table; and it's a beautiful sort of montage of all that we stand for:

our research, people's feelings, their investments in the programs, and I guess I would ask each one of you...send them to a man. Send them to a friend...they can be in Accenture or outside Accenture...but make sure that we're communicating. We each have a voice, and we can take all the voices in this room and elevate it to a much higher level. But particularly because we know we always have a limited space, and people have limited time on this day, we think this video, in the way to learn now by watching videos and podcasts, this will really help us expand the impact.

Audience question: How are we driving progress?

Sander: The leaning in on the leaders to say: this is not just a nice video or a nice PowerPoint or a bunch of emails. No, we expect you to do something with it. And the good leaders actually do something with it. I'm sure there are also leaders who don't, and I am sure that the leaders who do progress better and faster and further than the leaders who don't. So ultimately, we'll make the progress that you're looking for.



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The challenge that you're posing is a good one because think about Accenture—we are a company of 450,000 people—and now think of a, let's say, average family size of two and a half; that's a million people. I come from a city called Amsterdam. In Amsterdam, there's a million people. So now think about you changing a mid-sized city—their mindset, their actions, the way they operate, the way they behave—that doesn't go overnight. So, that's why the agenda and the agenda of equality or the agenda of belonging is not something that we do an e-mail campaign, and then we tick the box and we move on. No, this is something that we have been on for the last 25 years, and we're going to be on for the next 25 years because there will always be progress to make. But the most important thing is that we make progress from where we are. We can feel proud of where we are, but we should also recognize that there is still progress to make. And we should get on it. And it is the true Accenture style: we see the challenge; we get on the case; and we go for the next bit of [UNKNOWN]. That's how Accenture works, and that is what I think what we can all be proud of.

Stacey: I just want to thank you for being candid, insightful, and just such a champion on all fronts. It's a pleasure to talk with you and your messages really resonated. And I hope it's the start of more conversations or the continuation of more conversations.

Sander: Yeah, absolutely, and do pop by my office for a coffee or for a chat. You're always welcome. [APPLAUSE]

Stacey: Thank you [APPLAUSE].