

Building a diverse talent pool – start with skills

Steve Preston, *President and CEO of Goodwill Industries International*

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Hosts:

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00:01	Steve Preston: People often leave incarceration with no money, no job, no housing, no transportation, and no supportive social network. That creates incredible instability when one of the most important factors for somebody's success is stability.
00:17	Brenda Darden Wilkerson: One of the things that I raised my children with was the definition of freedom. I believe that that is choices, opportunities. But if you don't know what opportunities you have, you certainly can't choose them.
00:31	Jimmy Etheredge: There is a talent crisis in the US right now. A record number of people have left the workforce since October. Over nine million. People are calling this the great resignation. Yet, there are more than 27 million untapped workers in the US alone, many from underrepresented populations, ready to work. That's according to our 2021 hidden worker research in partnership with the Harvard Business School.
00:59	Emmanuel Acho: So, this is a question, why is there such a disconnect between people eager to work, people leaving the workforce, and companies unable to fill roles? How in the world do we tap into this ready to work talent? Because after all, an industry is only as diverse and successful as it's talent pool.
01:22	Jimmy Etheredge: So, in this episode, we share what leaders can do to bring the right people to the right positions. How to improve hiring practices, how to build inclusive and diverse workforces, and how to discover new pools of talent. We'll change the contestation for millions of people who are eager and able to work if only employers could find them. We'll tell you how workers can be reskilled in as little as six months, with an example from Walmart, Unilever, SkyHive, and the World Economic Forum. I'm Jimmy Etheredge, CEO of Accenture North America.
01:58	Emmanuel Acho: I am Emmanuel Acho, athlete, broadcaster, author. But we

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02:31	<p>are joined by two more important and impressive people than Jimmy and I, Steve Preston, president and CEO at Goodwill Industries International, a nonprofit that offers skills training to people who face barriers to employment. In 2020 alone, Goodwill served more than one million people around the world and helped more than 125,000 people train for careers and get the supportive services that are necessary for success.</p> <p>Jimmy Etheredge: We're joined by Brenda Darden Wilkerson, who is president and CEO of AnitaB.org. This organization connects, inspires, and strives for greater equality for women technologists in business, academia, and government. Brenda founded the original computer science for all program, which builds computer science classes into the curriculum in Chicago Public Schools. That was the inspiration for the Obama administration's national computer science for all initiatives.</p>
03:04	<p>Emmanuel Acho : Steve, Brenda, so excited for this conversation. Let's get right to it. Steve, crushing statistics about the diversity in our talent pool. One in three Americans have a criminal record, and they are half as likely to get a callback for a job interview as identical applicants without a record. Now, this is during a time when we are desperate to find qualified workers. You work with a particularly vulnerable population, the formerly incarcerated. So, what prevents this population from getting good jobs?</p>
03:38	<p>Steve Preston: Yeah, that's such an important question. There are a lot of reasons. But first of all, I'd say that many of us really do feel a great burden for these individuals, because they have had so many difficulties in life. They've paid their debt to society, but then when they try to reenter society, the deck is really stacked against them. As a result, a high percentage of the 650,000 people that are released from prison each year are actually rearrested in the first few years.</p>
04:03	<p>Steve Preston: Now, some of the challenges are very much structural. There are actually laws that prohibit people with felony convictions from getting certain occupational licenses, in healthcare, and even in industries like cosmetology, which is pretty surprising. It can be tough to get an identification card when you come out. It actually can be very difficult to qualify for certain government assistance programs, which are actually designed to help people get back on their feet, but because they require so much documentation right away. Then many employers have prohibitions on hiring people with certain backgrounds.</p>
04:37	<p>Steve Preston: But then besides those structural issues, there are a myriad of other challenges that people face that most of us don't deal with. People often leave incarceration with no money, no job, no housing, no transportation, and no supportive social network. That creates incredible instability when one of the</p>

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	<p>most important factors for somebody's success is stability. When you couple that with a lack of in demand job skills, it can create even more challenges.</p>
05:10	<p>Jimmy Etheredge: What are some of the programs that Goodwill runs to help these people overcome some of those challenges?</p>
05:17	<p>Steve Preston: So, many of our reentry programs pair participants with career coaches or career navigators who work with that individual to move forward in life. It starts with an assessment of the person's needs. That assessment really needs to cover a number of areas. It covers areas like what type of work skills do you have? Do you need support in terms of interviewing, and workplace effectiveness? What about life skills, like financial management, or conflict resolution? What about some of those other basic needs, like housing, and those types of things that I mentioned? So sometimes we actually provide those services directly to people. But sometimes we actually work with other partners to get them. But the important thing is to understand that continuum of needs so that the person can move forward.</p>
05:57	<p>Steve Preston: We have a particular program that we provide under a DOL grant where our year one recidivism rates are in the 5% range, which is just a fraction of the national rates, because we provide that totality of support. But we need to be honest about what it takes to support a person moving forward, and we also need to believe in the value of doing that. There is tremendous value. We've also seen some really encouraging signs. There have been studies by the Society of Human Resource Management that have showed that increasingly HR professionals and business leaders are willing to hire people that have been involved with the justice system, and more people are embracing that idea of a second chance. When they do that, employers are realizing that those individuals are just as effective as their other employees. This is very much based on survey data.</p>
06:50	<p>Steve Preston: In many cases, people would say they're even more effective employees because you've got people that are thankful for the job. They realize that this is part of their opportunity to move forward, they are highly committed. They often really attach well to the community. So, with the right kind of support, we can turn high recidivism rates into high success rates. As I said, doing so is so worth it to the individuals, to their families, to our communities, and I really think to our society at large.</p>
07:19	<p>Jimmy Etheredge: Steve, you mentioned some of the challenges that the individuals have and the need for support. You also mentioned some of the structural challenges that they face. But in terms of getting employers comfortable, changing their views that, "Hey, we should be hiring someone who has been incarcerated," What are the hurdles you're seeing there? Is it changing? Do you think that this great resignation, this challenge that a lot of organizations have right now around skills shortages, is it changing employer's perspectives?</p>

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07:50	<p>Steve Preston: It is changing employer's perspectives, as well as, I think, just a broader awareness that many of people's hiring practices have screened people out that could be great employees, and have actually, in many ways, reduced the possibility of building a diverse labor force. So, to some degree, these labor shortages are changing people's perspective out of necessity as well. So, it comes from both sides, I think, in terms of the need for labor. But also, a desire to move forward. The best example of that, really, is just many employers just sticking on a job requirement that says you need a college degree. Employers use that as a gating mechanism.</p>
08:34	<p>Steve Preston: So, when you look at what people are doing, they're beginning to look harder at whom they hire. They're hiring for skills rather than specific degrees. I would say these employers that are thinking harder, and in fact, late in 2020, 80 large corporations came out and publicly announced that they were going to be looking at all of their job descriptions and rethinking what those requirements are. Thinking more about the specific need for the job. It's actually increasingly easy to do that, because the industry has increasingly better assessment tools to connect what the job needs are with the skills and capabilities of the individual. Now that doesn't solve the issue of a lack of job skills.</p>
09:17	<p>Steve Preston: In many cases, we have jobs where they're looking for a very specific skillset and they just can't find it. Right? The vast majority of jobs that are being created, the new jobs, and this has been taking place for many years, are in areas that require very specific skills. So, we need to provide people with the avenues to acquire those skills, so they can move up in the workforce, and they can compete for these jobs that are emerging.</p>
09:44	<p>Steve Preston: That's where people like Goodwill come in, that's what we do. Of course, helping those people get those skills and land those better jobs is good for everybody. Not just for the individual and their families, but for our companies who need labor to be competitive, for our economy, and of course, we want to have a competitive [inaudible 00:10:03], also for our society, where people just ... We need more people to share in the wealth of our growing economy. It's just healthy for all of us.</p>
10:13	<p>Jimmy Etheredge: Brenda, question to you, in tangent to what Steve so eloquently put there is, looking for people to hire. There is clearly an untapped talent pool, and what you do with the Anita B. Organization is you work to bring diverse women into tech roles. Only 29% of employees in the tech sector are women. I'll just ask you a very simple question, why are there so few women in the tech industry?</p>
10:39	<p>Brenda Darden Wilkerson: For all the reasons that Steve stated and more. This is an issue that is about what we think and what we believe versus what really</p>

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	<p>has been proven to be true. We know that, and as I can share from my own experience, when I was a technologist, we've actually backed up from the numbers and the percentages that were representative when I was first in. We were at 35% before we took this huge nosedive all the way down to 12 to 14%. What those issues surround are the structural issues that we are grappling with today. What are the requirements that we put forth for people to come into these opportunities? Are you required to have a four-year degree to do many of the technologist jobs that are available now and were available when I was first a technologist?</p>
11:29	<p>Brenda Darden Wilkerson: I can tell you from my own experience, my first job, I was one of the only people on my team with a computer science degree. I was one of the only women. The men didn't have computer science degrees. But it was believed that they had a bent, and they could learn it. So, the fact of the matter is people, all people, can learn many of the skills that are necessary, that are up and coming, they're new, they're not provided for at universities yet. Companies, like Steven's, are doing a great service to other companies by providing that training. But I also believe that the companies themselves should be willing to invest in training the workforce in the way that's necessary. They are going to see a great return on it.</p>
12:13	<p>Brenda Darden Wilkerson: In fact, that is what was happening back in the day. There were always great training programs, especially around technology that changes so quickly. So, what is it that we believe to be the real issues? What do we believe that people need to know coming in? What we found is that many of the skillsets that we're looking for in individuals are not on those job descriptions, or they're not being tapped by the hiring managers, or first, the people that are at the first gate, which are the HR folks. The ability to collaborate, and really be able to measure, from a person's background, where they have that experience.</p>
12:50	<p>Brenda Darden Wilkerson: Many times, it comes from volunteer opportunities. I know I did some of my hardest tech work when I volunteered for organizations that I was invested in. I wasn't getting a paycheck, but those skillsets were real skillsets that got built. I was able to take on leadership roles. The things that we say we really need; we need to make sure that we're looking for them in the right places. So, I think many times, that's the challenge. We have to just change the way we measure, the way we do things, and look at the talent for what we can not only get from it, but what we can invest into it for a return.</p>
13:28	<p>Jimmy Etheredge: Brenda, we talked about your work around the computer science for all program. A great way to help some of our younger people get these types of skills. Tell us a little bit about what was your experience with that? What got you focused on creating this program?</p>
13:46	<p>Brenda Darden Wilkerson: Well, it's everything that's in this conversation. It</p>

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	<p>was also from my own background and experience. I always like to share that's in this conversation. I grew up as one of four kids of a couple of educators. So, learning as a key focus in our home. I loved learning and was a very good student growing up. But because of where we lived, the politics and the powers that be decided that things like computer science were not necessary for the students in our school. So, though I graduated as a very strong STEM kid, went to college as a premed major, I had never had access to computer science.</p>
14:24	<p>Brenda Darden Wilkerson: So, part of what as the impetus for creating a program such as computer science for all was because I knew of the struggles of people like me, many of us women, people of color, who the gates get set up that say, "It's not for you, honey, or people like you, this is not what you should do. You should go this way." I didn't go that way. I went the computer science way. It was challenging, because the supports were not there, and the expectations were not there. So, understanding that if we're talking about, let's fast forward to that workforce that we need, that trained workforce, that motivated workforce to create the future that we all know that we need to keep technology on pace with what we've already achieved. We need people who are not accidentally coming into computer science as I did.</p>
15:15	<p>Brenda Darden Wilkerson: I was accidentally in it because I majored in engineering, and all engineers had to have two computer science courses. When I became disenchanted with medicine, I had other choices. Right? So, one of the things that I raised my children with was the definition of freedom. I believe that that is choices, opportunities. But if you don't know what opportunities you have, you certainly can't choose them. So, what we wanted to do with computer science for all was make sure that we had a citizenry that was prepared to take the opportunities that they should have as choices, but we also needed them to be able to be prepared to do. To bring us into the type of society where we can maintain our competitive edge, where we can solve problems for all populations. That means that all populations need to be at that table where tech is created. So that really was the inspiration for it.</p>
16:11	<p>Steve Preston: Brenda brings up a number of great points, but one of which is helping people understand what their opportunities are. A lot of people are told stories about themselves along the way. They go into a situation with assumptions. One of the most important things we do for people is when they come to us, we look at them and say, "Let's talk about what the possibilities are. Let's be realistic about how to get there, and how we can support you." But it's opening up an understanding of what can be.</p>
16:42	<p>Steve Preston: We had a very interesting program a few years ago to support female veterans coming back. What we saw was a pretty significant earnings gap for female veterans relative to male veterans when they reentered the labor</p>

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17:12	<p>force. One of the most important things we did is we worked with those female veterans to say, "Let's show you the job data in your local market, the jobs that are available, the pay levels at those jobs, and talk to you about what you actually want to target based on those pay levels."</p> <p>Steve Preston: What we saw was when they were armed with data, and they were armed with an understanding of how to acquire the training to get there, those women made different choices. The pay gap narrowed significantly, because they were armed with information, and the right kind of support to get there, and support that was based on different assumptions for their futures. So, it's a very important to understand how we're encouraging people, how we're painting those possibilities, and how we're supporting them to get there.</p>
17:40	<p>Brenda Darden Wilkerson: So, I want to add something about the possibilities, because it's so important to talk about the possibilities for the candidate who has lived a lifetime swimming in the same pool with the rest of us, with the same sort of narrative coming at them about what they can and cannot do. So that, I totally believe what you said, Steven. It's very important. But I think it's just as important on the hiring manager's side to understand the data that many times is standing right in front of them. Many times, they've read, "Well, women aren't good at X, Y, Z, or this particular demographic is not good at this or the other," and starts to show them different pathways.</p>
18:17	<p>Brenda Darden Wilkerson: It starts in college. I had professors who said, "Why don't you do this versus that?" We hear data all the time about women and minorities being discouraged from pursuing technology degrees. So, I think many times what I want to say is that professor, that hiring manager, needs to see the data that's right in front of them, which is that candidate, that has a skillset, that is seeking a position, and be open to say, "Even though I've heard this narrative before, maybe I should consider what is standing right in front of me. Look at this paper for what it's worth and take an opportunity to fill a space that I have need of, that maybe I'm the barrier. I'm the gate that's keeping me from having that diverse workforce that I need, that qualified workforce that I need."</p>
19:08	<p>Emmanuel Acho: Now, Jimmy, we've talked a lot about those that are formerly incarcerated getting jobs. We've talked about the lack of intention in looking for adequate people to hire. But what about those who simply need to be reskilled? How can we go about properly reskilling those to enhance the workforce?</p>
19:33	<p>Jimmy Etheredge: Great question, Emmanuel, and I think it's a question that is even more important now in what, as you know, everyone is calling the Great Resignation, because I think what we see is there are a lot of people who are rethinking, "Is this the right job for me? Is this the right career for me? Is there something better?" We did a future skills pilot with the World Economic Forum, along with Unilever, and Walmart, and a company called SkyHive. What we did</p>

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20:16	<p>Is we used artificial intelligence to map, if I have these skills, what are the skills that would be adjacent to this, but might be in demand in a different industry, in a different role?</p> <p>Jimmy Etheredge: So, if you think about the pandemic, for example, how it impacted the hospitality industry. So, if you imagine you've got a front desk worker, and what the front desk worker sees is lodging is struggling, my industry is struggling. But you know what? I've got great customer service skills, I got great problem solving and data entry skills. But I'm just not sure I'm in the right industry, in the right place. So, what this pilot did is showed how this front desk worker could learn about other roles in other companies and other industries that are around data analytics or project management, and how skills might transition to that new career, a digital career.</p>
21:03	<p>Jimmy Etheredge: So, what this pilot is really helping around job mobility, and help people be able to look for and find jobs in areas that they might not have a lot of prior experience, they might not have contacts, but because you've got this focus on skills, it really enables you to map the skills that you have in a different industry to this. What we found is that the artificial intelligence, it really eliminated people's inherent bias to underestimate their own skills, which is particularly important for women and people of color, who typically underrepresent their skills and experience. What we learned from this pilot is that in just six months, you could have a newly skilled workforce.</p>
21:48	<p>Emmanuel Acho: Wow. That's fascinating. I was reading a book one time, talk about how some of our most brilliant creations are a matter of realizing what skills from one area can be applicable to another. It talked about how the creation of Velcro was because someone was walking through the grass with socks on, and those little pricklies got stuck to their socks. As a result, they were like, "Wait, if pricklies, the little pricklies that are in the grass will prick your skin, if those can adhere to socks, then why can't we create something based upon what those pricklies are good at doing?" That is how Velcro was created. So, it's funny when you talk about how there are certain skills that can also translate from one workforce to another, or there are certain skills that you don't even realize that you have, that can work to the good of another job is truly fascinating.</p>
22:45	<p>Jimmy Etheredge: Well, as they say, necessity is the mother of invention. What I see with a lot of companies is the need they see for more soft skills to go with these hard skills, so these technology skills. What they just are starting to see more and more is if I can find people that have good customer service experience, I can teach them the data analytics, I can teach them the technology. But traditionally, they wouldn't think to look there. So that's an area I think artificial intelligence can help us with that.</p>
23:18	<p>Emmanuel Acho: Do you put the onus and the ownership on the potential</p>

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23:29	<p>employee or on the employer? Because it sounds as though I'm hearing a little bit of both.</p> <p>Steve Preston: Yeah. You're for sure hearing a little bit of both. One of the things is if it's the employee, obviously that individual needs to be able to invest in themselves to be able to move in that direction, wherever that might be. That takes work. It takes work especially, Brenda mentioned people who are later career people how are beginning to think completely differently about their career in technology. That takes a lot of work. Right? People have to be willing to do it. It's remarkable when they do. That's what we see in our people. But if you are an employer, it begins with your willingness to think differently. I think that's what Brenda was tapping into. You have to ask yourself, what skills do you really need for the job? Then open up the aperture of your mind to think about who that could be, because your next great hire may be somebody that you never thought about.</p>
24:20	<p>Steve Preston: You got to say, who am I potentially excluding based on the assumptions I have and based on my historical behaviors? Now sometimes that may require you to redesign a job description to consider all of the ways a person becomes trained or becomes qualified for a job. There is a lot of evidence out there for what kind of pathways support a person to be effective in different kinds of jobs that are very different than just getting a college degree or something. You may need to research other jobs to understand those pathways that provide the training and experience, and then you also need to think about tapping into different sources to find those candidates. Reach out to local workforce development groups like Goodwill, where other people, there are other terrific, terrific organizations and communities that work with people who want to move forward in their lives to get the skills to be able to move forward.</p>
25:15	<p>Steve Preston: Community colleges in many cases are a good place to start. If you're an employer, I just encourage people, look, just put one foot in front of the other, and begin to try a different path. Because you'll learn a lot of great things, and you'll figure it out, and all of a sudden, you'll realize that you're tapping in terrific people who provide a richer work environment in many cases, who will be great employees, and open up a different labor pool, potentially, for you.</p>
25:45	<p>Jimmy Etheredge: Brenda, how about from your perspective? I know that we all want to be part of the solution and really change this conversation, as you and Steve have talked about. What does the C Suite need to focus on?</p>
25:57	<p>Brenda Darden Wilkerson: Just to continue on the conversation of thinking differently, many times our solutions are right in front of us, and we're still doing the same things that we've always done before. We run a Grace Hopper</p>

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	<p>Celebration conference which brings to the fore a pioneer who was a woman in technology that many people don't know about. One of her sayings is the most dangerous phrase in the English language is we've always done it this way. So, to begin to think differently about how we do it and look in different places. Why are we always thinking about the traditional pathway? There are two-year degrees, there are certificate programs, many times, that get people prepared for that job. It gets them in the door that gives you the types of skills that you need right now.</p>
26:39	<p>Brenda Darden Wilkerson: There are great organizations, Power to Fly, Afrotech, Asus, Last Mount Education Fund, which is a great organizations that just started, we partnered with, to make sure that the students who get to that last mile then run out of money don't get derailed and not graduate. They've already invested in that education, and they're almost there. So they know of some great people who have had to execute that grit, that tenacity to be successful, which again is one of those things, those skillsets that we really want in a great employee. So, looking for people who have had the easy way through is not necessarily the only place that we should be looking. We should be looking for people who know how to iterate and who know how to go that extra mile to get done those things that need to get done.</p>
27:32	<p>Brenda Darden Wilkerson: I've heard people say, "Well, only 18% of the people who are going after CS degrees are women, so there is not enough of them." My question to them is, do you still have your degree? They'd say, "Well, yeah." I'd say, "Me too. So why are we always just looking at the college grads?" There are mid-career women or technical women who for various reasons have left the tech workforce. They were dissatisfied, looked over. That is a great brain trust that we are not tapping into. Maybe they are part of that sandwich generation, as I once was. I had little kids, and I was also taking care of an elderly parent. I needed to focus then. Are we going back and getting them? I've seen that be successful with some of our partners who are in India, who really focus on going back and getting those women who have left the workforce, and providing that bridge for them to come back, because they are skilled. It doesn't take that long for them to get back up to speed.</p>
28:33	<p>Brenda Darden Wilkerson: We have to make sure that we are not talking ourselves out of great candidates in so many different ways. For instance, asking for JavaScript 29.9.6.A, whatever that is, right? Really, how much has changed? So, saying I can't bring you in unless you have those skillsets is really shooting ourselves in the foot. Looking at, we call them work gaps. People are still doing that here in COVID. "Well, you've been out of work for six months." So have millions of other people. Are you now going to overlook a population because they've had some arbitrary space that's less than a really long time? Six months is not a long time. Seriously. So, it's all about rethinking how we're doing things, looking for places where we can find talent that is prepared,</p>

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29:31	<p>they're excited, they're ready, if we would just see them.</p> <p>Brenda Darden Wilkerson: I want to say one more thing. Our culture is as much to blame, I'll use that word, for this issue that we're having as anything else. We think sometimes our culture doesn't come into the workplace. But it so much does. If you think about what the entertainment industry shows as the ideal technologist, it don't look like me. It's a guy, they make sure he looks antisocial, right? Makes sure he's of a particular hue. So, when I would show up and speak, and I would say, "Hi, my name is Brenda Wilkerson, and I am a computer scientist." People would kind of go ... Because the image that they had been bathed in from the press, from the entertainment industry, was that people like me didn't do it.</p>
30:17	<p>Brenda Darden Wilkerson: So, I want to do a shout out to folks who are in the entertainment industry and say add people to your sitcoms, to your drama, for technology that look like everybody. It worked for the other STEMs, right? All of a sudden, we had doctor shows where there were female doctors, the number of female doctors went up. Same thing with lawyers. The gatekeepers are watching these shows, people. It's impactful. The counselors, the people who make the policies, they believe that. Even though they may not think, "I'm believing this because I'm watching this TV show." It's impactful. People are moved by what they see. So, our society also has to participate in making the change that we need for the expectation of who can be at this table.</p>
31:07	<p>Steve Preston: You know, Brenda, you mentioned a little while ago the word grit. I think grit is such an important factor in success. A lot of research has shown that, I remember a few years ago I was CEO of a company, before I went into the nonprofit world, and I was hiring an HR head. The recruiter came and said, "You know, I've got a lot of these candidates, somebody here who doesn't have a college degree, so you probably don't want to talk to her." I said, "Tell me about her." Of course, I ended up hiring her. She was terrific. She had worked her way up the ladder. Self-taught, was incredibly savvy, had great EEQ.</p>
31:46	<p>Steve Preston: By the way, most of our workforce were people on the frontline. She completely understood our workforce. She was truly one of the best HR professionals I had ever worked with. It's so ironic that the recruiter that was screening candidates for me actually said, "You probably don't want to talk to her. But I just want to ask you just in case." I'm still in touch with her to this day. But she was a terrific leader in my organization. Nobody was going to outwork her or outthink her. She committed to learning, and growing, and adding value very day. It was just a great affirmation of where you can find a great candidate.</p>
32:21	<p>Emmanuel Acho: Yeah, I was told once, for those that aren't familiar, the NFL Combine is when these athletes run a 40-yard dash, and bench press 225</p>

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	<p>pounds as many times as they can. Steve, you have a vertical jump, and Brenda, you have a standing long jump. I was working on my Master's in psychology, and my Harvard professor, he gave me this example. He said, "Emmanuel, the NFL Combine would be similar to you and I walking into our neighborhood Cheesecake Factory. As we walk inside, I tell you, hey, I lost my keys. You come outside with me to look for the keys, and we bust a left. I start searching under the nearest light pole, and Emmanuel, you tell me, well, sir, you know we didn't make a left. We walked in from the right. To which he responds, yes, I know. But this is where it's easiest to see."</p>
33:09	<p>Emmanuel Acho: I think that's what we so often do, at least that's what I'm hearing from y'all is a resume is easiest to judge. A four-year degree is easiest to see. What you majored in is easiest to quantify. Steve, what you were talking about, well, you wouldn't want to see this resume. Rather than looking for where we actually will acquire the information we want, we're looking for that which is easiest to see. Now, Jimmy, I know Accenture has launched several outreach programs, and retaining programs, and apprenticeship programs to help massage this great talent pipeline. What's Accenture doing with that?</p>
33:47	<p>Jimmy Etheredge: I'd start by confessing here, I wish I saw this earlier. But we started an apprentice program in 2016. We started working with some of the community colleges in Chicago. At the time, I was passionate about us shifting from, we had programs we called Skills to Succeed. A lot of our focus was teaching, as Steve and Brenda have shared, there is a lot of groups that will do trainings, and boot camps to get people skills. So, we would teach people hard and soft skills to get jobs. But sometimes as I would sit in on those sessions and talk to people, what I would hear is, "How about Accenture offering me a job? Don't just give me skills, give me a job."</p>
34:31	<p>Jimmy Etheredge: So, this apprentice program that we started in Chicago, I thought it was really going to be something in the corporate citizenship, do good for the community category. But what became very clear is the individuals that we would put into this apprentice program were very adept at doing the work that we need to do every day with clients. We looked at all of our entry level jobs, all of which at the time required a four-year degree, and we found that almost half, 45 to 48%, the number of jobs kind of varies a little bit year-to-year. But roughly about half of those jobs, you didn't need a four-year degree.</p>
35:08	<p>Jimmy Etheredge: As Steve and Brenda talked about, there is skills that you need. What we found was we can get those skills trained into someone. So, we really began to expand that apprentice program to other locations. It's a six, typically a six-to-12-month program. We pay people a livable wage while they're getting trained. They need stability, they need financial stability while they're learning and while they're training. This group that come through this</p>

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36:07	<p>apprentice program, we've now hired over 1,200 people. This past year, 15% of all of the entry level people Accenture hired came through the apprentice program. 80% of them had no four-year degree. 60% of them were diverse. One in four were military. For this next fiscal year, my goal is 20%, one in five of everyone we hire is going to come through an apprentice program.</p> <p>Jimmy Etheredge: By the way, when I say 15% of our entry level jobs, this past year it's actually 20% of our technology jobs. So, in case you think, "Oh, well, you guys are hiring them to be in back office, more clerical activities." No. It's cyber security, its programming, it's app engineering. So, we have seen tremendous success with this. But, five years ago, when we were getting going with this program, if you asked me, "Do you think you could be hiring 20, 25% of all of your entry level people through this," I would have been pretty surprised. But I'm a big believer now because I've seen just how successful that program has been.</p>
36:47	<p>Brenda Darden Wilkerson: I want to say congratulations. There is so many things there, right? You were willing to think differently. When you thought differently, then you were willing to act differently. You created these programs. Then the fun part is you got to surprise even yourself with the success and the intangibles that you didn't think about. Most people don't think about the fact that these are going to be people who are going to add to your culture, because they are going to be happy people. They're not going to be feeling like, "Well, I deserve this job." Not that everybody does that. But sometimes there is that fullness that comes with, "I've got all these degrees," that just don't come with some of these candidates. So, they add to the culture. I've heard that over and over again. So, I just want to applaud Accenture for this, the longevity of this program, and for the success of this program, and for setting this example for other companies.</p>
37:42	<p>Steve Preston: Yeah. It's so exciting to hear that, Jimmy. It's such a validation. Given your reach and given your reputation, man, that's just such a good example and a proof point for other people. The other thing that happens too, and this is especially with people who have had challenges in life, is when somebody gets that opportunity and works to get it, and then breaks through to that first opportunity, that's not the stopping point. A person's perspective of what's possible in life fundamentally changes. I'll never forget speaking with a woman who had been homeless, went through one of our digital skills programs, she had two little girls with her. Within a year, she ended up getting a technology job.</p>
38:23	<p>Steve Preston: What she said was, "Where I grew up, nobody talked about career pathing. I didn't know where to go." At the end of the discussion, she says, "I've come this far, I'm heading for the stars." She has gotten two promotions since then. She's started a nonprofit. She got a certificate from</p>

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	<p>HBS. The breakthrough is path changing too. I think it's important for us all to understand the changes that occur in a person's life when they get an opportunity that they didn't think they'd have, and they've seen the pathway, and then the world of opportunity opens up to them. Everything changes. Everything changes.</p>
39:03	<p>Emmanuel Acho: I love that, I love that. This is incredibly inspiring. I think my biggest takeaway is just we have to do a better job of not being lazy with our hiring practices. Brenda, I love what you said, one of the most dangerous phrases is this is the way we've always done things. That really challenged me. Steve, just understanding the take that leap of faith that really shouldn't even require much faith. It's just a matter of take a leap of changing one's mindset and the way in which you've always done things. So, thank you all, both for this phenomenal and illuminating conversation.</p>
39:40	<p>Steve Preston: It's great spending time with y'all.</p>
39:43	<p>Brenda Darden Wilkerson: Yeah, it's awesome. Thank you.</p>
39:49	<p>Emmanuel Acho: We've been talking to Brenda Darden Wilkerson, president and CEO of the AnitaB.org, and Steve Preston, president and CEO of Goodwill Industries International. What a conversation. Jimmy?</p>
40:03	<p>Jimmy Etheredge: Well, Emmanuel covered a lot of ground. What was your biggest takeaway?</p>
40:08	<p>Emmanuel Acho: Yeah, I said it, and I'll restate it. I'm going to give Brenda the praise the first time, but then I'm going to claim it as my own. The quote of the most dangerous phrase you can say is this is always the way we've done things. I think that's both a business practice and a life practice. I think even in life, challenging me in regard to, I'm on television, and I fervently believe that what you see dictates how society moves. I can speak personally with the Black Panther. My parents were born and raised in Nigeria, I'm first generation American. I came back from Nigeria at the start of the year, went on a trip out there. When the Black Panther came out, it changed the perception of being African. I can say that with full truth. Being African was the brunt of jokes for so long. Coming to America had one depiction of being African. But then after the Black Panther, everybody wanted to do their 23andMe. So, I fully believe that we can do a better job, even from the television perspective of representation, and employers, and employees can follow suit.</p>
41:14	<p>Jimmy Etheredge: For me, just hearing the stories that Steve and Brenda really shared around how important it is to open that aperture and look at talent differently. One thing that does go through my head is just the role that technology plays in this, because particularly when you start talking about</p>

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42:12	<p>larger organizations, larger corporations, most of them are using some form of AI that helps screen all of the resumes and requests that they get with the roles. Just like Brenda talked about how humans can have their perspective impacted by what they see on television, you need this ethical AI, because this AI is going to be based upon what it sees coming its way. If what it sees is we continue to hire people to do this role with a four-year degree, then it's going to look for people that have four-year degrees to do that.</p> <p>Jimmy Etheredge: So, I think it's an area that organizations have got to get their HR people and their businesspeople to work together with the technology infrastructure to be able to address issues like that. I think as Steve mentioned earlier, a real positive in a lot of the HR systems and platforms today is they are becoming more skill oriented. Skills is the new language that are used to talk about what do you need in a role? I think the more that the focus is on skills, and not so much on educational credentials, I think that's going to help widen that aperture and widen that talent pipeline.</p>
42:49	<p>Emmanuel Acho: Incredibly, incredibly stated. I'll definitely be giving this one another listen. That's Jimmy Etheredge, I'm Emmanuel Acho. Thanks for joining us on this episode of Change Conversations. Remember to subscribe on Apple, Google Podcast, Spotify, or wherever you get your podcasts. Until next time.</p> <p><i>Credits</i></p> <p><i>Thanks for listening to Change Conversations with Jimmy Etheredge and Emmanuel Acho.</i></p> <p><i>This podcast is supported by Accenture, and produced by Laura Regehr and Alexis Green at Antica Productions.</i></p> <p><i>Stuart Coxe is Executive Producer. Nina Beveridge is Head of Production.</i></p> <p><i>Mixing and Sound Design by Reza Dahya.</i></p> <p><i>Join us for our next conversation. Let's make equality for all a movement, not a moment.</i></p>