

Looking back: highlights from a year of Change Conversations (Part 1)

Hosts:

Emmanuel Acho, *FS1 Sports Analyst, former NFL Linebacker, and The New York Times Bestselling Author & Host, Uncomfortable Conversations with a Black Man*

Jimmy Etheredge, *CEO – Accenture, North America*

With highlights from:

Pharrell Williams, *Artist, Producer & Founder of Black Ambition*

Jenny Lay-Flurrie, *Chief Accessibility Officer, Microsoft*

Kevin Kwan, *The New York Times Bestselling Author, Crazy Rich Asians; Executive Producer*

Cynthia “Cynt” Marshall, *CEO, Dallas Mavericks*

Time	Script
00:01	Jimmy Etheredge: Inclusion diversity, the skills gap, shecession, representation, mentorship, invisible disabilities, equitable healthcare, mental health. We've really covered a lot of ground in the first year of change conversations.
00:16	Emmanuel Acho: So much ground that we thought we'd take the time to share some of our favorite moments, some of the highlights over the course of the season.
00:24	Jimmy Etheredge: So welcome to Change Conversations. I'm Jimmy Etheredge, CEO, Accenture North America.
00:29	Emmanuel Acho: And I'm Emmanuel Acho, athlete, broadcaster and author. This episode, technically isn't a best of, because obviously there's no way we could actually include all the best moments in the time we have, instead think of it as a highlight reel. Jimmy and I are going to run down some of the more memorable thoughts, quotes, and experiences.
00:51	Jimmy Etheredge: I think there's a great place to start with our highlights reel, is the first episode. We were just getting to know each other and I think kind of right out of the gate, we set the table for what our goals would be for the podcast.
01:06	Jimmy Etheredge: When I think about the employee experience at Accenture, we talk about people feeling seen, safe, connected, and courageous. And one of the things Emmanuel it took me a little bit to understand, particularly for people of color that work at Accenture is to feel seen and safe, means I need to be my authentic self at work. And with what's going on around me, I can't just codeswitch and mask and come in because then I don't feel seen, I don't feel safe. And how I can create an environment where people can have

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02:13	<p>conversations, because at the same time, I've got other people who are afraid of offending or don't want to engage, they want to just put their work blinders on, which is a privilege you have when you're not you know being affected as much as people who are like, I'm watching someone that looks like me being murdered by the police. And having to figure out the way as a leader to help navigate that, I think has been my biggest challenge.</p> <p>Emmanuel Acho: You said so much there that I think it's imperative that we unpack. On first off, use the term, which a lot of people don't understand, code switching. This term of code switching for those of you all who don't know what that means, code switching is acting one way around a certain group of people, and then you switch codes, if you will, when you're around another group of people. Really the phrase in which it's most commonly used is a black individual who would have to act a certain way around white individuals, white executives, because their blackness, if you will, may make white people uncomfortable. Now, Jimmy in full transparency, I've gotten in trouble speaking publicly about this concept of code switching. Because I've realized that what may lead to the greatest success in life may not lead to the greatest success individually. Because if I, a black man, have to code switch when I am around white people at work, then I'm not being true to my most authentic self.</p>
03:24	<p>Emmanuel Acho: So now the real crux of the issue is, why do people have to code switch? You have to code switch because currently at least, we've lived and we live in a society where we are afraid of things we're not familiar with. And oftentimes in society, so many of the decision makers aren't familiar with certain cultures, particularly black culture and black cultures, plural because black culture is not just one little monolith. And so you code switch because you have to find a way to advance in society and it's harder to advance when people are afraid of you because they are not necessarily familiar with you. So you really took me somewhere with that ideology and that concept. Where did you even hear of code switching?</p>
04:20	<p>Jimmy Etheredge: From my black friends. I have a group that we are able to have very open conversations about... I'm frankly blessed that way. And they would describe to me how they would have to do code switching and it's in the language they use, the way they do their hair, what they wear.</p>
04:44	<p>Emmanuel Acho: Wait, let me chime in. Let me chime. Right now if you're listening to this, but you can't see me, my hair is probably three to four inches above my head and my beard is relatively full, at least for me. When I was first on TV, Jimmy truth, I rocked my hair incredibly close. I don't know what white people call it when y'all go to barber shops, maybe like a one or like a half. Black people don't say ones or twos, we just say like "Even all around." We're getting very uncomfortable during this podcast.</p>
05:15	<p>Emmanuel Acho: So true story. I used to rock my hair super close because I had</p>

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	<p>to, and I was told, "Hey, Emmanuel, you need to present yourself in the most polished manner." Then after I proved on television that I was educated and articulate, that's when I let my true self come out. Then the hair got longer, the stripes got in the hair, the beard got fuller. Because I was like, "Now that you know who I really am, you're not going to judge me by what I look like." So I just had to cut you off there to interject with that story because it is so real, but you're talking about your black friends and how you learned on code switching.</p>
05:56	<p>Jimmy Etheredge: And one of the things that I didn't appreciate, Emmanuel, until I had those conversations with them is the privilege I have of never thinking about that. Again, thank God we're on a podcast right now, so no one can see how long my hair is, but it's not corporate. So I don't worry about those things and I see the thousand little cuts, the little things that, as a black man, you have to constantly think about, constantly worry about that wear you down. And then when you couple that with things that are happening in the world around us, that you know, you need to share your emotions with, how do you balance this desire to try to fit in and not make anyone have some of their unconscious biases kick in? Would the need to be authentic to yourself and your emotions?</p>
06:59	<p>Emmanuel Acho: You said, realizing the privileges that you had, but you said it actually rather than access, you said it in regards to immunity. I just thought of this as you were speaking. Privilege can be passive. I think so many people assume that privilege is active. Privilege grants me access to something. Privilege grants me access to a certain space, a certain room, a certain college, a certain institution, a certain company. But privilege can also be passive in the manner that privilege means I'm not facing certain punishment that I otherwise would've faced. I'm not being subject to certain things that I otherwise would have been subjected to.</p>
07:43	<p>Emmanuel Acho: Wow. We went everywhere and I loved it. I think the biggest thing from that episode one I've realized in, since episode one, the house has actually passed the CROWN Act, March 18th, 2022, and the CROWN Act was to no longer tolerate the discrimination of women of color based upon their hair styles.</p>
08:07	<p>Emmanuel Acho: We talk so much about code switching in episode one. We talk so much about the plight of people of color versus people that aren't of color. And one of the main focuses, Jimmy and I said, ingest both also. And seriousness at times was the plight of black people in discrimination, just simply based upon hairstyles. Black women will wear their hair in protective styles, like dreadlocks, like braids, like twists and have been discriminated upon because of that. But that act has since been passed. Man, Jimmy episode one left me with a lot of thoughts, but no greater than one, you bringing up the concept of code switching. That still is one of my favorites to date because that is something that I feel like so many of my white brothers and sisters are ignorant to. And it was just awesome for it to be highlighted, to be known, that the experience of a</p>

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09:11	<p>black or brown individual or an individual of color is often adjusted just so they can fit in. But the place we need to get to in society is a place of acceptance for all.</p> <p>Jimmy Etheredge: Well, that was a really good discussion. And for those that can't see Emmanuel, he's still rocking the same hair doing and beard, looks great. But I think back to what you talked about, that privilege can be passive, not always has to be active. And I think that's something I've heard from a number of my white friends that have listened to the podcast, is recognizing that there's a lot of things that they don't worry about and that that's a privilege to not have to worry about some things. Such as "Am I fitting in the language I'm using? How I'm wearing my hair?" I can't think of a single white friend that's ever confided in me, "I'm nervous about the way my hair is at work and how people might have some preconceived notion about it."</p>
09:57	<p>Emmanuel Acho: So many good conversations. We'll also throughout the past year, we've been fortunate enough to sit down and learn from the C-suite leaders across a variety of industries. But also one of my favorite moments was sitting down with several time Grammy winner and one of the most creative people in the music industry. That's Pharrell Williams. He's a musician, he's a producer. We most notably know his song Because I'm happy. I wish I still had my singing voice. Anyway, Pharrell explained the importance of mentorship.</p>
10:28	<p>Jimmy Etheredge: Pharrell. I appreciate your call to action to corporations. There's a lot of business leaders that would be listening this podcast. What do you think that they could do to help these entrepreneurs more?</p>
10:43	<p>Pharrell Williams: I think it all boils down to mentorship. And then in terms of some of the CEOs and some of these people in C-suite positions who are in a position to actually make some decisions, I think empathy is really important. And you got to have empathy, because if you don't have empathy, then you don't understand your consumer base. And if you don't understand your consumer base, then your business is doomed. That's what a lot of companies came to realize during the pandemic. Like if you're not in touch with them and you don't - they can't relate to some of the company's policies, then they check out, they go to a competitor or they start their own business.</p>
11:24	<p>Jimmy Etheredge: That was a great podcast that we had with Pharrell. And as you said, Emmanuel, just an incredible entrepreneur and talented individual. But I thought it was very interesting that he started with this focus on mentorship. And I think, when we talk about mentorship, it really means active, and how you're going to lean in and help somebody be successful. It reminds me of a conversation I had with Ken Frazier, recently retired CEO of Merck. And you know that's what he told me, he was chief of legal officer and I said, "How did you get to be CEO?" He said, "I had a mentor." The CEO said, "You got the</p>

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	talent for doing this, I'm going to help you get this figured out and really leaned in."
12:06	<p>Jimmy Etheredge: And I think the other thing with what Pharrell was sharing was the point around empathy and the language that you've used, Emmanuel, of meeting people where they are. And that if you're not able to talk about these shared experiences or the lived experiences that someone else has had that you haven't, it's always going to be a challenge as it relates to being empathetic, as it relates to being curious and willingness to really mentor people that have different backgrounds from you.</p>
12:35	<p>Emmanuel Acho: I love that. Empathy is the key to success. That's what I learned from that conversation. It does not matter how well you think you want to know someone. It does not matter how hard you're striving to know someone. All that matters is your empathy towards that individual, whether it is familial, whether it is at a friendship level or whether it is occupational empathy. Because the best way to serve our consumers around us is to fully understand their emotions at all times. So that episode really spoke to me in regards to it doesn't matter how tough and brazen we are, but how empathetic can we be. Because the empathy is a true key to us, all succeeding, collectively and occupationally.</p>
13:23	<p>Jimmy Etheredge: I thought there was a lot to learn from Jenny Lay-Flurrie in episode three. She's the chief accessibility officer at Microsoft and she shared an enlightening and really helpful perspective on the topic of disability.</p>
13:38	<p>Emmanuel Acho: Just so we can set the table for this conversation. I heard you use the word disability. When I read that sometimes I'm like, "Ah, is that still a fair, accurate or empathetic description for someone who faces a difference or someone who faces a challenge?" Is disability a word that we should be using?</p>
13:59	<p>Jenny Lay-Flurrie: Yes. In fact, you say difference and I shut up. And here's the gig right, I have a disability. In fact, I have a few because I'm getting old. And disability is correlated with age. So if you're not in my core gang today, you likely will be as you age. Um, and the reality is that it traverses from what you can see to what you cannot. And the 70 plus percent of disabilities are invisible or non-apparent, meaning that you can't see it by looking at someone. Mental health, neurodiversity.</p>
14:33	<p>Jenny Lay-Flurrie: But I will say that it's just a part of being human. And if it's a part of being human, why don't we say the word? So actually I'm very proud to say that I'm here, I have a disability, I'm disabled. And I use that expertise that comes with having that disability and that empathy for different parts of being human, to help me to create better products and services for a company like Microsoft. It's a strength. Disability is a strength. So I actually don't want to hear diversity abled, differently abled, special abled, special needs. No. Why are we</p>

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15:19	<p>not saying this what it is? It is a disability and that is a good word, not a bad one.</p> <p>Emmanuel Acho: This episode slapped me in my face. Jimmy, I've quoted this conversation and dialogue in the last six months more than I have quoted any other conversation. This is one of the most valuable lessons I've learned of my adulthood and especially at this moment in time in our culture. You can be incredibly well intended, but poorly executed. And I recall introducing Jenny and I recall spending so much time and energy trying to figure out how was I going to properly introduce her, of which she responded and said, "Emanuel, your introduction made me cringe." And she reminded me, disability it is an ability and we focus on the 'dis' and not the 'ability'. This was a phenomenal conversation, incredibly illuminating, but here is the lesson, the lesson is you can be very well intended and poorly executed. So how can we make sure that our intentions and our execution match? Make sure we learn the person that we are trying to serve.</p>
16:23	<p>Jimmy Etheredge: I thought this was amazing as well, Emmanuel. And not only when she talked about thinking about the ability, not just the 'dis', but to me when she says "This is part of the human experience. And if it's part of the human experience, why can't we say the word?" I do think it's why I love doing this podcast with you, because there's so many things that as you said, we are well intended, but they don't come across the right way or we are uncomfortable and don't want to seem awkward. And sometimes in the attempt to not insult someone, we're actually not meeting them where they are. And it certainly gave me a different perspective and candidly, a different confidence with having a conversation with my friends who are disabled.</p>
17:09	<p>Emmanuel Acho: Love that. Well, so many great conversations and this upcoming one was equally as good. Hollywood came calling when Kevin Kwan's romcom novel, Crazy Rich Asians took off. Now, Crazy Rich Asians, for those who don't know, love story that quickly becomes complicated by family, politics and social status. The story caught the attention of several producers. One of the first to reach out to Kevin wanted to change the lead character, Rachel Chu from Asian to Caucasian. Kevin talked to us about that experience.</p>
17:42	<p>Emmanuel Acho: Kevin, you said that when a producer came and they wanted to whitewash your character, Rachel, that they missed the point. Let me ask you this. What point did they miss?</p>
17:54	<p>Kevin Kwan: Where do I start? The main point was that this was a book that really showcased Asian empowerment. So if you're going to take my heroin and turn into a white girl, you know, what does that tell me? It tells me you don't believe that a heroin can be an empowered, dynamic, attractive, smart, Asian woman, that no one will want to see this person on the screen or read about it. So to me you know, he was clearly off base from the beginning.</p>

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18:27	<p>Jimmy Etheredge: I can't even imagine the character Rachel not being an Asian woman. It wouldn't make any sense at all to the, to the movie. High profile campaigns, like the #oscarsarewhite and the current backlash against the Hollywood Foreign Press Association. And then kind of on the other side, you've got the Heights and some of the backlash that happened there, but it's brought attention to these kinds of issues. How much of an impact do you think these campaigns are having at, at all levels of production, from the stories that the producers choose to tell, to the actors that they decide to cast?</p>
19:07	<p>Kevin Kwan: You know, I think we're in very interesting times. I think there's a huge sea change. And I think there really is a concerted effort on the part of the people behind the scenes in Hollywood, who create the films and the TV series and all different types of media. They are listening and they are learning. And they are trying to be thoughtful and authentic to these stories and to the characters. So I believe change is happening. We're still in very early days yet. So I think there's going to be bumps along the road. Massive change takes time. And we're in really the teething period of what does the new landscape look like with a diverse multicultural audience and multicultural players on screen.</p>
20:01	<p>Jimmy Etheredge: Emmanuel, that was a really interesting episode and it still boggles my mind that Kevin is sharing with us, that they wanted to have a Caucasian play the Asian lead in his book, Crazy Rich Asians. And in addition to having Kevin Kwan the show, we also had Cynt Marshall, the CEO of the Dallas Mavericks, the first black female CEO in the NBA. She told us why she took the job, why having a culture of the inclusivity was so important. And you're going to hear a quote I've used a hundred times since this episode.</p>
20:39	<p>Cynt Marshall: What made me decide to do it, frankly, after I had almost an hour conversation with Mark Cuban, who we had just gotten to know each other. I didn't know him. He didn't know me. And we spent some time together. Two women stopped me as I was leaving his office because I hadn't decided that I was going to accept the job yet. I just retired from AT&T after 36 years, started my own consulting company. Life was good and I had something else I was getting ready to go and do. After he told me about what was going on, I read the article, the Sports Illustrated article, two women stopped me on the way out of his office and said, "Are you the one who Mark Cuban said is going to come in here and save us?" And I said, "Well, I don't have the power to do that. I mean I actually know somebody who has the power to do that, but I don't. But let me just think about it."</p>
21:24	<p>Cynt Marshall: And they started telling me their stories. And as these women were telling me their stories, and I thought about how sincere Mark was about a culture change and the problems there, I just said, "You know what? This is my opportunity to serve. I got to do it for the sisterhood. And the brotherhood will actually benefit too. But I got to do this." For some reason, I was uniquely qualified to come in and make a difference in the organization. And so I did it as</p>

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	<p>an opportunity to serve, didn't think anything. I didn't know at the time I was going to be the first black female CEO of an NBA team. I don't think my boss knew that. So he wasn't trying to make history. He was trying to make a difference. And so it was an opportunity to serve. And so we've been doing some heavy lifting, but I think we've made a lot of progress.</p>
22:07	<p>Emmanuel Acho: That is amazing. Cynt, I'm going to go off script, completely off script, because as you're talking, I'm realizing different people have unique qualifications that make them better skilled to do a job than other individuals. And different individuals have unique qualifications that may make them lesser skilled to do a job than other individuals. What makes you, a black woman, uniquely qualified to excel in this position?</p>
22:34	<p>Cynt Marshall: Well, first of all, I think growing up the way I grew up. So I mean I grew up in poverty. So I grew up in the Easter Hill public housing projects in Richmond, California. And I think growing up and knowing what it feels like to be different and knowing what hard work will get you, knowing what will happen when people give you an opportunity, when they look beyond the zip code, when they look beyond the color, when they look beyond the gender and just create an environment that's diverse and inclusive, which is what has happened to me in my life. And then I was able to lead some of that work at AT&T. So I have, I think, the qualifications around knowing how to transform cultures and seeing what happens when you really believe in the business case for diversity.</p>
23:23	<p>Emmanuel Acho: I loved a couple aspects of that. Number one, I loved her boldness. I also love a quote, which I've taken from her, "Diversity being invited to the dance, inclusion being asked to dance." Cynt really hit the nail on the head because when I try to synthesize both what Cynt was discussing and also what Kevin of Crazy Rich Asians was discussing, I realized a couple things. The power in diversity. Over the course of our dialogue together, we talk about so many different aspects of uplifting one another, being more empathetic towards one another, inclusion, et cetera. But there is power in diversity. Crazy Rich Asians was a depiction of powerful, intelligent, accomplished, dynamic Asians. If that character would've been whitewash and become Caucasian, it would've just been the same story that we've been sold for so many years in Hollywood. And then, Cynt, what I really got from her is the power that she holds in that role, but also the power in pushing diversity. It's not just a matter of being diverse for diversity's sake, but being diverse because there is power for your corporation and diversity.</p>
24:39	<p>Jimmy Etheredge: I totally relate a manager to the point you made about the power of diversity, but what really stuck with me was this power of inclusion. And yes, I loved the getting invited to dance as opposed to just invited to the dance. And a lot of times I'll talk to people about how to shift from optics to outcomes. And it really got me thinking about when I'm talking about I&D or</p>

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25:24	<p>D&I, I'm talking a lot about diversity and not enough about inclusion and asking myself, "Am I doing enough on the inclusion part?" Instead of just trying to make sure that the people that work for me look like the communities we live in and work in, are diverse, but how included do they feel? So that was really powerful for me with Cynt.</p> <p>Emmanuel Acho: For the record, Jimmy, I've all still stolen from you, the optics and outcomes line, I gave you credit the first time. But from here on, it's been mine.</p>
25:33	<p>Jimmy Etheredge: Fair enough. Fair enough.</p>
25:40	<p>Jimmy Etheredge: Thanks for listening to this episode of Change Conversations. Don't miss the second part of our highlights reel, when Emmanuel and I continue our look back at the wide range of issues in sometimes uncomfortable conversations we've had to date. We'll revisit our episodes about the shesession, improving equity in healthcare, and the challenge of protecting our mental health at work and play. Be sure to subscribe wherever you get your podcast to download part two when it's available. I'm Jimmy Etheredge, talk to you next time.</p>
26:21	<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>