

Can you be your authentic self at work?

Bozoma Saint John, Hall of Fame inducted Marketing Executive, author, entrepreneur and general badass

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*

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00:01	Bozoma Saint John: Why am I there, if not to represent my specific and unique point of view, culture, language, attitude, insight, all of those things? Those come because of the experiences that I've had. Now, if I hide any of that, or if I massage any of that, tone any of that down, then we all lose.
00:27	Jimmy Etheredge: Ask yourself this question. Do you feel like you can be your true self at work? Just think about that for a second. Your true self at work. If yes, why? And if no, then what's holding you back? And no matter how you answered that question, I bet trust and transparency probably have something to do with it. And given all that is happening in the world and the workplace, we need authentic leaders from all levels of the organization to lead with compassion, to create trust, and prioritize purpose. I'm Jimmy Etheredge, CEO, Accenture North America.
01:06	Emmanuel Acho: And I am Emmanuel Acho, athlete, broadcaster, and author. Now, Jimmy, I've had the pleasure of being led by many authentic leaders in my life, ones that encouraged me to be myself in all situations. Now, even at work, it can be tempting to just keep your head down and grind it out. But thankfully I've been led by several authentic leaders.
01:28	Jimmy Etheredge: Well, at least for me, I think a lot comes down to how these leaders create the right environment for everyone to be transparent about their lives, their strengths, their weaknesses. And those leaders need to create a culture where people feel safe to truly be their authentic self. And I think for the leaders, of course, that means you got to show up as your authentic self.
01:54	Emmanuel Acho: Absolutely. It takes a lot of trust and courage to be authentic at work for most people. That's why on this episode of Change Conversations, we're talking about the importance of authentic leadership. We're joined by someone who's a shining example of the good that comes from authenticity in the workplace, not only for a business leader's career, but also for the careers of people that they manage.
02:18	Jimmy Etheredge: Well, it's my pleasure to introduce our esteemed guest,

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	<p>Bozoma Saint John. Now Forbes named her the Most Influential CMO in the world last year.</p>
02:33	<p>Emmanuel Acho: The world, you heard that right. Bozoma's held C-suite marketing positions at Netflix, Apple, Uber, so, so many more. And that was after getting her start at Spike Lee's creative agency. She's also the author of the forthcoming book, <i>The Urgent Life</i>. The one and only Boz. What's up, my friend?</p>
02:50	<p>Bozoma Saint John: Hello, Emmanuel. Hi Jimmy. I'm very, very, very glad to be here. What an intro too. I love that. That setup was perfect.</p>
02:59	<p>Emmanuel Acho: Boz, last year, the Harvard study about authentic leadership based on your life was published. A Harvard study. What were those highlights?</p>
03:09	<p>Bozoma Saint John: Well, first of all, I was actually very shocked that they wanted to write the case on my career and my life, because I just find that I'm just living. I'm just working. I'm doing the things that I thought I was going to do, i.e. working hard. My immigrant parents wouldn't allow anything less. There's no stopping to pat yourself on your back, really. Regardless of awards or positions or promotions or the lists and all of that stuff, there really isn't allowance for that. I'm busy, trying to do the work. And so when they told me that they were interested in writing the case and that they would have to study me, including the interview and the in depth investigation about how it is that I do what I do, I just thought it was fascinating. And if I'm being totally transparent, because this is what we're talking about, I was also surprised by it because I know a lot of Black women who are as transparent, who are working as hard, who are achieving, but just who aren't seen. And that is what fascinated me about even the idea of studying me, that I'm like, "Oh, well, I just represent a whole lot of people. That's all. That's it."</p>
04:29	<p>Jimmy Etheredge: Well, Boz, I mean, you describe it pretty easily about how you can be your authentic self in the workplace. But I mean, a Black woman climbing the ranks of some of the country's top companies, and anyone that Googles your resume, I mean, these are the biggest brands in the world that you have been responsible for building their brands and running their marketing programs. When Emmanuel and I had our very first podcast together, I told him how a lot of my Black friends would talk about code switching and the efforts they went through, appearance, tone, what they would share or not share. Did you have times that you couldn't be your true self? And who taught you not to shy away from being your true self?</p>
05:18	<p>Bozoma Saint John: Ooh, yeah. That's a good one. Oh my gosh. Yeah, code switching. It's such a terrible thing. What a disservice to us as a society, as companies, as humans. It's such a disservice because then you never get to see</p>

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	<p>the person. And actually mine was, yes, I did, by the way. I did try to be like everybody else.</p>
05:40	<p>Jimmy Etheredge: Yeah.</p>
05:41	<p>Bozoma Saint John: Early on. I failed miserably at it. And that's actually what happened. That's the truth of it, which is that, of course, like everybody else I came into my first big marketing job, which was at PepsiCo. I was in the multicultural marketing team, where I could sort of be myself because I was responsible for understanding the cool things that were important to African Americans and Latinos in the United States. And then as soon as I transitioned out of that job and worked on the flagship Pepsi brand, everything changed. Then it was, "Oh, well, you should probably figure out a way to speak a little bit differently, understand the data differently, dress a little differently, your hair is a little, your passion comes across as aggression." All of those things. And by the way, nobody was being quiet about it. It wasn't said in hushed tones. It was said out loud. And so I knew that if I wanted to succeed, if I wanted to become the CMO of PepsiCo, that I would have to adjust the way that I am. And I would be lying if I said I didn't try that, because who doesn't want to be successful?</p>
06:53	<p>Jimmy Etheredge: Right.</p>
06:53	<p>Bozoma Saint John: I'm in a career and I'm ambitious. And so if you tell me that like, "Oh, this is what I need to do in order to succeed." Of course, I'm going to go do that thing. Of course I am. So I tried it. Like I said, I failed miserably. It was terrible. First of all, I was super uncomfortable. I was uncomfortable in my own skin. I would literally sit on my hands in meetings so I wouldn't gesture, the way I'm doing now. I would drop my voice to sound more like this so that I wouldn't be too passionate for anybody. I would wait until somebody more important, or somebody who didn't look like me, would say their things and then jump on their comments. I did all of those things. And then the following year, in my review, I got the same feedback, same criticism. And I thought, "Well, damn, I spent a whole year trying to adjust." And so I went home that night. I swear to you, this is what happened. I was like, "You know what? F that. I'm tired. I'm literally tired." I woke up the next day, I threw on some leather pants, I came into the office. Because I was like, "Well, you know what? I give up. If I'm not going to be the CMO because of how I am and what I talk and blah, blah, blah, then I give up." And so in that meeting, I mean, I was literally that person, like that caricature you've probably seen, leaning back in my chair, I had my arm up, I had my mug of Pepsi in the can, slurping, you know what I mean? And anything that came to my mind, yep. Shot it off. And it scared everyone, by the way, literally everyone was afraid. And I remember my manager at the time swung by my desk and was like, "Hey, everything all right? You okay? It seems like maybe, should we talk?" And I was like, "No, I'm good. I'm fine." But what was amazing, is that in that failure, over the next few weeks,</p>

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	<p>it became less of a chip on my shoulder and more like my badge. I was like, "Oh, you think I'm too passionate? Wait till I tell you this idea." And it was incredible to me that it almost felt like overnight people's attitudes changed towards me in a way that I didn't expect. I thought I would be ostracized. I thought I'd be the one that was thrown off to the corner. Instead people were like, "Oh, wait. Yeah, yeah, yeah. No, she's the cool one. She has the cool ideas. We should ask her her opinion on X, Y, and Z thing." Like, "What? I've always had that. I've always been the cool kid. What are you talking about? I was born cool, okay? You weren't, but I was." You know?</p>
09:26	<p>Emmanuel Acho: Yeah.</p>
09:27	<p>Bozoma Saint John: And in through that is what became then my calling card, was that I became unafraid of myself because I failed trying to be somebody else.</p>
09:38	<p>Emmanuel Acho: Is there ever a space where, either you call it code switching or you call it massaging your personality, is there ever a space where there is discernment in that? Because some people obviously are a certain type of way out with they guy friends, out with they girlfriends, and maybe that is not necessarily work appropriate. Can you kind of differentiate for the listener between when you don't recommend code switching or if there is ever a time where Boz is like, "You know what? Yeah, you probably shouldn't be like that at work."</p>
10:15	<p>Bozoma Saint John: Ooh, that's a really interesting question, because I don't know that I have that lever. I don't know that I actually do have that lever. I think most people who have worked with me, especially in the boardroom or in a environment where it feels like I should maybe be toned down or just a little bit, like what did you say? Massaging a little bit. They will tell you that I'm not same person when they see me on Friday night. I don't say that casually because I actually do think it's very important to represent myself, in all scenarios. Because the truth and matter is that then why am I there? Truly? I mean, this is the essence of what we're talking about with authentic presence. Why am I there, if not to represent my specific and unique point of view, culture, language, attitude, insight, all of those things? Those come because of the experiences that I've had. Now, if I hide any of that or if I massage any of that, tone any of that down, then we all lose, because then I'm not able to actually affect the work the way that I could if I just was putting all of the energy into the idea versus trying to cut back. Because at the end of the day, it's all just energy. How much energy am I spending trying to tone myself down? Because that takes thought. I have to be conscious of that. And if I take any of my energy away from the work and away from the ideas and put it into my presence, then I have lost something for the work. I'd rather you came in and you were just talking crazy all day. I'd rather that you do that. So I can get the best of</p>

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	<p>everything that you have rather than concerned about whether or not the way you said something or the way you positioned it is going to be interpreted incorrectly. And I think that's where the idea of cancel culture has really taken root in our corporate spaces in a very dangerous way, because it's not as loud as it is in like social media. You don't want to say the wrong thing. You don't want to say it in the wrong way for fear of being then ostracized. And so we have to create these safe spaces and the safety then means I can show up as myself, I can say something and feel like, "Oh, if it is not the right thing to say or the right way to be, that somebody will correct me in a safe way." All of these things are what keep us in fear and therefore we can't actually bring the full brilliance that we have into the work.</p>
13:04	<p>Jimmy Etheredge: And listen, I tell people all the time, as a CEO the number one problem I have is most of the information I get from people is filtered. And so I am so hungry for unfiltered-</p>
13:20	<p>Bozoma Saint John: Yes.</p>
13:20	<p>Jimmy Etheredge: -thoughts and experiences. Have you worked in an environment that didn't have the benefit of an authentic leader?</p>
13:28	<p>Bozoma Saint John: Oh, yes.</p>
13:29	<p>Jimmy Etheredge: So did that change anything about kind of how you went about doing what you did?</p>
13:36	<p>Bozoma Saint John: It made it harder, for sure. And, again, in the spirit of authenticity and transparency, I don't do these things unafraid. It's not like I walk in with my huge Afro and tight pink dress the way I did at Apple, when it was time to present at the Apple keynote and I was presenting Apple Music. For the second time, by the way. The first time had kind of failed. This was going to be like life or death for the brand and the product. And I didn't walk in there unafraid, not thinking that somebody would say, "Hey, look, this isn't going to work for the audience. This doesn't work for our space. This is not the way our executives look." Because, I mean, that was obvious. You just looked around. Just open your eyes, look around, you'll see. And not that Apple wasn't an environment that didn't appreciate diversity and inclusion, but there's also, I don't think it's any secret, it's one Apple. There's one way to do things, and doesn't have much edge to it outside of the innovation of the edge of products. And so for me, being in an environment like that, and by the way, Apple's not the only one. Almost every company I've been in. It's not as if there's like some critical mass of people like me. Being very specific, Black women, who speak the way I speak and act the way I act and have the inside jokes. None of that exists for me. And so every time I'm in an environment, I don't know that I actually feel that this is an open environment, a safe environment for me. It</p>

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	<p>never feels that way. I'm always so curious when there's almost like an assumed distinction. Like. "What happens when you walk in and then what if the environment isn't safe for you?" I'm like, "Where is it safe for me? Do you think I've ever had that? There's never been. It does not exist for me." And so it's just normal, however sad and terrible that is, it is normal. And so I walk in and I know that there is high risk of rejection. I know there is high risk of being quieted. I know there's high risk, by the way, of being fired. Or saying that like, "Ah, you know what? She doesn't actually fit, doesn't culture fit. Just get her out of here." That always exists, every single day.</p>
16:01	<p>Emmanuel Acho: Now, Jimmy, then let me ask you this, as a CEO, when you're mentoring someone, Jimmy, or you're responsible for people's careers, how can you make sure that you're cultivating an environment where people are allowed to be their authentic self?</p>
16:17	<p>Jimmy Etheredge: Well, I think one is you have to start by walking the talk yourself. And so if people don't think I'm authentic, which means I need to be transparent, it means that I need to show that I'm going to meet people where they are. I need to be curious in the moment when people are talking to me. I think that's the first most important thing you've got to do, because if you're not being authentic, it's hard for them to trust it's okay for them to be authentic. And then I think the second thing is you think about the teams that you build and you try to make sure that you've got diversity on those teams and that your teams feel comfortable with each other. And I don't know if this is corporate speak, but as a compliment I'm often told that I have a very collegial relationship with the people that report to me, which I think means I just treat them like humans like I am, as opposed to you're subservient to me because I'm higher on the corporate ladder. But I think to Boz's point, I'm glad to hear you say that you're nervous or you have some fears in those situations because I know when I talk to people that's what I will hear. And one of the things I worry about nowadays is I'm best when I'm with people, and so now since the pandemic has started there's so much more that's on video, which is just not the same as having a cup of coffee with you or having lunch or a drink after work or whatever it is, where I think people relax a little bit more than when they're staring at themselves while they're talking to you going, "Oh my gosh, my hair is not quite right." There's all this self judgment going on. Well, I'm trying to get you to relax and be yourself and get away from those kind of things. So it's something that I don't know if I'm doing as good a job now as I was before the pandemic.</p>
18:11	<p>Emmanuel Acho: Let me add a little bit of tension to this conversation. You all both have spent the majority of your careers, at least as of late, in the C-suite. Boz, I'll ask you first, is there a risk that businesses run if everyone were to bring their fully authentic, non-dilute self to work? Now you might have some fully authentic, non-dilute, drastically contrasting backgrounds trying to exist in the exact same workspace.</p>

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18:39	Bozoma Saint John: Yeah.
18:39	Emmanuel Acho: Is there a risk? If so, what is it?
18:41	<p>Bozoma Saint John: Yes. There's always risk. There's always risk. Because you have the risk of people not accepting each other, not allowing for somebody else to be very different from them. So you as the leader can create an environment where you're like, "Hey, look, everyone is welcome. Truly, everyone. Bring your full self because it's going to make the work better." By the way, plenty of Harvard cases have been written about the fact that having true authenticity and true diversity actually helps our businesses. We all know that academically. But then we have to, to your point, actually work together. We actually have to accept other people doing it. And you know that saying like, "Everything I need to know I learned in kindergarten?" Well, I learned a lot when I was 12. My family had moved from Ghana to the US. We moved to Colorado Springs, Colorado, which probably don't need to tell you that it's not a very diverse town. But the way that I had to get to know my fellow classmates, teachers, people at the grocery store, at church, all of that was by being curious. And so I really loved, Jimmy what you said about curiosity. It meant that I had to ask a lot of questions. I had to tell a lot of people also about where I came from. Now the funny thing is, obviously I can better articulate this as an adult than I could at 12. I didn't even know that's what I was doing. But I wanted to know more about them. I wanted to know why they did this and why they did that. And then when they would say things to me that I knew was different from my own experience about Africa, I would then have to say, "Well, no, actually it's not like that at all." And then I would have to tell them why. And sometimes it was met with laughter. Sometimes it was met with accusing me of lying or whatever. It wasn't comfortable always. But the same thing applies to us as adults, that we have to be more curious about other people. And then we have to be able to accept people coming as their authentic selves. We always go to these super extremes when we talk about this stuff. By the way, any situation, right? We go to these extremes, like, "Oh my gosh, the worst thing they could happen. What if this person comes and they just want to be naked all day long at the office? You going to let them be on their authentic selves as a nudist?" And I'm like, "Huh? Do you know any nudists? Do you actually know any nudists, because I don't know, not one." And if there is one, maybe then that's when you enforce a dress code, all right. But honestly the truth is that most of us bringing our authentic selves isn't about the extremes. It's just me being able to authentically say like, "Hey, look, actually this campaign idea that we have? Actually kind of hits wrong because if a working mom sees this thing, this is going to be tone deaf to her." Instead of saying, "Yeah, that's a funny ad. That's great. Yeah, yeah, yeah. It made me laugh. I love it so much." And then it's out in the world and it bombs. I'm like, "Why didn't you say anything? You knew that, because of your own lived experience." That's the kind of stuff that I'm talking about. Putting ourselves in the work. I'm always so shocked, especially</p>

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	<p>as a marketer, when people are like, "Oh, well, let's see. I think the mass would like this vanilla color that we have here." And I'm like, "What? No, no, no, no. Throw some pink in there. If some people don't like pink, it's all right. A lot of people like pink though. If you like it, put it there." And one marker that I always, always, for myself and also for my teams, I'm like, "Hey, look. As marketers it's my job to communicate. I have to make people feel happy instantly or reflective or inspired or scared." They have to have some kind of feeling immediately. So if I'm looking at some work and it doesn't do that for me, then it doesn't work. It's like, "Oh my gosh, no, but you're like a judge of one." I'm like, "Yes, I know. I know. That's why I'm in this job. And that's why you're in the job you're in." It's like go by your taste. Because, again, the lessons I learned when I was 12 was that if I found something interesting about somebody or they found something interesting about me, we had a better chance of the connection. It didn't need to be exactly the same. Just need to have some curiosity and some understanding there and then some acceptance.</p>
22:52	<p>Jimmy Etheredge: Yeah. Well, I think, Boz, you've done a great job of talking about why this authenticity is so important for business performance. And Emmanuel, I understand your point, and in business in general, there is a sort of, "I don't want to offend, I don't want to be ignorant and ask questions and stuff." And so what I think some people feel they're kind of doing a favor to the dynamics of the environment at work. What I learned a lot about, in particular starting with the George Floyd murder, was I know for our people I need them to feel seen and safe. And if something's happening that's really affecting them and they come to work and it's like nobody says a word about what's happening out there. Honestly, I think for some of those people, they felt like "Well, I don't know what to say and so I'm not going to say anything." But it's really just doing more harm than anything else. And you've got to get people comfortable being curious. And what I have been so impressed by when I'm talking to people and kind of getting people together is the willingness of people to show grace towards others. If you're genuine and you're curious, and you're asking me about my lived experience, you might say the wrong thing or whatever, but I'm going to throw some grace your way, because I could tell that you're trying to do that. One of the things that's fascinating to me about the two of you, Boz, when you mentioned Colorado Springs, it reminded me of Emmanuel's stories growing up in private school environment in Texas. I mean it's like being thrust at a completely different culture and trying to figure out how to fit in. And as hard as work is, one of the things I remember not from kindergarten, but junior high and high school, is peer pressure and the need to fit in was so important. But both of you, you were spending your adolescent years in a environment where you looked different than everybody else. And I mean, how did that affect you or what'd you take away from that?</p>
25:00	<p>Emmanuel Acho: Boz, I guess I'll go first. Yeah. So I was in school with like really all white people, and rich, rich, white people. And so I really just had to</p>

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	<p>try to learn how to fit in. That's why I've always had a interesting relationship with code switching. That's why I asked you, Boz. Because in society, I think there is some value monetarily that can be attained by code switching until you revert back to your normal self. I always say when I first got on television, I did not have the two parts in my hair, I would not wear non-prescription glasses, and I did not have my hair grown out at all. It was even all around, no parts, and it was just very as digestible a version of a Emmanuel Acho as possible.</p>
25:52	<p>Jimmy Etheredge: So kind of fake it till you make it approach.</p>
25:55	<p>Emmanuel Acho: Bingo. And then once you make it, you ain't got to fake it. Because I always tried to infiltrate from inside out, which is why I'm always so very fascinated by hearing the illuminating words of Boz, because I'm fake till you make it. But now that I have my own show on TV, you getting all the parts, all the outfits, now that I've made it, oh, you going to get the realest, rawest version of me. So that's the full circle answer. But, Jimmy, the answer to your question is when I was younger, like to the age of 12 to Boz's point, I was really just lost trying to figure it out. I couldn't really code switch because I didn't know who I was in the first place. So there was no switch to be had. I was really just a chameleon if you will. Whereas now I know exactly who I am and I can kind of navigate in that confidence. Boz?</p>
26:50	<p>Bozoma Saint John: Hmm. Gosh, I want to go back to something you just said, because it was so fascinating about sort of faking it till you make it. Because what I have found in my experience, and I do counsel, especially more junior people who are trying to figure out who they are too in these corporate environments, that they actually can't do that because there's no point at which to turn it back. There's actually no point. The challenge in corporate spaces is that the more senior you become, actually the more pressure there is to fit in. It's quite the opposite trajectory. And so now, by the way, on my social media, I can't tell you how many times I'll get the private message, especially if I post like, oh God forbid I post a bikini photo. "You're in the C-suite of a public company. Don't you think you should be more reserved?" I'm like, "For what? Why? I'm on vacation? I don't understand." But honestly it's like the pressure increases. And also what happens is that because you create this reputation, you call it brand persona, whatever you want to call it, as you advance in your career, if you showed up one day totally different from who you were yesterday or who you were in the last job, folks aren't going to trust you. They really are not. They're going to be like, "Oh, so you just decided to come up with the six cuts in your hair. Where does that come from?" It's a very odd thing. And so it's actually very counterintuitive, because I hear that all the time. People are like, "Oh, but it's because you're the CMO. You can do whatever you want." And I'm like, "Who told you that? Wait. Hold on for 20 years. See what happens when you get here." And so the idea that, I like what you said about getting to know yourself and knowing who you are, because that is actually what I counsel</p>

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	<p>people to do. It's like your growth and advancement is in getting to know yourself better, bringing that self, constantly the evolving self, to the table, and actually appreciating and valuing it. So now it's like, look, I get into a room and I'm like, "Oh, no, you want the Boz effect on this work. You don't want some cookie cutter CMO thing. That's not what you called for." I don't get those calls because they're like, "Oh, we just need a CMO." No, you need me. And the only way that is if I show up as who I am.</p>
29:34	<p>Jimmy Etheredge: Now, Boz, you're writing a book, a memoir, <i>The Urgent Life</i>, about the importance of living life with urgency. Tell us what does that mean to you?</p>
29:45	<p>Bozoma Saint John: Yeah, well, I learned it in a very painful way which is what made me want to write the book in the first place. About eight and a half years ago, my husband passed away from cancer. He was almost 44. We were living a very fabulous life in New York, both of us in marketing and advertising. He was diagnosed in May of 2013 and was dead in December. I really still can't articulate, even though I've written a lot of words, I cannot properly articulate what that experience was like, not just for him, but for me, having to live afterwards, having to live in the aftermath. And I don't think anybody would've blamed me if I had decided to retreat from life. Our daughter was four. I mean, it was just devastating to our lives. But what I learned in the process was about the true meaning of all the little things we say about like <i>carpe diem</i> and live every day like it's your last. It's like on mugs and t-shirts, and none of us live like that, is part of the reason why I don't take any shit. I'm like, "Look, this is it. This is my one life." And so I am not going to waste any of it. And the urgency is not just about time, because that makes sense, it's like, "No, no, no. Do the thing right now, like rush." But it's not just that. It's intention. It's like, "If I don't like the thing I'm doing, or if I want to do something else, why am I not doing that?" It was six months between Peter's diagnosis and his death, six months. It's not a lot of time. And in that time I did learn how to live urgently saying, "Okay, today we are going to do this thing." Because it was that important. And so now, I don't look at it morbidly. I'm not walking around like, "Oh my God, we could die any moment. You could get struck by lightning." That's not the way it is. I'm living joyfully, because I'm like, Oh, man, look, I have another day. It's an opportunity to do something incredible." So I'm not going to wait for retirement to do the thing. I'm not going to wait until next week. Even in the process of COVID and the pandemic and people say, "Oh, I can't wait for things to get back to normal and then I'm going to do." Why? Why are you waiting? If you want to do the thing, do it right now. If you don't like your job, quit. If you don't like the person you're with, leave them. Your haircut's ugly? Cut it all off. Do the thing. And so that's the urgency with which I hope to encourage people, that it's a courageous choice to live. And so if you do it with intention, if you do it on your own terms, if you do it even fearfully, it will be a much better and richer life at the very end of it.</p>

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32:54	<p>Emmanuel Acho: Well, one, thank you for your vulnerability and sharing that story publicly. Let me ask you this, because so many people cannot relate to what you've gone through and thus they don't have the same impetus, if you will, to live with that kind of urgency. What do you risk if you don't live life urgently?</p>
33:18	<p>Bozoma Saint John: Oh, yes. That is such a great question. Because you're right, I don't expect that you would've had to lose somebody in such a tragic and horrible way in order to feel like you should live. My point is that there are so many of us, almost all of us, who have some dream somewhere in the back of our minds. And it's not always some big enterprise, it's not. It's just like some little thing that you want to do that we don't do. And then you wait and it's like three years have gone by and still haven't done the thing. That's what I'm talking about. The risk to not doing that is that you really do live unfulfilled, that you turn around and the years have gone by. I heard this theory the other day, I have to figure out where it actually came from, but it was about ideas. And it so struck me because it was like ideas aren't just given to one person. The thought of an idea is that it is borrowed. So you have it for a little while. And if you don't do anything with it goes somewhere else. And so what happens is, think about all the things, all the ideas you've had about something, you're like, "It would be great if I just created X, Y, and Z. It would be great if I did this thing." And then you turned around and you saw something very similar somewhere else. You know why? Yeah, exactly, because you didn't do shit with it. And then somebody else got the idea and then they went and did it. And it's the same thing for our lives. It's not necessarily about the creation of a product or this thing or that thing. It's like, "Hey, look, in your own life what a sad state to be in if you woke up in 10 years and realize that you've been thinking about that one thing for so long and you never did it." That to me is sadder than death, actually.</p>
35:01	<p>Jimmy Etheredge: Well, Boz, so speaking of living with intention and urgency, recently you've taken the leap towards the next step in your career and you left Netflix, where you were the CMO, a role that many would say dream job. Although I could say several of your roles have been what many would consider to be dream jobs. But how has staying true to your authentic self and living with urgency factored into your decision to move on?</p>
35:28	<p>Bozoma Saint John: Yes. Oh, gosh. By the way, can I just also say that there has never been a job I've left, the people have been like, "Good job. That's a good idea." Never. Not one time. Never. It's like there's always someone who thinks that the thing you're going to do is the worst decision of all time, sometimes in my own family. But you know what I'm saying? And so when I decided to leave Netflix, it was like that. There were lots of people who were like, "Oh, why would you do that? You're on a high, this big global company. You're like entertainment. This is like the apex of the thing." But deep down, I know that</p>

Time	Script
	<p>there's more for me to do but first I have to take care of myself. I have to take a little break and regather my strength. It's been a long career of lots of moves, I don't know why people think it's like so glorious. So I have to take some time and that's what I decided to do. And yes, it's very scary. I didn't make the decision like, "You know what? I'm going to quit my job tomorrow." I contemplated it. And in so doing, I feel even freer to be able to do the next thing.</p>
36:53	<p>Emmanuel Acho: Boz, thanks so much for joining us. Thank you for your authenticity. Thanks for your vulnerability, your transparency, Bozoma Saint John is the author of the forthcoming book, <i>The Urgent Life</i>, and an award winning marketing executive.</p>
37:08	<p>Bozoma Saint John: Thank you, Jimmy. And thank you, Emmanuel. I really appreciate it. This has been awesome.</p>
37:11	<p>Emmanuel Acho: Boz, thanks so much.</p>
37:12	<p>Bozoma Saint John: Thank you.</p>
37:13	<p>Jimmy Etheredge: Thanks.</p>
37:21	<p>Emmanuel Acho: Jimmy, that was just such an illuminating conversation and dialogue with Boz. Authenticity, such a rich topic to explore, but what do you find is the hardest part for you about leading with authenticity and how do you navigate around it?</p>
37:36	<p>Jimmy Etheredge: The hardest part for me is getting people comfortable with being vulnerable and knowing that they are, by being their authentic selves, as Boz said, I mean, you do feel afraid. You are taking a risk. What I probably have the hardest time with is getting the people around me really comfortable that being vulnerable around others, sharing your lived experiences, coming to work or getting on the video calls as your authentic self, that the risks are worth it. And perhaps even more so that the alternative also has risk, of not being your authentic self. You're someone, who you encourage others to be their authentic selves in interviews and when we do these conversations, but how do you stay true to yourself in moments where it's tempting just to go with the flow, but you know that it's important to assert yourself?</p>
38:32	<p>Emmanuel Acho: Yeah, I think that's difficult. That is what to me is the rub between being authentic, between code switching, is as a Black man, full transparency, a 6'2", 240 pound former NFL football playing Black man, I'm very cognizant of not coming off as too intimidating, not coming off as some of these things that people are naturally going to assume I am. So for me, it's a balance each and every day being my truest, most authentic self, because I'm</p>

Time	Script
	<p>always worried that people aren't yet ready to receive my most authentic self. Are people ready to receive me in my realest and rawest form? Or am I going to be stereotyped and cast into a bucket that I don't actually fit in? Jimmy, we heard the importance of drawing on personal stories and experiences when being authentic. Again, I always say your experience is your expertise. When you're trying to build authentic connections with people, what's your favorite story to share?</p>
39:41	<p>Jimmy Etheredge: A lot of times I'll tell the story of how I got advice from one of our team psychologists. That I had these two little voices in my head, one of them's never satisfied, and the other one says kind things to me, and I never listen to the one that says kind things and I just focus on the one that is never happy with what I did, could have done it a little bit better. And you and I talked about that with Aly. There's things like that that I'm not sure I would be where I am today without that. However, I now am more self-aware of the downsides to that. And I think almost every time I've told that story to someone, you can see their eyes light up of like, "Oh my God, you have that voice? I have that voice. That's how you deal with it? I have the same issue." And I think that's what helps me get that connection.</p>
40:38	<p>Emmanuel Acho: Yeah. I love that. I love that.</p>
40:40	<p>Jimmy Etheredge: So we also heard today that being your authentic self takes courage, so I'm over-emphasizing vulnerability, but it takes courage. If you could pick one source of inspiration for your courage to be yourself, who or what would that be?</p>
40:56	<p>Emmanuel Acho: I think courage and vulnerability are synonymous, because you cannot be vulnerable without being courageous. When I think about who my source of inspiration for authenticity would be, there's no one person. I think it's people that have come before me. I think it's the different marginalized communities, because so many different marginalized communities over the course of history have only created change by finding a way to be their most authentic self. Because when you are your most authentic self, I think everybody wins, you included. So this conversation has really reminded me and continued to encourage me to just make sure I am my authentic self at all times. Thank you, Jimmy. Thank y'all for listening to Change Conversations. Once again, I'm Emmanuel Acho.</p>
41:48	<p>Jimmy Etheredge: And I'm Jimmy Etheredge. Remember to subscribe on Apple, Google Podcast, Spotify, Audible, or wherever you get your podcast. Talk to you soon.</p>
41:56	<p>Emmanuel Acho: We'll see you next time.</p>

Time	Script
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