

Michelle Gadsden-Williams Shares Her Poignant Story on Diversity and Inclusion with the Pacesetters

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In true TED Talk fashion, Michelle Gadsden-Williams, Managing Director & Diversity Lead at Accenture, interacts with the Pacesetters at S&P Global on April 16th. Gerri Bostick, Pacesetter Chair, introduced Michelle as a true trailblazer for diversity and inclusion and encouraged the group to learn from the hurdles that Michelle mastered as a woman and a minority, as well as her successes.



Michelle explains what it was like being, not only the only minority, but the only woman in the executive suite

Michelle began her talk by describing her career path which she calls “up the backstairs”. She reviewed her backstory and her family history, guided by parents who believed in unrelenting straight talk. This set the stage for her career choice of working with powerful women who are anchored in passion and purpose.



Michelle shares a story about a threatening letter she received from an unknown person

This led her to the human capital side of business where she has worked for the past 25 years as a diversity practitioner. Early on, she found out that her real challenge was to keep up and be among the best and the brightest. Part of what was respected was an Ivy League

education which led her to drive 3 hours each way for 3 years to the University of Pennsylvania to secure her MBA degree, all while holding a full-time position. She was committed to doing whatever it takes, including having an influential sponsor and a talented mentor. Her advice to the Pacesetters was “cultivate your ecosystem, knowing that in addition to receipts, you must also make deposits” and have something to offer.

Making personal sacrifices for her career came easily to Michelle who took global assignments, spending 10 years in Switzerland and taking other positions in Istanbul and Hong Kong. She encouraged the Pacesetters to help other women and not roll up the draw bridge, to find their own voices, to speak up for themselves and always put themselves first. She talked about persevering when racism or discrimination raises its ugly head and described some difficult situations that she endured. Much of this is chronicled in her book, *Climb*, which the Pacesetters received.



Front: Shannon Seidel; Lillian Kim; Michelle Gadsden-Williams, Presenter; Kelsey Duffy; Trine Alimena; Emily Estevez; Kathleen Wishashan; Alexandra Lee Rear; Veena Jayadeva; Julie Chin; Zoie Blackwell, S&P Global; Sarah Schaffer, S&P Global; Lara Cooley; Gerri Bostick, Pacesetter Chair; Anne Engler; Robin Milberg; Margoth Garcia; Susan Ganz, Pacesetter Mentor

The Pacesetters engaged in a comprehensive Q&A session with Michelle. When asked what she would change about her life, Michelle said she wished she had taken more time to enjoy her successes along the way instead of always being focused on her next career step. This is sage advice and an important takeaway for the Pacesetters who are such a high potential, career-focused group.