

## Esi Eggleston-Bracey Transcript

**Esi:** No one can do you better than you and that is your superpower and figure out who that is. And that makes a difference and lean in. The other is my personal mantra, that's why I say to my kid that is like it, but in that my personal mantra is passion power and it is around passionately making a difference in everything I do from who I am.

**Matt:** To thrive in a rapidly evolving landscape, brands must move at an ever increasing pace. I'm Matt Britton, founder and CEO of Suzy. Join me and key industry leaders as we dive deep into the shifting consumer trends within their industry. Why it matters now and how you can keep up. Welcome to the Speed of Culture. Today we're going to be speaking with Esi Eggleston Bracey, who is the President of Unilever USA and the CEO of North American Personal Care at Unilever. Esi was also recently named Marketer of the Year by the Advertising Club of New York in 2022. Esi, great to see you. Thanks so much for joining today.

**Esi:** Thank you for having me. Happy to be here.

**Matt:** Likewise. It was going to be a great episode. And as I was looking at your background, one thing that definitely stuck out to me and you've had such an amazing career, is that you were previously on the path very early on to becoming a biomedical engineer while at Dartmouth. Why the change of heart? How did you go from there to being in the seat that you're in today?

**Esi:** It's so funny. You just never know what's going to happen in life. So first the question is, how did I even decide I wanted to do Biomedical Engineering? My father was a math teacher and my mother was an attorney. And I knew I did not want to do what my mother was doing. Thick, thick, thick books all the time, studying the law. And she went to law school when I was between three and five and six years old. I remember that. And I love solving math problems and I think I got that from my dad. But I knew I didn't want to be a teacher and I loved people and I liked to be challenged. So I just decided I read somewhere that I wanted to be an MD, PhD in Biomedical Engineering. Why people? Being a doctor, math and an applied way of using math, engineering, MD PhD, stretching. And I just decided I wanted to do that and I knew nothing about it. Like, what is that really? And so I went to school. I had a sense that I didn't want to just do technical work because I liked people. So I went to Dartmouth College and I got a Bachelor of Arts degree in Engineering Sciences while taking a number of pre-medical courses. And along the way, I did some internships and I realized I did not like being in the lab. I liked the pencil and paperwork, but I much preferred working with people, working with teams. And so I said Biomedical Engineering was not for me. I needed to take a break. I went to an informational session about brand management, and I got super excited. It was about people learning what made them tick about problem solving, working with teams as president of my sorority, and starting a number of clubs on campus. And I thought, oh, that would be fun to take a break. I didn't think it would be a full career, just something fun to do. In '91, I started in brand management, and now I've been a CPG executive for over 30 years. You just never know.

**Matt:** Yeah. And you started at P&G, which is obviously sort of the be all, end all for brand management, especially for people early in their career. In fact, one common theme we've had at the Speed of Culture Podcast is that so many guests have had a stint at various lengths at P&G. What is it about P&G that you think helps prepare you for where you are today? What are some of the things that you've learned and some of the things that P&G does differently that makes them such an excellent breeding ground for talent?

**Esi:** Well, I was there 25 years, so definitely was more than a stint. I think a couple of things about P&G, it's often viewed as a great place to start and not a great place to stay, because it's known for, like, on the ground training. You learn by doing, and it's up or out. So it attracts people that like constant advancement. When I do my assessments and what my strong suits are, there's something called strength finders. And number one for me is achiever. So I'd like to achieve, and I think the culture of P&G kind of breeds that. And so it creates a group of people that like, I'm advancing or I'm out. And I love that. And that was one of the things that attracted me to P&G. And it gives you opportunities. I was an engineering major straight out of undergrad. I knew nothing about business, but I had the opportunity to learn without an MBA. I went to P&G, so I had the opportunity to learn again while doing. And so I think that is something that is treasured, and I think that's what makes it a place that attracts a lot of people that you now see as senior executives, because it kind of profiles this achiever mindset. It gives you the opportunity, of course, it has so many of the big brands in the world, and you learn a lot and you're able to do a lot.

**Matt:** Absolutely. And you definitely did a lot while you're there. I saw that you were also the youngest GM ever in the history of P&G. I think that you look at people right now trying to get ahead in their careers. What I find is sometimes you have people with a sense of entitlement. They expect to be promoted quickly but the reality is you have to earn it. You obviously dove in and must have done something different than other people that made you advance so quickly in an environment like that. Like what advice would you give to other people starting off in their career so they can kind of get on the fast track coming out of the gate so to speak?

**Esi:** Yeah, I'd say a big part of it was luck.

**Matt:** You're in the starts, kind of .

**Esi:** You're in the stars kind of riding up.

**Matt:** Are you just being modest?

**Esi:** Probably but I do think a lot of it was luck but the other thing I would say in terms of advice to people that I really believe today is you have to know yourself, be yourself and then share yourself with others. Because I started P&G but it was a few years into it where I really flourished and that's when I had that aha moment that was like Aha! This is who I am and the confidence to be myself. I'm going to give you some examples because that can sound like a clue. I started as an engineer and I joined a company that was a good culture fit. When I was an engineer I was very analytical and the company valued data. It wasn't subjective, it was data and that was a fit because at one plus one equals two here are the facts with the data, our industry and marketing can be highly subjective. That was not a company that had a lot of subjectivity. It was fact based. It was learning how to influence with data. So that was first the culture fit and so I played that. I used that to my advantage. But that's what the culture expected. Then I realized as I was doing that I was doing what everybody else was doing. I was good at it, I could contribute and so I did well for a couple of years but then I realized I was doing what everyone else was doing and I really wasn't being myself at work. I thought who I was personally was different from who I needed to be in business. You know, I was young. I skipped a grade in school. So I started working when I was, like, 20 or something in my first job with a lot of NBA. So I started young. And so I felt like I had to put on the suit and put on the face and to put on the mask to come in every day. And particularly as a black woman, you know, I permed, bob and I wore this little neutral suit, and I had these little plain glasses, and I just gotta have my head down, and I was cranking out the numbers, doing my analysis. You know, I did a few

things that stood out, did some creative stuff, but I wasn't, like, really giving all that I could give. And I went to this training session once, and they were talking about how junior women in an organization couldn't really relate to senior women in the organization. And it's because the junior women, the new hires were finding the senior women to be almost more male like than their counterparts. And the trainer was saying that's because there's so few of them, they have to change to survive. So it's not the fault of these women, it's the organization and why it's so important. If you believe in diversity, to drive organization change, you have to give yourself the organization. And I remember thinking those senior women shouldn't do that. And I was like, oh, my God, I'm doing that. I'm letting everyone think I'm just like them. At that moment, I decided to make a change and I did. Within six weeks, I had cut off my perm and stopped straightening my hair. I wore short natural. I went out and bought this convertible red Porsche. It was like used. It was no money but it was flashy. I would have never done it. Instead of going out for the shoe shines with the boys, I would say I'm going to get a manicure for lunch. And you know, like, what does that have to do with the workplace? It was like everything. I did that because I was such a diversity advocate and I thought that if the company was going to embrace diversity, it needed to start with me. It wasn't my house's job to start it with me. And the gift I got from that, it wasn't about me helping myself, it was about me helping the company. And the gift I got from that was like a spree. It was amazing. I was so much more of myself and that's where my career really started taking off. That was not the goal, but I was so much more comfortable in my own skin and I got to practice that. It was really uncomfortable for the first couple of months because I felt vulnerable, exposed, like I'd been hiding. So that's in being yourself. But it is in knowing myself that I was able to be myself. Like, what were the things that made me tick? And I was being more of that. And as an engineer, what I discovered is I really like creativity. I really like coming up with new concepts and coming out of that was creating for Breeze. Coming out of that, bringing more of that, let me call it the left brain over the right brain. And knowing that and then being comfortable sharing my talents, my desires, even some of my soft spots with others who are more senior to me that had more experience, that could guide me to maybe Esi, you should try this. I remember when I moved from working in soap. Soap is what was called laundry detergent, household cleaning products into beauty. I didn't ask for that. It was someone who knew that I had a personal passion that I might be a good fit for that. I never asked to get moved to the beauty business. And they moved me to the beauty business, which is where I've really cut my teeth, and that was sharing myself with others. So that's an example of knowing yourself, being yourself, sharing yourself with others. And that really made, in my opinion, the difference at my advancement in my career.

**Matt:** I also love one of the things I extracted from what you just talked about was just be the change that you want to see. So instead of trying to let the change happen to you, it starts with you. And I think it's such a great message because you really can't rely on anybody else. But if you start, if you have the discipline to make that happen, sooner or later, you know, people start to gravitate towards it. And that's really about leadership, isn't it?

**Esi:** Yeah, it's like, how can I be a champion for diversity if I'm hiding myself? So, first the idea is first it starts with you. Look at yourself. First starts with you. What can you do? And that's one of my core values, is responsibility, being responsible, taking ownership. So thank you for that, Matt.

**Matt:** Absolutely. So you talked about beauty and how you really cut your teeth there. And one of the projects you worked on, what is fascinating to me is that at P&G you led the merger of Coty and P&G specialty beauty business. What was that process like for you, leading such a large scale merger? What was the role you played and kind of what did you take out of that experience?

**Esi:** Yeah, so I had spent a lot of years in beauty and primarily leading the makeup business and leading the makeup business. I was actually a real proponent of P&G selling the makeup business. Because makeup is a business you can't have as a hobby. It has to be your profession.

**Matt:** That was sort of an outlier to the rest of their brand portfolio. Right?

**Esi:** It was an outlier. And so a number of people felt like, oh, why are we being divested? I was so committed to the business. My excitement and enthusiasm was for the ability to unlock even more growth by being more focused and dedicated. So it was out of that that I was really lucky, after leading the makeup business to be selected in what was called the President Designee to run the consumer beauty business for Coty at the time, which included this merger. That was a Merger of Equals, which was formerly P&G's makeup business. Brands like CoverGirl and Max Factor merged with Coty's businesses like Rimmel and several others, Sally Hansen and several others. And so I was selected to lead that joint makeup business plus hair color business, Clairol, et cetera, and then some of the body business, which was like Adidas deodorants and fragrances. This is a quite big portfolio. And it was incredible because there were two companies, formerly P&G and Legacy Coty, that were coming together to create a new company. At the time it was called the New Coty and it was creating a whole new culture, extracting the best of what P&G had to offer, the best of what Legacy Coty had to offer. And then this third culture that would be even more performance driven, even more innovative, even more agile. And having the opportunity as that president designee to bring all that together was such an incredible learning experience. The thing about P&G, again, 25 years there, it's such a big company at the time, the way it was structured, you have a lot of support, you have all this corporate structure. So there are things I came to realize I felt kind of sheltered from the real world. And when I came into this role, the real world was right in front of me. The level of granularity I had of the PnL drivers, granularity and ownership of those.

**Matt:** Like really getting your hands dirty almost, right?

**Esi:** Really getting my hands dirty. Things that I just took for granted that I was supported in, but had to figure out how to get that done. So you ask, how was that? I would say it was dynamic, exciting and personally growthful. It's like I busted the bubble. I got out of that safe haven of all of this support that a big company like P&G provides, rolled up my sleeves and really got to create a new company as a president designee.

**Matt:** Almost like a startup, right? Almost like you jumped into a startup in many ways.

**Esi:** That is so astute of you, Matt, because at the time that's what it was called. We said it was like a startup at scale because it was a startup building the infrastructure, connecting the dots and the wires to make any kind of merger work. Usually when you do an acquisition, you're integrating a company into a platform. This was a merger of equals. So you're creating there's no predominant culture. So it's really exciting. And also because P&G is promote from within, you're working with a ton of the same people all the time, with the same kind of cultural value. It's the same. I mean, there's diversity within that, but it's a lot of the same. This was the first time after all these years, I'm working with people from companies all over, people that we thought were competitors and like, oh, they're bad because, you know, you get into the real world and people are people. Working for all these different companies in different industries even because not only were we merged from the companies like Coty had a history of people that hadn't just come from Coty, but we hired from other companies, let's call it a Mars or a Kraft or not even from CPG. So it also bursted the bubble, if

you will, in terms of working with a whole new diversity of people. And that was also so growthful. And I love people. I love people. So it was personally energizing.

**Matt:** Yeah, I led a merger of equals before. The other thing that you have to deal with is just there is kind of this element of ego, and, well, I'm a VP and you're a VP, and who reports to who and how do you choose and oh, you can't just choose the people from your old company. You have to look at the other people. And it's not easy to manage all that when you're trying to move quickly and actually have results at the end of the day.

**Esi:** And my leadership team was probably a third, a third, a third, from new people from legacy P&G and legacy Coty. So we got to frame looking at what was meant to be the new company, values, how we would work, and really get the most out of everyone. And that was such a help for me. And now working for Unilever, which historically was thought of as a P&G competitor, although in makeup, Unilever never played, it has been such a gift because I work for so many different people. I'm not just that P&G person. I have the ability to connect with different cultures and use different, not just the P&G framework. Here's a recommendation. The three points to support, strategy. I can flex between that, I can use that and bring that, but I can flex to execution, execution, execution, to collaboration and trust and relationship. So I learned that in that role to not just use the P&G stick. And that's the risk. When you stay at P&G a really long time, you can get really good at one way right, and have enough experience that you're versatile. And the best leaders have versatility in style, some consistency in the core, but some versatility to adapt to different situations. So I love my training ground at P&G, but I'm grateful for the time that I have spent outside, and it's helped me be a better leader and has been incredible in coming to Unilever, which has been just probably the highlight of all the places that I've worked. I've probably enjoyed my time here at Unilever the most.

**Matt:** And I'm really excited to dig into your role at Unilever before we do. So the one other thing I saw, just in terms of your background, is there was a gap in between your 25 year career at P&G and Unilever. You decided to take a sabbatical for eight months. Was that a hard decision to take? You mentioned that you have two children. What was driving that decision? And I guess, would you recommend it to other people as they're making a career transition?

**Esi:** I am so impressed Matt. You have done your homework.

**Matt:** All of my amazing team at Suzy.

**Esi:** I would say the short answer is yes. It was a very hard decision to make, and it was there, and it was probably one of the best decisions I ever made in my life. There's two, if I look professionally, incredible decisions I made one was to live outside of the US. I spent eight years in Switzerland. Amazing. And I was so scared. And the second was leaving Coty to take a sabbatical and not go straight into another job and take a break. And there's a few things I would say about that and I'll talk about the sabbatical. I learned from that a distinction that I use of knowing when to say yes and when to say no, which is a really tough thing. That had been a tough thing for me to do. And I've learned to say yes when I'm scared and to say no when I'm clear. And the times I've said yes, I've been so scared not knowing what was going to come next. And they have been incredible. Moving to Switzerland.

**Matt:** That's where the growth is. It's going into the unknown. Yeah.

**Esi:** I was pregnant. I hadn't told anyone that I was pregnant because I don't think I knew when I said yes to the job, I was expecting my second. I accepted the job before I knew it, and moved to Switzerland. I had to take maternity leave. A new country. I had to have a baby. I don't know the language. A new culture to start up. Was so scared. I remember telling my parents and my family that I was moving. Holding back tears. Everyone would say, you must be so excited you're moving to Geneva. Oh, my God. So great. Oh, my God. And then my sabbatical. After having gotten appointed to be this is such a big role, which I was surprised that I was even selected. I was one of two Americans on the leadership team at Coty. It was one of two women and I was the only American that was a commercial leader. The other American was an R&D. So I just assumed they weren't going to select me. And when they did, it was a big appointment. And then to leave that appointment and take a sabbatical, like, I was afraid. What would the world think? Maybe they would think that I failed. What if I never did?

**Matt:** Right? You're a high gear professional that's accomplished a lot. Like, I can imagine you thinking, well, am I going to just be disconnecting? Coming back in is going to be hard for me to reenter.

**Esi:** And am I going to never do anything again? Is that going to be the end of mine? But why I decided to just take a break was because I was on this corporate roller coaster. I've been doing that for more than 25 years. Go, go, go. I was living outside of the US. I traveled 75% of the time. I'd wake up sometimes in Tokyo. Where am I? Wake up in the Middle East. Where am I? Go. I had two children at the time. I had my kids. I'd see my kids on the weekend. That was never the plan, but just life happened and I needed a reset. I needed a reset. So it was a massive time out and why it was amazing as I set out four goals, really, probably because I was afraid that I would not use my time well. One was I was moving my family to New York that summer. So one was to get my kids settled and launched in New York because one was born in Switzerland, the other moved from the States when she was three. So they need to get back to being in America. The other was to get and run a marathon. So I did that, training for the marathon, which I think, again, I did that because I wanted to accomplish something. Three was to figure out what I wanted to be when I grew up, where I would want to work, but not with the pressure of finding a job, just the inquiry and the reflection. And a part of that was finding my purpose and to figure out what I wanted to do next. I was even open to it being non for profit. And then the other was to rest, which was to sleep.

**Matt:** Which everybody needs.

**Esi:** Right. And I did all those things except for the sleep, because it was meant to be an 18-month break. But I ended up coming off of the break because the Unilever opportunity came up. And I wasn't looking for an opportunity. I wasn't. And when I talked to Unilever, it wasn't like a job interview, it was more and when I approached my job interviews, I wasn't being interviewed, I was doing the interviewing because my mission was, what do I want to do when I grow up learning about industries, learning about other companies. So I could figure that out. And I ended up with an aha when I really went to a workshop to articulate my purpose, I thought, oh, I can do that here. So the first few times I was like, no, I don't think this is going to work. Why would I go to Unilever? I have worked for P&G for 25 years. Why would I do then I have, aha, this is exactly what I want to do, which is use my experience in beauty. My purpose I articulated is inspiring our greatness through beauty, confidence and well being. And I saw this amazing, beautiful beauty portfolio with the brand Dove, with Shea Moisture, with brands like Axe and so many others that I could use to certainly as a leader, grow the businesses, but to create more impact. And so I ended up here out of that. Like

that was an intentional choice to have a platform to live my purpose. And I had never defined or articulated my purpose before that sabbatical.

**Matt:** Absolutely. One interesting point I just have to just pull back out of what you just said. There's so many great nuggets there that when you interviewed for Unilever, you were the one asking the questions. And I often find that the best employees we end up hiring are people who ask me more questions, interviews than I asked them because they really want to work at this company and they want to learn more about it. They're not just looking for a job. They're looking to be somewhere that aligns with their purpose, and they want to know about the culture and so many other things. I just think that's a great point that I never articulate that way in my head, is that you should be the one asking questions, not them, when you're in an interview, if you really know what you want. So I think that's just awesome. I just want to say that.

**Esi:** And I knew Unilever through the lens of P&G and then through Coty, so I didn't know. And I was meeting people I'm like, these people are amazing. Are they for real? Because I had a different view, and I got to see all these incredible purpose driven leaders. Purpose driven is kind of like yeah, purpose driven, but like, people that were deeply committed to growing the business and having an impact and seeing no trade-off between those two. And so I saw, wow, this is an incredible platform where I can use my experience in beauty and evolve what was their personal care business into growth pockets of beauty, really driving growth and using that to create impact beyond the products themselves, which in turn creates more product growth. There's so many examples of where Unilever does that one that's kind of timely now, which is a Super Bowl. I don't know if you've seen any of the work on Hellman's?

**Matt:** I've been reading about it. I have not seen the work yet, but I'll have to check it out on YouTube right after this.

**Esi:** And I've been doing beauty work, but I think it just perfectly illustrates what the philosophy is. It's like Hellman's, it wasn't mayonnaise. What's Esi talking about? Mayonnaise. It's like Hellman's promise is all about make taste, not waste. What that means is we have so much food waste in this country, like, how much stuff do we throw away? Yes, we have leftover even so much we throw away. And so what we would love to do is throw away less, but we want to eat food that tastes good. So if you use Hellmann's and the mayo is great tasting, you can make all sorts of amazing things. So there's a Super Bowl ad. You've probably seen it year over year out of this promise of taste, not waste, you find ways to use more mayo, which will sell more, which is what we love to do. Because you have new uses, help the planet, because you're finding new ways to reduce the waste, and build the brand. because you do so in a way that's entertaining. So last year Super Bowl,

**Matt:** You're also helping your consumers save money in a market downturn as. Well, they're able to do more with less themselves.

**Esi:** I love that. That's another benefit. You're helping people save money and then you're entertaining people because you see last year there was Mayo the football player, like, tackling people who are wasting food. This year you will see ham and brie that are found in the fridge and then it makes a ham and brie sandwich with mayo in a very entertaining ad. So I hope people are able to watch that.

**Matt:** Yes, it's about unlocking a deeper brand purpose. And that's where storytelling lives, right? Ultimately, it's got to go beyond the product or service. It's like, what are the brand equity pillars?

What's the core tenet of it? And what's the story that consumers can sort of associate with coming out of that?

**Esi:** What's the story that drives, that you have the right to own your brand because not every brand has the right to tell the same story. It's back to your promise or your equity in that. How does that drive growth? Because we're creating value for our enterprise, which is a part of what we do. And how are you making an impact on people? You start with this. I'd like to talk a lot about human-centricity, find out what people need and then match that with the business need and what the planet needs. And then you can create something beautiful when you find what is unique and ownable for that brand. And I use Hellmann's story mostly because it's timing, it's the Super Bowl, so it's top of mind. But to illustrate, there's no compromise between growth and impact. And that concept is where I saw, wow, what a candy store or a playing ground to contribute to the beauty and personal care brands, which we've done on Dove, which I've had a chance to do on Chim. Like so many examples. That's where Dove co-founding and championing the Crown Act comes from. Like, what are people's needs? What do they need? We all want to feel seen and feel beautiful. But today's society doesn't have us all feel that way, right? If it's because of shape or size, if it's because of gender, or if it's because of ethnicity. And black women in particular say that the definition of beauty that's in America doesn't look like me, not my hair, not my skin tone. And by the way, when I'm told that I can't wear braids when I go to school or I have to change my hair to get a job, it just perpetuates that. And so, you know, Dove, one of the brands that I joined Unilever for, where I saw the opportunity, has been championing beauty inclusivity. Beauty inclusivity. And it's like, okay, that's incredible. And how can we serve underserved consumers, black women, more deeply as a part of that beauty, inclusivity purpose? Campaigning for real beauty. Let's understand what they need. What we need I shouldn't say me, what we need and how we can make a difference in that that our brand uniquely stands for. And we saw, you know what, we can change. We can be a champion for making it illegal to discriminate against women, men with textured hair saying that kids can't enter school, adults can't enter the workplace. And that's where the Crown Act came in, creating a respectful, open world for natural hair. And just last week, we now have 20 states who have passed a **Crown Act** or legislation inspired by it, where the first one was passed in 2019. That's the work. That's what gets me excited. And Dove is one of the fastest growing brands. We've grown high single digits year after year after year through this model and philosophy.

**Matt:** Of purpose and impact. And I think there's a misconception by many people in business that when you delve into the world of purpose, that has to come at the expense of profit. And what I'm hearing you saying is that purpose and profit are intricately aligned. They're intertwined together. If you do it the right way, if you do it coming from a place of authenticity.

**Esi:** Absolutely. And that's why I almost have stopped using the word purpose because of the people's view that there's a trade-off. And I view it as meeting people's needs. We all talk about consumer centricity, I like to talk about human centricity. You solve people problems. That's what we do. And we solve people problems through products and we solve it through programs that drive impact. And that example of the Crown Act example of Hellman's is how we do that. And when we solve people's problems, we drive growth. We drive growth, we drive profit. And when we drive growth and profit, we can solve even more people problems.

**Matt:** I think it's so well put. So let's zoom out a little bit. So today you've been at Unilever now for five years and you're now the president of USA Unilever, as well as the CEO of the North American Personal Care Business. Very big job. But when you break it down, what does the pie chart of a



normal week look like for you? Where are you spending your time and where do you lean in the most in this new, wider role?

**Esi:** I bet you know what I'm going to say. What I try to do is help people. That's where I said my time is helping people.

**Matt:** In your organization, the people who work for you.

**Esi:** Yes, that's how I think about myself as a leader. How do I help people? And so what do I do? I help people by creating clarity of strategy, meaning where do we go to grow? So in my role in personal care, it's spending time clarifying the choices we will make to grow and then engaging my teams in that to help them understand what success looks like and how to drive impact. And I spend a lot of time doing that. And then I help people identify resources and break barriers to deliver that growth. I help people by being a resource to brainstorm ideas when they seem like they're dilemmas. I can do A but I can't do B. I try to find the bridge between A and B to help people. Because the longer you've done something like this, the more experience you have to draw from to help people. So a typical day for me looks like a lot of helping people in different situations. In my role as head of the US. It's the same. I help our customer teams, our retailer teams on how to unlock value for our retailers because growth is about creating joint value, making one plus one equal three. Understanding a retailer's needs and strategy, understanding ours at Unilever and creating plans and programs that deliver that and drive growth. So I talked to teams to think about what my day was today. I spent time with two of the teams, the retailer teams in that area. Helping people. Again spending time with my HR partner who supports people for the US. On how we create an incredible employee value equation or proposition at Unilever. Thinking through areas for that, how we reward people. So the thing I do every day is try to help people and I show up in different parts of the business and help people and then I spend time with people like you. Not every day, but that's a part. So I do some of that. I'm trying to think of something else? I'm reflecting on what I did today. I started at seven. Many times. I started at six, but I started at seven. I've been back to back. My hardest thing is figuring out when to commute back into an office.

**Matt:** Right? Yeah, a lot of people are struggling with that right now.

**Esi:** Yeah, let's say I started at seven. Our office opens at seven. I started at seven. I started before that worked out. So I took a shower, got ready for seven. I intended to commute in for my 8:15 meeting, but there was something I needed to do for someone in between and I lost my commute time. So that's the heart. So I took a meeting while commuting to manage my commute time. That's when I talked to one of our teams. So I hope that answers your question.

**Matt:** Yeah, absolutely. No, I think it's always interesting for people to understand a day in a life. So for sure to wrap things up, we're obviously still very early in 2023. The world is changing so fast. There's all this recent news about artificial intelligence. We're obviously still in an uncertain economic environment. So many things to contend with. When you sit on top of a portfolio like you do have so many big brands, have so much volume. Obviously there's eCommerce and the shifts that that's happening. Private label. What are some of the things that you have your eye on in terms of trends in the categories you oversee that are driving some of the strategies here in 2023.

**Esi:** Yeah, there's so much opportunity is what I would say. And so thinking about how to lean in and expand our business to be fit for those trends. And so there are a number of them. The first one I would say is the wellness trend, the wellness as a lifestyle and how it's evolved. And at Unilever, we

think about that expansion in a number of ways. One is the expansion of our portfolio. You'll see it's a lot in the ingestibles space. We've got brands like Ali and Smarty Pants and on it that are all, Liquid I.V. that we've expanded. We've created that portfolio over the past five years. Then in our core brands, really in our core, outside of that, evolving those brands into wellness, you will have seen we've really expanded into Bath and Body. We co created a brand with Target called Beloved. That's an extension of Love, Beauty and Planet because we know during the pandemic, the bath and the bathroom was an escape. And so having a

**Matt:** Yes, sanctuary, right.

**Esi:** A sanctuary and breath of fresh air and then the products deliver that experience, that's been an incredible success. So we've really learned there. And there are a number of other areas of wellness in our portfolio that we've leaned into in our core. You see it on our brand Dove and how we think about wellness in terms of mind, body and spirit, physical, skin care and more. So that's been a big space, wellness in terms of food, I talked about Helmann's as an example. You see vegan Hellmann's, you see so many other healthier, different versions of healthy for helmets. You see it in our ice cream business, playing in vegan, et cetera. So wellness is one of those big spaces, and then the other is **community inclusivity and connectivity** that you've seen during COVID and even before that, just a rise of activism and a rise of people wanting to be seen. Products that serve have a voice, people having a voice and making sure we have products and programs that service that are Shea Moisture brand, Beautiful. We don't even call it a brand with a purpose or a mission. We call it a mission with a brand and deeply serving the black community and black female entrepreneurs. There's an \$11 trillion wealth gap today between the black community and the average. And so we've invested we're scratching the surface, but we are leaning in with we've invested \$10 million in black women entrepreneurs and so many of the programs there and then so many products, products for textured hair. And when we think about inclusivity, we've done some work on Degree as an example to help people with disabilities. We had a product innovation called Degree Inclusivity. To help people with physical extremity challenges. Deodorant is about confidence. And if you don't have access to deodorants because you have a hard time physical challenges applying it. So we experimented there and now we actually have a set of accessories. We found there are different tools you need depending on your physical challenge. We have an accessory kit with four to make it easier to twist off a stick, deodorant or pull it off and you can actually go to degree.com I think degreedeorants.com and order the kit. So you asked about growth space. **I'd say wellness, inclusivity, diversity, activism** are two that come to mind and then obviously the third is **Tech** tech, tech, the digital revolution. They hate to say that with AI, Tech, Data, et cetera. So that's another area that there's a lot that we could talk about there. But those are the three I'd start with.

**Matt:** Amazing, amazing. Well, we're going to wrap with that. I mean the energy that you have, the passion, the purpose is just really inspiring, I have to say. So I'm so excited to have had you on today. To wrap things up, is there one quote that you like to live by? You captured so many different mantras throughout our conversation today. Is there one that when your children get older and you're like, mom, what's your one mantra? What would you tell them that sort of has driven your career and even your role as a mother?

**Esi:** So when you say mother, that's interesting and I'm going to say two because first what came to mind is trying to be someone else is a waste of who you are. That is my mantra. Trying to be someone else is a waste of who you are. And you know, I believe it's Marilyn Monroe who said that,

but trying to be someone else is a waste of who you are. So I am a big believer in doing you as your superpower.

**Matt:** And not everybody, sometimes it takes people a long time to understand that. I think especially in this world of Instagram and FOMO and wanting to be other things, you have to get to a certain point of social and emotional maturity to say, you know what, I'm okay with me and that's enough. And the earlier I think people can get there in their lives, I think the more fulfilled they're going to be personally and professionally.

**Esi:** No one can do you better than you and that is your superpower and figure out who that is and that makes a difference and lean in. The other is my personal mantra, that's why I say to my kid that is like it, but in that my personal mantra is passion power and it is around passionately making a difference in everything I do from who I am. So that's the quote and that's my mantra of passion power.

**Matt:** I love that. Well, we're going to wrap with that. Thank you so much. Esi Eggleston Bracey from Unilever, our guest today. Thanks again for joining us. On behalf of the Suzy AdWeek team, be sure to subscribe rate and review the Speed of Culture Podcast on your favorite podcast platform. Until next time. We'll see you soon, everyone. Take care. The Speed of Culture is brought to you by Suzy as part of the AdWeek Podcast Network and a guest creator network. You can listen subscribe to all AdWeek's Podcasts by visiting [adweek.com/podcasts](https://adweek.com/podcasts). To find out more about Suzy, head to [suzy.com](https://suzy.com) and make sure to search for the Speed of Culture in Apple Podcasts, Spotify and Google Podcasts, or anywhere else podcasts are found. Click follow so you don't miss out on any future episodes. On behalf of the team here at Suzy, thanks for listening.