Hi, I'm Mauro Porcini, PepsiCo's Chief Design Officer.
Join me for our new series where we dive into the minds
of the greatest innovators of our time.
With the goal of finding what drives them
in their professional journey and in their personal life
trying to uncover the universal truth that unite anyone
attempting to have a meaningful impact in the world.
This is In Your Shoes.
Design is not some sketch artist with a notepad.
It's much bigger than that.
Design unlocks solutions to our problems.
I'm quoting the guest of today
is the founder and Chief Creative Officer of Dreams Design and Life,
a think tank delivering design innovation services
using a human centered approach.
His background spans engineering, business and design in equal proportion
over his 20-plus year career with leadership roles in companies
like Nike, Boston Consulting Group and a variety of others.
He's a prolific speaker with keynote talks at conferences
like TED, BCG, at Google Design, AIGA, DMI, MIT and a variety of others.
Right now, he's writing a book
on multi-disciplinary innovation for the MIT press
and I'll make sure that we ask him a lot about this book.
So it's a pleasure, it's a real pleasure,
to have you with us today, Kevin Bethune.
Hi, Kevin.
Hi, Mauro. Thank you so much for having me.
So you were actually with us, with our design team at Pepsico, very recently.
You joined us for a town hall that we had
and you share your story, the story of your life
and you've been inspiring so many of us with the story,
and especially with the beginning of the story
when you told us about how you started.
You didn't start as a designer.
You start somewhere else as an engineer.
And then, you know, the difficulties, the roadblocks,
the lack of information about the world of design
that you face at the very beginning, and then, at a certain point,
you decided to change trajectory and embrace design,
but connecting with other kind of backgrounds that you have.
Can you tell us this story?
Can you share with all of us this story again?
Sure, happy to.
And I think at the early outset when I was young, I had a creative volition.
I love drawing, I love the arts,
but I didn't necessarily know how to channel that creativity.

And, honestly, design felt like a thousand miles away.
I spent the majority of my childhood in the downriver Detroit area,
So in the heart of big automotive country.
Most of the neighbors were engineers or business people,
and something like design was almost viewed under the house of art.
And coming from a middle-class upbringing,
both my parents, BLACK Americans from the South
sacrificed so much for our family.
The idea of needing to have a pragmatic job
on the other side of college as much as they were sacrificing,
it was super important to sort of find that pragmatic path
more than entertaining something around the arts.
And I would say as I started to navigate high school, looking at college,
the intersections of mathematics and science were also appealing.
So engineering made more pragmatic sense to pursue.
So I started as a mechanical engineer.
I went to Notre Dame in South Bend, Indiana.
And when it came time to looking for potential employers,
one industry in particular had what I would call a knowledge management crisis.
Most of the folks that had been a part of the early engineering efforts
were on the verge of retirement
and they had not hired young people for 10 to 20 years prior to me
coming out of college, and that was the nuclear power generation industry.
So I enter the nuclear industry with this wide-open door,
they're hungry to provide new talent with these fresh experiences
and it was a remarkable runway to hit the ground running,
get some early cycles on product
and learn how to work with high-performing teams
and build trust with them.
I would say through that engineering experience,
that product experience, a natural curiosity
for business arose in that journey
and I didn't have a lick of business education
going through my engineering curriculum.
And so, the curiosities led to looking at business school.
And so, I pursued an MBA
and the school that I chose was Carnegie Mellon.
And Carnegie Mellon was a place that was empathetic
to engineers looking to add that business layer.
But mind you, the creative itch from my background was still sort of scratching.
And I told myself, you know what,
I'm not just gonna go back to an engineering organization.
I'm gonna look for an organization
that embodied not only technology and strategy,
but also creative faculties not knowing what I would do with that,
but that was where the heartstrings were sort of tugging

and it formed the companies at the top of my list.
And, thankfully, at the time, Nike was at the top
and they afforded me an opportunity to come into their organization.
So I started in a business planning capacity,
but I was really a product person at heart.
And I spent 18 months in corporate planning
helping investor relations, helping senior management understand the objective,
operational and financial performance of the business,
but I was also networking with the creative and
really meeting real life creative professionals
for the first time in my career and I became very curious about design
and seeing how design could interplay with business and technology.
That was quite fascinating for me.
And so, coffee chats, meeting more and more people, led to opportunities
to actually stretch myself for free to show those product organizations
I was really passionate about what they did
and I wanted to learn, but while also bringing
some of the skills that I had to bear.
And those scratch assignments, I would say,
gave me evidence to sort of hold up and say,
hey, you know, can you take a shot on me for the next role?
Can I have a product role for my next opportunity?
And, thankfully, Global Footwear, product engine took me onboard.
I started in an operational job there,
but I got even closer to design.
And some beloved friends, creative friends, gave me opportunities
to actually cut my teeth on real footwear design,
and that was the beginning of a soul-searching journey
to really understand this converging opportunity.
And I'm also looking outside of Nike and
seeing the world converge as well.
We're seeing the advent of iTunes and these ecosystems of opportunity,
and so that's where the love affair with design actually started.
And this unique background in mixing engineering,
business and design has been useful for you in your career.
Do you think it's something important that any designer should have?
How did it help you?
I'll be honest, Mauro, I must start with the challenges
and that navigating those interdisciplinary sort of transitions was not easy.
Whether I was an engineer looking for business,
the business people were like you're an engineer
you don't understand our culture, our language,
you're an introverted engineer, go over there.
Or trying to understand design from a business angle
within the Nike environment,
I had probably for every one person that gave me the time of day,

I had 99 people saying you're a numbers guy,
we just don't see you playing over here.
What are you doing?
So there was that initial challenge.
But, honestly, curiosity was the thread that kept me propelling forward.
And now that I see the world and reflect over
the last five or 10 years and where the world's going now,
there's so much change happening.
So much disruption.
And I, honestly, believe it's not about being all things to everyone
and being such a generalist where you have no anchor,
but I'm a big believer in this notion of breadth and depth.
To have breadth of life experiences,
rich, diverse experiences that allow you to understand
how to solve different types of problems,
but to have a couple deep, super powers,
or deep wells of expertise and experience
that I can draw from where people can still trust
that I can deliver a certain outcome based on whatever needs arise.
What is your super power or your couple of super powers?
I would say from a depth perspective,
I love all aspects of what I would call strategic design,
which is really helping to partner with business owners, enterprise leaders,
to problem solve the future course of their business and
find ways through image in their design,
through future vision aids or future speculation,
ways to make their organization more relevant
and resilient for a dynamic marketplace.
And I would say the other super power,
which is a love affair of sort of physicality and
the love affair that I have with the industrial designer's process
is really that industrial design capability,
and it can apply to objects, of course.
I love tangible form factors and flushing out
affordances that can meet the needs of the audiences that we serve,
but I think that same process is beautiful when it's applied
to digital experiences, as well as human service-based experience as well.
And you moved from one field to the other somehow, following your dreams,
following your curiosity as well, and you decided to do that by studying
in the different the fields, by having an MBA, studying design.
You know, for the people listening to us
that are interested eventually to move from one field to the other,
what would you recommend?
Should they do an MBA or a Master in Design?
Or is it enough to learn with that curiosity
on the field when they're working?

Is just an accelerator, you know, the MBA
or the Master in design or is it something that is necessary
because it give you the depths you were talking about before?
That's an excellent question, Mauro.
I think when I reflect back, it's easy to say that hindsight 20/20.
But early in my career, I probably did suffer
from a stepping stone mentality where I thought to advance,
when I look around at my peers in the company, whoever's advancing,
whoever's getting the better job offer,
the Master's Degree is a difference maker,
at least that's what it felt like.
So it's almost like a mentality of I gotta go get that piece of paper
to check certain boxes to get perceived to be credible for the next level.
So those are natural notions, but thankfully,
as I got into my engineering career,
some mentors basically shook me and said
the days of the stepping stone progression are over.
You better make sure any education investments is actually helping to empower,
it is what you want to do in life, how you want to reposition
your career and what you want to do moving forward.
And, honestly, after going through three educational experiences,
I wouldn't have predicted doing that at the start of my career,
and in some ways it was a major gamble to do so.
But I think the mentality that people should have now
is the notion of a lifelong learner,
that you should never stop learning.
Your most creative days should not be in school.
You should always wanna soak it up and
there's different modalities of learning thanks to technology
and the advent of all this content that's around us these days.
But I think the more that you experiment, the more that you soak it up,
try to find out like all the learning opportunities
that you can have in your present job,
in your present platform.
Network with people.
Ask to understand what they do.
Offer to help them.
Be almost subversive around finding ways to help
the business grow and you're growing at the same time.
But at the same time as you're doing these little experiments,
and growing hopefully, in your present platform,
I found that you find these big forks in the road.
The evidence trail that you create from those experiments sometimes leads
to a bigger fork in the road where you have a clear decision to make.
And for me, it happened in the Nike environment of all places.
I was clawing and scratching on footwear projects

and I felt just amazing gratitude for seeing shoes
that I designed in market under the mentorship
of places like the Jordan brand and whatnot,
but when I looked at the progression
and how I was perceived in the Nike environment,
I could've continued another 10 to 15 years
to claw and scratch on more and footwear projects
to be perceived as a designer in some people's eyes.
Or I could go make the investment in a sound
design studio foundation through the arts and education I pursued
and ensure that no one could question, even myself.
I could solidify that foundation and
that I could step forward with confidence and credibility
because I had the right foundational capability set.
Yeah, it's somehow an accelerator.
I think it's about the core or what you want to do.
For instance, you wanted to be a designer, probably to study design
in a formal way has been important for you as an accelerator.
If you're a designer and you want to learn more about adjacent work,
you wanna learn more about business,
about the world of science, maybe in that case, you still have the choice
to go back to school, but you also have
the opportunity eventually to learn on the go
in the company or in the real life
or leverage in the content you can find everywhere.
So probably depends on what you wanna do and where you wanna go
and how fast you wanna get there as well.
That's right.
Both of us, we are everyday working.
We're both designers and with a business world.
And there are companies like, for instance, PepsiCo,
that is hosting us today, there are companies that are investing in design.
They are believing in design and there are others that don't yet.
When you interact with the business world, how do you explain design?
What is design, you know?
How does design create value for the business world?
And I think is a question particularly interesting for you
and the answer is gonna be particularly interesting
because you come also from the business world.
You've been on both sides.
So you understand the world better than anybody else.
I think it's excellent.
Design, for me, is definitely
a creative problem-solving tool set or set of capabilities.
And I think there's so many myriads and nuances to design as a capability.
But when I think of how does it affect the business world,

industries and enterprise players within it,
I think about the notion of growth and relevance.
So you talk to any business owner,
I don't care if they're a C-level executive
of a multi-billion-dollar corporation or a startup from Silicon Valley,
growth is a mindset that business people are after
and there's different ways to grow, right?
I think we can think about building a business from scratch
that's almost like a zero to one explosive growth.
And we might need to address a new opportunity
for a new market and that's completely from green field, from scratch.
Or, it might need to be a new business exploration
to replace something that's under disruption.
So we might actually need to replace a business needed
by creating a new form of growth altogether.
And then, you know, a lot of us who are a part of companies,
you're a part of a company that has a very large platform
that you have to be respectful of and mindful of,
large organizations, a lot of specialties,
and so the growth there is rather different.
It's incremental growth.
It's re-engineering the present platform
to ensure that it's actually still relevant
for today's marketplace and also relevant for
what's to come over the next three to five years.
So as a designer,
I love bringing a creative aperture to the conversation
not just a human-centered aperture,
but a creative aperture to look at what are our opportunities for growth
as we look between now and the future?
Respecting history, but now to the future,
what can we actually use
leveraging the creative problem-solving process to cross-pollinate
needs of people that we're serving and not just the end user?
I'm talking about the ecosystem of stakeholders that surround us.
You know, if I'm mindful to distributing
product through a retail or a wholesale environment,
there's several stakeholders that we have to think about.
And each human being in that has a value criteria
that we need to respect and understand and distill
and what's exciting is you can design solutions against that value criteria.
And some of those values are static,
you know, human beings are human beings.
But at the same time, they're also being influenced
by all these headwinds and tailwinds of trend, right?
So we have to be mindful for what value criteria is actually shifting as well.

So that's the people side of what we can cross-pollinate together.
But then, also what's exciting is when I get
to partner with business owners and business leaders
is we get to also question some of the paradigms that exist
within the existing value stream or the value stream that
we're imagining for a new business altogether.
And as creative problem solvers,
how can we actually shuffle some of the pieces of that value stream around
or question some of the foundational principles that are at hand?
And then, being a creative, I get to bring to them
a plethora of trends, not just technology trends,
but a full plethora of trends, all the different categories of trends
from social behavior, economics, environment, legal,
regulatory trends, mobility trends and then find real life exemplars.
Like people actually doing that, scientists, luminaries,
startups and bring all that to the conversation
and it's something where you can't expect the room
to just find the idea at the moment.
But what I'm more interested in when I partner
with teams is to create an environment
where we can sort of just immerse in all this diversity of insights and inspirations.
And I'm a big believer when you do that
and you're thoughtful and you provide people the room,
natural sparks and connections will emerge that turn into ideas
that turn into credible innovations
the more that you prototype and exhaust and explore them.
You know, you just gave me a second answer
to a question that I asked you earlier,
How you've been leveraging your different backgrounds.
You just explained design in a way
that just somebody with a business background could do.
I mean, in a way that you become in a way
a translator, a facilitator, a connector,
among cultures and this is so important.
You know, connected to this, you have a role
in your past that is very interesting.
You've been working for Boston Consulting Group
that is a firm that is used by many CEOs
and top manager and executives of many companies.
When you say Boston Consulting Group,
as well as eventually, MacKenzie, and a variety of others,
there is already credibility in the name, in the brand itself.
And you've been building a design capability within BCG.
Can you tell us more about this?
Because if BCG decided to invest in design,
it means there's probably there is some value

in this thing called design
and they can be amazing ambassadors also for us as designers
and the design community in their conversations with the CEOs
and the Boards of many of these organizations and companies.
Yes, great question.
It's funny, I have to start with that story and that answer,
I have to start with some of the challenges I experienced
as I was leaving art center.
Here I was this hybrid...
I love how you always start with the challenges.
It's interesting. You know,
often from the challenges come innovation and opportunity.
So yeah, I love how you do it.
Go ahead. Go ahead.
I can say this was like 2011-2012-ish.
It wasn't necessarily easy to look back
at the marketplace for potential jobs and
me being a hybrid with, you know, engineering,
business and design, early design,
to line myself up against viable, successful profiles.
Most of the feedback was, ah, you didn't do one thing the breadth of your career.
We don't know what to do with you.
So the conversation's over.
That was, honestly, eight out of 10 conversations with potential employers.
But what was interesting the one, well,
one or two out of 10 conversations did get it.
They were immersed in a dynamic market where
there was a desire or hunger to wanna connect disciplines together
and I just so happened through friend of a friend connections,
I met a small group of players that had, to your point,
long runs at places like MacKenzie and BCG and and Bane.
But they saw, as they worked with large organizations,
the perils of the waterfall process
whenever you're looking to explore a growth idea.
So you would hire, you know, BCG for a while.
You might hire design firm like IDEO or Frog for a while
and then you might have a couple implementors [PH]
to build on the technology around the idea.
But still you might only see a prototype
one or two years after the initial conversation
and that's just far too long in today's fast-paced world.
And as I met these small group of partners,
they were in parallel serendipitously conceiving of a model
where they wanted to get all participants around the table.
And when they met me, they said,
oh, he's the creative guy,

let's get him around the table.
And really the ask was, they're just design me a logo
or design, you know, an object or whatever, a widget.
It was you need to problem solve with us 'cause
we're gonna go meet with this multi-billion dollar corporate
and we're gonna be in the room with the C-Suite
and we gotta use all of our faculties to problem solve our way through.
And we just took a risk all of us.
And sometimes for pay, sometimes without pay,
just believing in this early model of like
what can you get when you get all the disciplines
in a conference room together with the client?
And we were problem solving on the white board.
They allowed me to bring in sketches and prototypes.
We didn't come in there with Power Point decks.
We came in with digital landing pages
and we would have conversations
around these early assets around their core issues.
And we would feel the anxiety around disruption
that Silicon Valley startup might clean their clock
and take their market share if they're not nimble enough.
So we would literally invent businesses
in these problem-solving sessions and that same team
that we had could then prototyped the offering
and create the assets in Silicon Valley speed.
And so, we started doing that for a couple of corporations
and then more got in the mix and then some of the reliable partners
that have helped these corporations in the past
started leaning into our team and asking about us.
And we went through a couple gyrations,
different parent companies, but the Boston Consulting Group
ultimately took us onboard as sort of the final parent.
They said give us a list of what you need
to be successful in doing things your own way.
We don't want you to do it the BCG strategy way.
And I, honestly, think like why would they
take a bet on us, these little guys, these misfits,
that are definitely not coming from the prestige of like a BCG career path?
We're a bunch of makers.
We're a bunch of creatives.
But they saw the impact we were able to make
with our own client relationships and inviting us into the room
and those conversations and they saw like how quickly and how nimbly
and how empathetic we were to the stakeholder needs
and coming up with prototypes and exotic solutions.
They just gave us what we asked for.

So they invested in innovation studios for us
and I rode that chapter for about five and a half years to a point where,
you know, the team had grown to roughly a thousand people
and one third of that, an equal third of that, was design,
which was quite powerful that every,
what we call ventures, every venture team was multi-disciplinary.
Design got equal credence in the conversation.
The clients we didn't necessarily fly to a client like BCG would.
We said client, you have to send
some high potential to live with us in the residence
and we're gonna cook a business together from the innovation process
all the way through incubation and commercialization.
And those new things that we created, those new businesses would either,
you know, become perhaps a joint venture and stand on its own as a new entity
or it'd go back into the bigger client as a new business unit.
And that was sort of the incubator that we formed.
And we didn't know what to call it as we were creating it.
We just took a chance.
Fantastic story. Fantastic.
We're talking a little bit about business
and while you were talking I was looking at the poster behind you and
for anybody that doesn't see the video and is listening to us,
Kevin has a poster of a documentary,
a video-documentary called video Objectified by Gary Hustwit.
Many, many years ago, I was in Barcelona and
I met Gary at the premiere of the movie in Spain
and that's the last time I saw the movie.
But from what I remember it's really
the celebration of product design, industrial design
and the world of form and beauty on one side and functionality on the other
with many interviews with amazing stars of the design world.
So going back to the world of design, and thinking about the movie,
and thinking about the emotions that it gave me back then when I saw it,
there is often in our world is debate
between the role of form on one side, esthetic,
beauty, and functionality on the other.
So question to the engineer and the designer, form follows function?
Or, function follows form?
That's a trick question.
By wows or not by wows?
No, that's funny.
I ended up meeting Gary for the first time actually a couple of weeks ago.
He invited me to a panel for the IDSA Sustainability Summit.
And so we've been talking over the last couple weeks and
developing a friendship over sharing inspirations with each other.
So it's funny you have that anecdote as well.

- He's a fun guy. - Form or function?
I love him.
Form or function?
For me it's the chicken or the egg.
Ultimately, I believe any new experience
that we're conceiving, ideally, it's multi-disciplinary, right,
but we still give room for design to do its thing
and really flesh out proper form and function.
But, ultimately, my hope is that every outcome that we consider
is opening up a new path of new utility for someone, some audience.
It could be B to B, B to C, I don't care.
It's ultimately, a human being at the end of the day.
How are we creating a new avenue of utility for them
that they naturally wanna walk through,
that we're not making them come into out market funnel
or our machine and feeling uncomfortable?
Like how can we embrace them with a new avenue of utility on their terms?
And in this world of computation and big data,
I worry a lot about all the noise that's infringing on us.
I mean, I feel it.
I look at my family how everything is surrounding
and how people are being influenced by all this information,
good and bad information.
How can we as designers help design experiences
that parse through the noise and surface up
the relevant information that will make someone
feel more comfortable walking through that path of utility we've just created?
It could be a device service app, whatever it might be.
And then, lastly, are we doing more than just solving incremental pain?
Are we transforming how someone connects with the brand?
Do they feel like their life has been actually uplifted?
Do they feel more empowered?
Do they feel like a hero?
That emotional resonance is ideally what I strive
or the teams that I influence strive to achieve.
And if we hit all three together, that's like a moment of truth
that you can build a business around in itself.
Yeah. Yeah.
You mentioned that we get an idea, say, I think if I understood well,
you've been participating,
you've been joining a sustainability conference, right?
Sustainability is actually something, obviously,
very close to our heart as designers.
In PepsiCo, in particular, obviously, we're trained
to understand how to be as much as possible a sustainable company.
We have so many targets, investments.

We just launched recently this new platform
called Soda Stream Professional to customers.
You drink with reusable bottles.
So we're trying to do the right thing, but it's not easy.
It's not easy because it's an ecosystem.
The brands in the company have a role.
We designers, engineers, inside these organizations,
marketers inside these organizations have a role.
But then, you need also consumers to embrace what you are proposing them.
And you need an entire society to change, eventually, some behaviors,
to take some tradeoffs in some sort of convenience that they're used to.
So what's your point of view on sustainability in this world?
What designers can do to drive sustainability in this world?
What the society should do?
How should we change?
Because sometimes it's not just about the product itself
and what the company is offering you,
but it's about the people embracing this offering,
changing behavior, trying to think and act in a different way.
What is the future of sustainability?
Wow, I think that's a huge multi-faceted opportunity, of course.
Give me the answer so we can use it.
I think it does tie to the conversation we had earlier on growth.
I think the growth ideally that we are all after in the future,
and even now into the future,
is a sustainable growth, a respectful growth, a responsible growth.
And meanwhile, a lot of our companies like Pepsi,
are sitting on massive supply chains, right,
and you could argue, you could critique,
that supply chain all day of how sustainable or not it is
and I feel the desire and I applaud that the initiatives like Soda Stream and
to consider new models of ways to deliver value to customers,
but it's not gonna happen immediately overnight.
So when we think about
is there a leap that we can make around sustainability,
does that fit in a growth context that's outside the core platform?
That's a question that we might have to consider.
Does it need to be its own brand like a Soda Stream
or a new sort of distribution channel
that hasn't been built yet that we need to think about?
Meanwhile, the big platform of Pepsi is running.
So what can we do within that platform
that's respectful of the business, respectful of the people
that are running the business and the existing customers
that you have to keep sustained with product and services?
But how can you be more respectful about

moving the needle and identifying opportunities?
You can call it incremental, but for a company the size of like a Pepsi or Nike,
that's a huge impact if you're able to move
incremental needles in such a massive supply chain.
So I think we just have to be opportunistic but also respectful.
You know, many of us are managing large freighters and
we can't break the boat in our effort to wanna change.
But ideally, we have a vision of what the future does look like
and this is where designers can be a huge influence.
We can use our prowess around visual and sense making and
capturing emotion to tell new stories of possibility.
And once we tell those stories, we're gonna excite
our stakeholders and get them bought into the vision.
And then we can then prioritize like what's feasible, what's impactful
and how do we organize the steps that we take
against those different growth levers, if that makes sense.
Yeah. Yeah, and I agree completely.
Changing subject completely, about a year ago,
it was September 2019, we were both in Boston.
We both sit on the Board of the Design Management Institute
and you've been always a great advocate of diversity
and inclusion in a variety of different ways.
And back then, I ask you help, because we want to really
accelerate our diversity ratio in a variety of different ways,
gender, people of color, and you help us and, you know,
we continue a journey, you know, that we started even before with your help.
And then, more recently, a variety of different things happened
that we are all very well aware about,
you know, something very bad and very tragic.
And I think people like me, you know,
I'm a privileged, white, Caucasian man.
You know, many of us, first of all,
we are, now I'm gonna talk about myself.
I've been extremely touched by what happened
and, you know, we talked a lot about this.
But right now, I'm also in the process of learning.
You know, I'm really trying to understand exactly how to do,
how to react, I think as individuals and companies as well.
You know, with so many missteps and companies
trying to figure out what to do,
we realize that action is more important than words.
I was very pleased when our CEO, Ramon Laguarta,
announced an initiative, you know, with investments
of 400 million dollars over the next five years
to help the BLACK communities in the country and beyond.
But there is so much more to do and to learn.

So what's your advice to anybody like me
that wants to help the BLACK community
and, in particular, because this is a design podcast, their design community.
We know AIGA did the census of the brand design community in 2018, I think,
and out of the census we found out that just three percent
of the population of graphic designers in the United States is BLACK.
So it's not easy, but there is so much more to do.
So what's your advice to us?
Yeah, this definitely has been a very challenging conversation,
but I think with recent events being so vividly,
showcased in the media, everyone can see this.
- It's there. - Yeah.
And I'm coming from a lived experience.
Generations of my family, parents from the South,
descendants of slavery,
and seeing the systemics happen and hearing their stories even before social media.
Like, for example, I think I told you before,
my mother when she was two, one of many kids,
the siblings are lined up, one of the oldest siblings
is holding my mother, my two-year old mother,
and there's burning embers behind them
because the house got burned down by the Klan.
You know, these terrible moments are part of just our lived history
and our memories growing up and listening to our elders.
And then, I remember, you know, bricks getting thrown
in the back of our windows and homes growing up.
I vaguely remember those memories.
Being the only BLACK family on the block or things of that nature.
But the jarring events that happened also,
and I think it is true for everybody in the BLACK community,
it makes us remember all the subversive stuff, all the covert racism,
supremacist behaviors that occur within the workplace and within academia.
And right now, I think we're at a time where
we have this awareness, which is great and
it gives me hope that people want to actually see it change.
But we do need to recognize that the systemic threads of racism
run so deep in this country.
Like reading resources, like for example, the work of Nicole Hannah-Jones,
from the New York Times where she made this beautiful mosaic,
this curation called the 1619 Project a few months ago.
And then, recently she's making the case for reparations.
And just, again, shining a light on systemic threads
that are just not part of our education here in America.
I mean, BLACK history usually when I was growing up
in the history books it was one or two pages.
Talk about sort of non-Anglo-Saxon history

was reserved to one or two pages.
So, unfortunately, we're navigating, at least in an American sense,
a society that is poorly educated on these systemic threads,
and I think everyone needs to become very aware of those
and then how that permeates the behaviors,
subconscious, as well as conscious,
that happen in places like the workplace or in institutions.
So because the threads are so deep,
my recommendation for any conversation
that we have is to treat this like a systematic transformation
just like you would with a digital transformation
or call it design thinking, digital or whatever.
This notion of hardwiring your organization
to be diverse, equitable, just and fair and inclusive
should be part of every organization's DNA moving forward.
And we have to be honest too.
Like we may not know where things are, we may not know
how to anchor ourselves or how to benchmark ourselves.
We're all, I think, collectively, learning.
We all need to share and be transparent.
And especially in a hyper-connected world, I can go on Twitter right now
and hear from every employee inside of a Nike or a Pepsi.
I can hear what they're saying regardless of
whether the company wants the message out or not.
We know.
Now in connected world, we know what's going on behind the brand's walls.
So the external messaging has to match
the internal energy and effort being applied.
One example that I liked recently was [Warby Parker?].
They actually broke down their metrics of up and down the corporate strata,
what is the representation that matches their marketplace and audience,
up and down executive all the way to front-facing employee.
And, you know, what they recognized as clear,
you know, departures from how to best mirror their audience.
And they're making that very visible and transparent
and saying, hey, we are way behind and let's like partner,
let's learn, let's figure out how to we start programs and investments
that get us to this trajectory that we have in mind.
So I think that is what I encourage for every organization.
Think about it systematically, like a strategy, like a transformation
and put your money where the mouth is.
I think one pitfall I see a lot of organizations and professionals,
especially in design and innovation make is
I think there's a lot of [intent?] to wanna help.
But we have to go about it with a sense of service and humility.
So I think if we take a servant leadership mindset too

on top of the transformation that we need to make.
Servant leadership, I'm a big believer in that.
It helps us get in the right mindset
and use the right tactics to start to recognize exclusion,
to start to recognize barriers to people's growth and acceleration in companies.
So it's about moving those barriers out of the way.
Servant leadership helps us do that.
We have to think about education, mentorship
and exposure in education for the audiences
so that you can give them a sense of
what it would be like to work for your brand one day
and that could be career path for them
because you respect them as an audience member.
They bring in insights.
How can we make space?
So, ultimately, it's about like sometimes you gotta just hire
and fund the people that are looking to be a part of your equation.
Again, back to the pitfalls, sometimes our professional friends
want to quickly go to coaching and mentorship, which I applaud.
Right, I applaud the conviction, but many of the people
that are knocking on design's door, actually have skills,
they have insights, there's a pipeline, albeit small,
and organizations can be transformed by some these talented people,
some of my BLACK design friends that are out there in the market
that have knocked on certain doors and been excluded.
Or, have not been taken seriously
because by some subjective measure that's not transparent, or not clear.
They're just kind of waved aside.
And now, brands are re-engaging and it's a mistake,
it feels less than authentic, I'll just say that.
Mm-hmm. Yeah,
you gave us also some very precise tactical advices
that I think could be useful to anybody listening to us right now.
For instance, going to education before college to educate about design
because many people don't know about design.
Like it was your case you didn't know too much about design
and you went for engineering.
So that's something that anybody can do.
We are putting together a plan.
You know, me personally, and many people in my team, we go to high schools,
around the country to talk about what design is.
So that's something that everybody can do.
We found out actually in the town hall with you
that some designers were already doing it,
you know, in [Miami?], in other parts of the company.
Yes.

And then, creating internships and then doubling down again in the search
and the hiring of people that can come in and then change from within.
We are really, really serious about this.
So help us improving is our ask for help as well in a very humble
and respectful way 'cause we are in learning curve as well.
How do you inspire people around you and what inspires you?
How do I inspire people around me?
And what inspires you?
So you to others and others to you.
While you think about that, I'm gonna say something that inspires me of you,
so I'm sure it inspires many people around you.
Is your kindness.
You look at your face, your body language, your way of talking, your content
and you can feel the kindness.
And I think in this world we live in, we need kindness as much as possible.
I think kindness connected with content, knowledge,
confidence, you know, curiosity, many things
that you talk about today can move mountains.
I was relooking at the video of our town hall
with my fiance the other day at home
and she made the same comment.
She look at your face, just looking at your face,
and she say, wow, you know, he looks so kind.
So buono.
In Italian we have a word, buono.
Thank you.
So for sure you inspire people in that way. What else?
Or do you agree by the way?
You agree that's something that inspire people when they interact with you?
Yes, and sometimes I'm often like I blush and
I'm caught off guard by these comments
but they happen more frequently,
and I think one of the reasons is earlier in my career,
maybe less as an engineer
'cause I was at least somewhat comfortable in my skin there,
but when I was navigating the influxion [PH] between business
and then being aware around design, and
trying to even decide if design was gonna be part of my arsenal.
There were times where I did not feel comfortable in my skin.
And you could feel it.
My family could feel it. My wife could feel it.
My son could feel it.
You know, but when you make certain bets
and commitments to yourself to transform yourself,
reposition yourself, for what you wanna do,
what you believe your life's purpose is,

I no longer wanna have a conversation of whether I fit in or not.
I wanna be my full me.
I feel very grateful to be walking in a path
where I can be my full self, I can leverage
my lived experiences in the problem solving and
to help organizations, startups, products,
whatever it is we're working on.
That is a non-negotiable anymore.
I wanna be my full self.
And when I look back, and especially when I'm around other people
and hope that my influence can inspire them,
is I always encourage them to think about how can you nurture creativity
as a beautiful thread in your life?
For me, it's been the defining thread.
I'd be lying if I said things I've done were part of some master plan.
Absolutely wasn't.
I probably would do things different if I could repeat.
But curiosity has been a beautiful thread
and then getting people to experiment on those curiosities in the present job,
for Hobby, whatever it is and maybe the curiosity and
experiments take you to a big fork in the road, right?
And it's not about shooting in the dark with any experiment
and in any direction, we can look outside.
I get a lot of inspiration and I try to inspire teams when I say look outside.
Even when I was at Nike, you know,
you could walk through a very masculine sport category,
but I look outside and there's nothing but women running around the campus.
You know, it's like are we speaking to what's happening in the market
is the challenge for any team or anybody I'm engaging.
And there's real need.
There's a ton of stuff out there waiting to be solved.
There's a lot of human potential waiting to be unlocked
that we haven't even touched yet.
So that's what I try to keep pointing to and that's what guides my convictions.
And what inspires me is just constantly meeting diverse communities
and engaging in deep thought beyond just like
the team brainstorm and the design thinking workshop.
Like I'm a big proponent of design thinking as a philosophy,
as what's critical for our business conversation,
but I'm also interested in like balancing that with
deep topics where we're, literally, trying to like who are the people?
Who are the scientists? Who are the fringe,
edge dwellers, that are actually forging new territory
that we don't even know will become products yet?
Like that fascinates me.
You just mentioned diversity.

If you think about the real value of diversity for inspiration,
it's all about having people by you
that have a different kind of background.
Beneficial because it is their background
is a deep background somewhere somehow.
And when we talk about diversity now,
I refer to all kind of diversity, different abilities,
different religion, different color of skin, any kind of diversity.
And it's magic because innovation is all about
looking at things with different eyes.
Seeing something that you never saw before and innovating in the way.
And so you look at everything that surround you
every time in the same way,
then if you have somebody by you
that look at the same thing in a different way
and that is gonna enrich you first,
but the beauty is not just the different perspective,
but it's the dialogue between the two perspective
that is gonna generate a third perspective
that is the novelty perspective.
That's the most beautiful value I think of diversity.
We're running out of time
and I started this podcast talking about your book.
I didn't ask you about your book, but this is great
because it means that I'm gonna invite you again
when your book is ready and is in market
to talk entirely all the time about the book.
But in 30 seconds, can you give us a teaser
so that people will be there waiting for your book,
you know, to buy and to read it?
Yeah, I appreciate that.
The working title is "Strategic Innovation Through Design"
and really building on what we know about design thinking.
I believe there's a deliberate arrangement of
of design and innovation capabilities
that are necessary to help organizations understand
how they can become more relevant to the marketplace
in terms of human centered understanding and
future fitness, future foresight,
that kind of thing and just making sure that
we also think about the implementation
against that context that we just surfaced
and then really leveraging the depth of design craft
in conjunction with other disciplines,
to understand how to bring the best outcomes when we think about
that strategic context that we surfaced, creatively together.

So that's sort of the rub around design innovation capabilities.
How do we arrange them whether you're a startup or a large enterprise
to maximize relevance and future foresight?
When are you going to launch it?
When can we get it?
Still TBD.
My manuscript though is due on September 1st
so we're under an aggressive schedule.
Fantastic. We can't wait.
So, Kevin, thank you so much
for sharing your insights, for inspiring us today
and I can't wait to meet you in person very soon,
COVID permitting.
Yes.
And read your book very soon as well.
Thank you so much.
Thank you, Mauro, for having me. I appreciate it.
Thanks, everybody.
Bye.
Bye.