



*Foreword by* **JULIE SWEET**

**NELLIE BORRERO**

# **UNWAVERING**

**REJECTING BIAS, IGNITING CHANGE,  
CELEBRATING INCLUSION**

**WILEY**



## Praise for *Unwavering*

*“You might be all powerful, confident, and perfect but there is a little Nellie in you. There is certainly a little Nellie in me. We better start doing some things that are uncomfortable because our planet, people, and our businesses need strong leaders. Nellie changed lives and a great organization by being courageous. She proves repeatedly that the people around you change when you do. Great companies have an uncommon proportion of leaders like Nellie, and I have the data to prove it.”*

**—Michael C. Bush,**

CEO of Great Place To Work and global authority on  
high-trust, high-performance workplace cultures

*“In Unwavering, Nellie Borrero shares how she has led the charge for diversity and inclusion to ensure that everyone belongs. In her authentic voice, she brings to light the urgency for change today and inspires readers to take action. If you read just one book about the power of belonging and how you can be a champion for a culture of inclusion in your organization, read Unwavering.”*

**—Jacqui Canney,**

Chief People Officer, ServiceNow

*“Unwavering will change the way leaders think, feel, and behave—no matter who you are, or where you are in your career. The book offers unexpected candor, timely insights, and battle-tested solutions. Rarely do you find so many resources in one place.”*

**—Douglas R. Conant,**

former Fortune 500 CEO, champion of 21st-century leadership,  
and *New York Times* bestselling author

*“Iconic leadership is inclusive leadership. No one knows that better than Nellie Borrero. Her personal story of over 30 years at a top global company is truly “unwavering”—where she faced the same kinds of hurdles, challenges, and opportunities that so many people still deal with at work today. No matter what your background, position, or company, Nellie’s book will mandate that you do more, because (as the data show) growth leadership is inclusive leadership.”*

**—Rachel Cooke,**  
Chief Operating Officer, Brandon Hall Group

*“Powerful and honest! Nellie Borrero’s story of her courageous rise from the Bronx to Director at Accenture will keep you laughing, cringing at the missteps, and inspired until the very end. Filled with the raw truth of what it is to be a woman of color in leadership, Nellie’s story is about remarkable challenges, passion, and determination to make this company’s inclusion a competitive advantage. She shares her award-winning strategies, starting with smart moves everyone can make on Monday morning to think bigger. Unwavering is a must read for executives, HR, and people everywhere looking to make their organizations better because we can’t wait any longer to get talent right.”*

**—Dr. Marshall Goldsmith,**  
Thinkers50 #1 Executive Coach and *New York Times*  
bestselling author, including *The Earned Life*

*“Deeply personal, with vivid stories that evoke strong emotions in the reader, Borrero’s book brings to the surface the challenges that so many of us face in the workplace and provides a roadmap for how to overcome them.”*

**—Dr. Stefanie K. Johnson,**  
Thinkers50 guru, professor at CU Boulder’s Leeds  
School of Business, and author of the *Wall St. Journal*  
bestseller *Inclusify*

*“Unwavering is the book that gives the inspiration to dismantle bias that leads to lifelong transformation, and celebration of inclusivity of all. Nellie’s reflections are remnants of the past that bring light to the urgency of today. While her experiences may shock some, they will empower all to be change agents and inspire others to stand as allies. Do yourself a favor, if you really are seeking to understand the power and impact of belonging, get this book today and another for a colleague or mentee.”*

**—Leah McGowen-Hare, MEd,**  
Senior Vice President, Salesforce

*“A book full of lived truths, Nellie Borrero’s Unwavering starts with personal, powerful, deeply resonant stories. For those who wish to unleash their under-recognized greatness—whether you are an “awkward ally” who can do more to help others find their greatness, or you come from a diverse community and have faced some of Nellie’s same barriers—this book gives you a sense of agency to win together.”*

**—Sanyin Siang,**  
Director of Duke University’s Coach K Leadership and  
Ethics Center, Thinkers50 guru, and CEO advisor

*“Nellie Borrero is a one-of-a-kind human being who has focused her career on uplifting others through the power of inclusion. Accenture has evolved into a globally recognized diverse and best place to work in large part due to Nellie’s grit and humanity. She’s taken her 30-year career at Accenture and openly shared it as a continued effort to create change. Get the full story, and how you can become a champion for inclusion in your company, in Unwavering.”*

**—Rosa Ramos-Kwok,**  
JPMorgan Chase Managing Director and  
Board Chair of the Hispanic IT Executive Council

*“This book is important for everyone to read, process, and absorb. Her premise is truly about a successful business in the 21st century. I have always thought of diversity and inclusion as “basic business.” If you don’t have a broad set of talent, don’t understand your broad base of customers, and don’t understand the broad base of suppliers your company depends upon, your business will not achieve the performance levels of those that do. Talent has proven to be an engine of growth and innovation—all kinds of talent, including diverse backgrounds, ethnicities, and experiences. Companies, organizations, and governments with a truly diverse mix of talent have been shown to outperform those with limited or no diversity. Nellie’s book, Unwavering, brings that into clear focus. In her career, Nellie has exemplified an action-oriented pioneer and leader as she has ascended to Managing Director of Global Inclusion & Diversity at Accenture. Nellie represents the heart and soul of Accenture. She lives it and breathes it. Her book serves as a manual for how to value all people, and how to bring together diverse talents to build a competitive advantage and a world-class culture.”*

**—Sol Trujillo,**

Founder and Chairman, Trujillo Group,  
Chairman of the Latino Donor Collaborative, and  
Co-Founder of L’ATTITUDE

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*I dedicate this book to:*

*My parents, Jose and Georgina, who set a foundation full of love,  
instilling an inner sense of spirituality, self-empowerment, and pride*

*My husband, Ken, who has lovingly and unselfishly cheered me on  
throughout all phases of our journey together*

*My children, Ginaly and Kenny, whose daily love nourishes me,  
infusing me with incredible joy and purpose*

*My grandson, Liam, who has reminded me how amazing life is  
through a child's love and imagination*



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## Foreword

**T**he success of Accenture is completely entwined with our focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion. With a culture and sense of belonging, we have better financial performance, attract the best talent, and live our core values. But it was not always this way at our company.

In 2010, when I joined Accenture, then-CEO Pierre Nanterme said to me, “We aren’t leaders. We are fast followers.” And we both knew that posture was not sufficient to ensure our success. Just a few years later, we set the ambition to be innovation-led and to rotate our company from being less than 20% digital, cloud and security to 70% by 2020. We recognized that you cannot lead in innovation—and reinvent the core of your business—by being a fast follower. And you cannot be an innovator without a wide range of perspectives, expertise, and insight. That was the point where diversity became a business priority.

The business rationale is clear: talent is a competitive differentiator. To be successful in the coming decade, companies will need to access, create, and unlock the potential of talent. And if leaders do not attract diverse talent, they shrink their pool of talent by default—leading to less of a competitive advantage.

So we set the strategy and the goals, collected data, and began to hold our leaders accountable, just as we do with our financial priorities. And in 2015, as CEO of Accenture North America, I published externally—for the first time in our industry—our US workforce demographic data for gender, race and ethnicity, persons with disabilities, and veterans. We did so with a clear vision in mind: transparency builds trust. Our numbers were not good at the outset, so we doubled down. And we began to attract more diverse talent, not because we were where we wanted to be, but because people knew we were committed to fostering a culture where everyone can be themselves and reach their potential both personally and professionally.

None of this would have happened without Nellie Borrero.

Nellie's journey is Accenture's journey. In her words, she has led the way in “rejecting biases, taking the space, and owning it with good intention.” She has helped Accenture—and countless companies and individuals—move from aspiration to action. Her determination and relentless focus on doing the right thing for everyone in the room, even when it is incredibly difficult, have moved the needle from a lack of understanding (and sometimes even blind resistance to change) to a welcome and necessary reality of diversity through intention, inclusion through choice, and equality through everyday actions.

I greatly value my relationship with Nellie—and I am inspired by her journey. She has been instrumental in helping me become the leader I aspire to be, through her fearless feedback and clear counsel.

For decades, Nellie has traveled the world, sharing lessons learned with underrepresented communities and coaching generations of

leaders on how best to lead others, particularly around diversity. In these pages, she offers practical advice on negotiating cultural collisions, creating your own brand of courage, cultivating a sense of belonging, and knowing your worth. At the heart of all this is Nellie's personal story—the ups and downs, with nothing held back. This is a book about human potential and possibility, grounded in real emotion and her boundless empathy.

It is not always easy reading, because it is not intended to be. Diversity and inclusion are challenging issues. Nellie raises the tough questions about belonging, marginalizing, and self-minimalizing that we must ask about the people we work with, and ourselves, especially if we are leaders. What does it feel like to be uncomfortable in your own skin—to feel marginalized and alone? To have your abilities questioned by others? And to question them yourself?

Through her honesty, her openness, and her practical guidance, Nellie is igniting the change she wants to see in the world. Guided by her insightful and hopeful book, we can work together toward a future where everyone is seen, heard, and valued—and everyone celebrates inclusion.

Julie Sweet  
Chair and Chief Executive Officer, Accenture



**UNWAVERING**



## Introduction: The Power of One Question

Several years ago, my colleague Carolina and I were debating a career opportunity that would have evolved the work that I'd been doing to have a more global reach. It was an expanded role that would have undoubtedly propelled my career to new leadership heights and the type of professional advancement that I had visualized for quite some time. Yet instead of being fully excited, I sat there listing all of the reasons—or more accurately, all of the excuses—why it was not a sound strategic move for me at that time. I felt a heaviness that robbed me of my freedom to get excited and feel truly joyous about the opportunity.

As I relentlessly added to the list of negatives, Carolina asked me in a very direct and deliberate manner, “Nellie, who in your past has made you believe that you are not good enough?” Her stare was piercing and somewhat intimidating. Although I knew in my heart that her question came from a genuinely good place—she was a team member who reported to me and we'd known each other for quite some time at that point—my mind immediately went to, “What did she just have the audacity to ask me? Seriously, why would she ask me that?”

I paused for a moment, hoping that my body language adequately concealed my defensiveness. With conviction and a serious attitude, I replied, “Absolutely no one.” I was not willing to be exposed, and I wanted my reply to end the conversation. I redirected the conversation towards other topics we needed to address. But as decisive as my answer was, I couldn’t deny the unpleasant sting that resonated inside of me. It was obvious that she had touched a nerve.

At home that evening, I still could not shake off the discomfort of Carolina’s question. I tried to shift my attention to my normal evening routine. I turned on the news for some distracting noise and tore through the kitchen, flinging open the refrigerator and cupboards to quickly cook dinner, but none of it helped. With every dash of seasoning I shook into the pot, I could, in almost perfect synchronization, hear myself repeat each word from that provocative question: “*Who. Made. You. Believe. You’re. Not. Good. Enough?*”

I knew it was time to stir one of the pots on the stove, but I was too distracted to do so. One by one, faster and faster, memories from my childhood flooded my mind. Those moments, experiences, and incidents that had impacted me deeply and shaped my beliefs vividly reappeared, accompanied by a swirl of emotions. The questions of self-reflection came in quick succession. Had I subconsciously been showing up as if I were not good enough? If so, had this belief inadvertently affected or slowed down my career progression or personal brand? What opportunities have I missed along the way as a result? Have I been too passive or too complacent because I subconsciously don’t believe myself to be good enough? I was feeling anxious, and angry, but also curious. I knew that no matter how uncomfortable, I needed to dig deeper and find the answers.



## My Early Days

I learned very early in life how to make myself virtually invisible to those who did not look like me. Standing in the elevator of an apartment complex that my parents worked hard to get us into, my mother's orders rang loudly in my young ears: "Be still. Be silent. No talking, laughing, or acting silly. No eye contact with anyone." My sister and I did exactly as we were told whenever we entered the lobby of our building. In the elevator, I almost felt like I was holding my breath as I watched the floor numbers ascend. By the time we finally reached the 23rd floor, I could barely wait to get into our apartment, where the outside world no longer mattered, and we were free to be our authentic Nuyorican selves.

It was the mid-'70s, and my parents had managed somehow to secure a North Bronx apartment in a massive complex with very few minority families at the time. My parents felt incredibly fortunate to raise their daughters in such a good and safe neighborhood, but they also had no delusions about the real world. My mother's lobby rules weren't given out of meanness or malice. They were intended to protect our innocence from conceivable prejudices, from people we assumed would not embrace minorities, while also teaching us not to feed into others' biases and perceptions about minority children.

My parents were both raised in a small town in Puerto Rico called Juncos, but they did not meet one another until they were young adults living in New York City, trying to navigate a better life. Both were bright and smart, but each had limited resources. My dad was recruited from Puerto Rico at the age of 17 to pick tomatoes at a farm in New Jersey. My mother left Puerto Rico right after high school due to the lack of opportunities at the