

EDEN BRIDGEMAN SKLENAR: SHINING A LIGHT ON LEGACY

JUNE 2021

Featuring:

Jolen Anderson, Global Head of Human Resources, BNY Mellon

Eden Bridgeman Sklenar, Chairwoman, EBONY Media

Moderated by Tom Hoare, Deputy Chief Communications Officer, BNY Mellon

TOM HOARE: Hey everyone, it's Tom Hoare. Welcome back for another episode of our BNY Mellon Perspectives podcast series.

Today, we have an energizing and uplifting discussion between two incredible leaders. Eden Bridgeman Sklenar, the Chairwoman of EBONY Media, joins us for a discussion that is led by our very own Global Head of Human Resources Jolen Anderson. You know Jolen from prior episodes.

And, as you may know, Ebony has been one of the most influential brands in America for decades. Launched in the mid-1940s, it was really the first media company to shine a light on the Black and African American experience, and it gave these communities an important and powerful voice in the mainstream.

Earlier this year, Eden Bridgeman Sklenar bought the iconic EBONY brand and brought it under her family's multi-generational company Bridgeman Sports and Media. At only 34 years old, she is bringing a new, fresh perspective to this media platform, which has had such a huge impact on the cultural fabric of our nation for decades.

Eden takes us behind the scenes of relaunching a media company like this with such a long and significant history in this digital era. She shares her vision for EBONY as a brand of the future, one that will help make media inclusive, more accessible and more engaging for more people than ever.

And Eden also talks about the incredible impact that her family and their businesses has had on the communities in which they work and serve.

In this conversation, she and Jolen have what I think is a really inspiring and authentic dialogue about

their journeys as Black female executives in their industries. It's really inspiring, and they are just two impressive people.

We are so excited to bring you this conversation, I think you are really going to enjoy it. We adapted this from a recent virtual fireside chat hosted by BNY Mellon Wealth Management. As always, please listen, rate and review wherever you listen to your podcasts and thanks as always for joining us for BNY Mellon Perspectives.

JOLEN ANDERSON: I'm really pleased for the program that we're hosting. It's an opportunity to reinforce BNY Mellon's commitment to supporting diversity and inclusion, Black and minority owned companies and brands, and women's leadership and entrepreneurship. It's really my pleasure and privilege to introduce Eden Bridgeman Sklenar. She's the owner of EBONY Media group and COO of Manna Inc and Bridgeman Food. Ms. Bridgeman Sklenar has been with Manna and Bridgeman Food since 2009. She served as the regional marketing manager for two years before taking a leave of absence to complete her MBA in entrepreneurship at Loyola University Chicago Quinlan School of Business in 2011. She received an induction into the International Business Honor Society in 2013 at the conclusion of her MBA program. And she now serves as a board member and the program director for the Bridgeman Charitable Group since 2017. This group produces an event that I know many of you have heard of called "The Trifecta." It's an annual Derby Eve black-tie celebrity charity gala in Louisville, Kentucky. And last but certainly not least, any day now, Eden is welcoming and adding another title, perhaps the most important title to her impressive resume of accomplishments: first-time mom. Eden, thank you so much. Welcome to our program.

EDEN BRIDGEMAN SKLENAR: No, thank you. Thank you Jolen, and so honored to be here. And excited to share my story, my family's story, and hear from the audience questions as well what we're trying to do and see the future through EBONY. So I had to make sure we represented the brand just right tonight.

JOLEN ANDERSON: I already told you, I love the sweatshirt. I cannot wait till I get an opportunity to get one of my own. It's beautiful. So I'm really glad to see you repping the brand. OK. First things first, I know I did the introduction. But I did Google you, I will confess. And I promise it wasn't in a stalker way, but I did. And here are some of the headlines that came up: "How this Kentucky Derby Eve party maven is relaunching EBONY Magazine for a New Generation." "Eden Bridgeman Sklenar: Did I Really Just Buy EBONY?" "The owner of EBONY Magazine: After a \$14 million buyout, its new millennial owner talks a historical launch." And there were just many others out there talking about the work that you're doing in the space. And, of course, the background and work of your family.

So, I got to start with the first things first. Let's rewind a bit to 2019 before the EBONY deal. You've shared already that the family was interested in purchasing another brand, perhaps *Sports Illustrated*, not too long before the EBONY deal. But you obviously went in this different direction. I'd just love to hear some of the conversations that were happening, some of the rationale. Why did you ultimately decide to go with the purchase of EBONY? And did you always know as a little girl growing up that you wanted to add media mogul to your family business portfolio?

EDEN BRIDGEMAN SKLENAR: Well I can tell you that prior to July of 2019, I can tell you like most

people, I was just someone who knew EBONY. Obviously grew up looking at the magazine, wishing I could be on the cover. JET Magazine as well, wishing I was a JET Beauty of The Week one day.

But truly, it was July of 2019. My family, we have quarterly business meetings where we sit down and kind of talk about what's happening with the business, new opportunities. And my father presented to my siblings and I that EBONY was up for potential acquisition. And if we wanted to pursue —because we knew that with this brand or a brands compared to some of the other business ventures that we've been blessed to get into – this was going to require our family to come out of the shadows for lack of better words. We tried to operate as quietly as we possibly could. But we knew with this acquisition, it was going to bring a lot of press. You were going to be in the news. So as a family, we all had to agree.

Now for me, I felt that this was a definite opportunity to lean into not only some of the things I've been blessed to do outside of the core business for our family, but the idea of some of the things that I've been exposed to. I felt that this was a legacy play absolutely for my family and wealth creation, which is absolutely something that we focus in on. But the opportunity to make sure that something that is so important to people of color and 75 years of history, but also to American history. We say that EBONY and JET are legacy brands that are woven into the American fabric. So we wanted to make sure if we could, to bring these back and to steward them in a way that not only for African-Americans and what it means to the community, but also just to American and really global.

When the news broke about the acquisition, I got messages from all over the world saying, "Please bring EBONY to Brazil. Bring it to South Africa. Bring it to London." So we knew the power of it, but it really was July of 2019. I had no idea that this was about to change my life for ways that I could not have foreseen.

JOLEN ANDERSON: I so can relate to everything that you're sharing. I remember being a young girl growing up, and the power of seeing faces that look like ours represented in print and in media. And the absence of that and what that felt like. And I can tell you that even today, I have young kids who had a school assignment where they had to identify pictures of people who look like them. And I still struggled when I went into the store and picked up a magazine to find images that reflected the life that they were leading. So it's so important, I think, the work that you're mentioning.

But I can imagine to your point in 2019, here it is, OK. You decided the deal's happening. And now it's finalized. What did that feel like? What were some of your first thoughts?

EDEN BRIDGEMAN SKLENAR: Well, naturally, you're like, "Did we make the right move?" I mean \$14 million, should we use it in a different way? I mean, there are a number of things that that money could obviously be purchasing and acquire. But I would say from closing, which we closed on the acquisition January of this year, it still hasn't sunk in. I mean, it truly is something I wake up every day and pinch myself and say, I can't believe I am in a position to have the opportunity to steward these brands into the future – to make sure, like you said, your kids can see themselves, that they have a voice, that they feel like they have that home, which has been missing in the marketplace. EBONY and JET were that voice. They were the truth within the community. You knew, if it was printed in EBONY, if it's printed in JET, you knew that was factual information. So we want to make sure that

we're able to bring that level of not only feeling of home, but that idea that if it's printed digitally now – maybe not so much getting it in the monthly subscription at home – but the idea that that factual information, that your voice is being heard, and that we are positioning that to be a shield as well for the community to say, "No, these things are not OK, and here's why." Or, "Here's the information for you to better your life."

And the resources as well, because we want to make sure it's not just information. Because you can find information anywhere, but the tools and resources needed for a community to continue to move forward, that's where we see the power of the brands being able to move into under our leadership.

JOLEN ANDERSON: Every time you talk about it, and I have to say, I feel it as well. I can hear the sense of responsibility that you feel about being in this space. It's definitely both a privilege and a responsibility, and how seriously you're taking that sense of how do you take this iconic brand, the challenge of a 75-year-old iconic brand, and make it new again. How do you approach something like that? I'm sure it's exciting. But how do you anticipate moving forward in this new age?

EDEN BRIDGEMAN SKLENAR: I think that goes to the lessons that I've learned over the years. I've been blessed with parents. My father obviously gets probably the most press out of the entire family. But truthfully, both my parents, my mother being the one that made sure my father was able to go out and accomplish all that he was able to do.

So seeing two entrepreneurs – my father obviously more the definition of what most people think, but my mother had to be an entrepreneur within our house, had to make sure that the house ran a certain way. So there was an idea of servant leadership, and the idea of surrounding yourself with people that can be the expert even if you're not.

As you mentioned in the introduction, my background is not in media. There's nothing about my career path thus far that anyone would have thought, "Oh yeah, she's going to get into media. That's an absolutely likely step within her career path." But one of the first things that we said was that we had to surround ourselves with experts, with the A team. EBONY and JET deserve the A team to bring it into prominence. Not just the idea of it being a leader within Black media. But we say: It has to be a leader within media overall.

So one of the first things once we identified that this was something we wanted to pursue, we made sure that we went out and found someone who really understood the business, who could lead it from a CEO level. And that was Michele Ghee. And funny enough, I never knew her prior. And she did not know who I was prior to her coming on board. And it was the power of a Black women's network. I just sent a text to a few friends saying, "By any chance, do you know anyone within the media space that can point me in the direction or be someone that could fill this role?"

And a dear friend of mine, Tawana Bain, put me in touch with a mutual friend of Michele's. They kind of talked, and then Michele and I, one text is what I sent her saying, "I have this opportunity. I know you don't know me, but do you mind getting on the phone?" And she did, and the rest is history.

So, the idea again of that servant leadership. Being able to step back and let others kind of lead as

well as surrounding yourself with truly the best, and people that are smarter than you, and not having that be at all something that your ego or anything like that feels, "Well, I need to be the expert." And it's like no. I need people that can make sure they understand it, they can digest it, and it's on me to package it together and move it forward. So that was kind of the process and has been the process ever since as we built out our entire workforce.

JOLEN ANDERSON: I love so much about everything you just described. And we're going to try to unpack some of it. The value of your family, servant leadership, entrepreneurship, and the power of the network. I often wonder how many other deals are made by sending out a message to your network, right? And that's how deals are made. But to have it happen among Black women, the power of that, right? Friends in the community, women coming together saying, "What connections can we make?" And then that leading to two women coming together to really transform this brand. It's a very powerful story. And I'm so glad that you shared it. And again, there's so much to unpack there.

But let's start with family, because you've referenced that. I know that that's important to you. The concept of family really does mean a lot. And, of course, while I was Googling you, I also had to do some research on the family. And also found headlines talking about your dad. Your dad Junior, who played in the NBA for 12 years. And while I was doing my research, I stumbled upon articles talking about how Junior Bridgeman turned \$350,000 into a \$600 million fortune. And it was from being a franchise owner, starting out with two or three Wendy's, to growing to hundreds of Wendy's, eventually adding brands like Chili's and Blaze Pizza, Jimmy John's, many others. To now becoming one of only three Coca-Cola bottlers and being from East Chicago to really kind of create this opportunity.

I mean, what a fantastic story. But I think what was equally powerful was just how your family always gave back to the community. Why was this so important to you? What lessons did you learn growing up in this family of achievement and accomplishment that now really carry with you today?

EDEN BRIDGEMAN SKLENAR: My parents made sure that my siblings ... so I had two older brothers. Although if they were on here right now, I would say I'm their big sister. So that lets you know the dynamics within the family. But truthfully, my parents came from very humble beginnings. My father from East Chicago, my mother grew up on the west side of Louisville, Kentucky. Neither one of them came from means, but they had parents as well that instilled a work ethic that propelled them forward. So once my parents became a unit and the idea of raising their children and the values that they wanted to instill in us, part of that work ethic was understanding each part of the business.

So my first job was not in the office. It was not as a C-suite level individual. My first job was actually as a janitor. And my parents wanted my siblings and I to understand each level and the importance of each individual within the organization. Not that if our career path was going to lead us to be a janitor, and there's obviously nothing wrong with that, but the idea of understanding each role, and to work it, and to be able to have the value within the organization itself. So, my brother Ryan and I, we would come after school, after all activities, and we would clean the office. Cleaning toilets...

JOLEN ANDERSON: That is not a glamorous summer job Eden. That is not.

EDEN BRIDGEMAN SKLENAR: ...so even, we had to work within the restaurants. I know how to drop fries, and flip a burger, and seat you if I have to. We had Chili's restaurants. And we had to work within the business, because nothing was going to be given to us. And one of the values, or I should say words or phrases, really that my parents love to say, is their money is their money. It is not my money. So we had to understand how to work and to create opportunities for ourselves, because nothing was ever going to be given to us. The only thing that my parents said that they will make sure to support us in is education. That that was going to be their gift. But everything else we had to make sure we worked at. Because if we didn't, we wouldn't understand the value. And especially for them, coming from such humble means, they understood the value of every single dollar. And my siblings and I being blessed with financial means and such growing up, they had to make sure to instill that. So each one of us within our career path, I think it was truly the lessons that my parents instilled in us and why we're able to be in the positions we're in within the company.

JOLEN ANDERSON: That's fantastic. It's really important to hear that you said that you were instilled with those lessons of hard work and growing up, getting your hands dirty, literally, with the business, to really make sure you understood each part of it, and that gift that your parents gave you of appreciation. And again, I know this concept of giving back and community impact is so important to you as well. Tell me more about your work in that space, and equally why that is another foundational value that's part of what you learned with the family and that you guys demonstrate in the communities you support.

EDEN BRIDGEMAN SKLENAR: Absolutely. So the name of our restaurant arm for the business is Manna Inc. And the reason why is obviously manna from heaven. We're a Christian-based company, so the values, obviously, of our faith being that to whom much is given, much is expected. So that idea of community and giving back is instilled from those values. And understanding that at any moment, your whole life can be turned upside down. So the idea of making sure that you're continually giving back and appreciating everything that you're given and not taking it for granted. Again, comes from the values of our faith in living that out and practicing that day in and day out.

So some of the things that we've been able to do, not just with fundraising and things like that within the community, but also taking care of our employees. We say we're a "people-first company," and insert the company, whether it's Wendy's or some of the other newer ventures for Coca-Cola.

Even we say with EBONY and JET that we are "people first." So with that, it means we have to take care of our people, both inside and external: implementing programs that give back and lift up their lives. One of the things that I grew up experiencing and then was able to make sure it continued was at Christmas time, we host kids' Christmas parties for our managers for all of our restaurants, manager level and above. That if you have a child 12-years-old or younger, we give them a gift. We allow that parent to submit a toy request. Obviously, there is a certain dollar amount associated with it. But they're able to submit a toy request. And we host a big kids' Christmas Party in all the markets that we operate in. And again, a chance for those families to be able to come together for Santa to be there. There's games and food, and it's time for the family to not have to be in stress. For us to give back that time that we know day in and day out, they're working hard in our restaurants. So this is a way that we can give back.

So for our family, we say “people matter.” Again, not just the organizations that we support with the Trifecta, and at Derby, and throughout the year, but also the programs that we want to support for our employees who have given us the opportunity to have the blessings that we have in life.

JOLEN ANDERSON: That's fantastic. And that motto on top of sort of saying “people first,” right? You have the values that you live by. And then no matter the venture, whether or not it's restaurants, or media, or bottling, you still incorporate that value of people for first faith-based values, all the things that have made you successful thus far. And keeping that part of what you do I think is really I think an important lesson to share, and very helpful to see that that plays out in ways that have enabled you to be so successful as you kind of continue the next generation with the family.

One of the reasons why, frankly, that we wanted to bring this story to the stakeholders is that we as BNY Mellon have a chance to engage with is because as we look at Black wealth and the wealth gap, we all know that there's still work to be done in that space. And 2020 as we all know was a year of a lot of things happening. But certainly, from a social justice perspective, was a year of highlighting and transitioning the work that still needs to be done to bring communities together.

And as we think about the racial wealth gap between Black and white families, what are your thoughts on that as somebody who sits in this space? And what can companies like BNY Mellon, like EBONY, what can we do to really help our part to close that gap?

EDEN BRIDGEMAN SKLENAR: Yeah. So, to answer your first part, I would say last year has been extremely interesting. Because I think it really did expose that there is still so much work to be done. You think about the timeline of the freedom of the slaves kind of going even further back, to the idea of the Civil Rights movement and kind of what my parents can share in those. I say more seasoned in life than I am about that. And then you think OK, well I'm now at this point, or we're all at this point, we should be so much further ahead. And I think what the past year exposed was there was so much work still to be done. And I think the first step is acknowledging that. So many people want to think, “Well, that was in the past. And that's not something we have to talk about anymore.” And you see individuals or families like myself, you see individuals like LeBron James or all of these individuals being able to amass a large amount of wealth. But the idea that it's still not spread out either diverse enough or it's just not spread out amongst enough people.

So, the idea of first being able to acknowledge. And second, listen. And that's the piece that I feel has been missing so much. People want to quickly get their opinions and quickly answer. But the idea that we all have to sit back and kind of listen. There are points on each side that we first need to understand why is it that you feel that way? Or why is it that the organization hasn't been able to move forward? Or why employees feel that there isn't a pipeline to the C-suite to the executive level in order for their family's trajectory to change? Why is it that housing or access to certain resources are still not available? Instead of saying, “No, that's not true,” there's a sense of kind of being humble with the idea that I need to sit back and listen.

And then once you listen, again, surrounding yourself with the experts that can implement, whether it's the programs to provide the resources necessary to actually begin to tackle it. And then the last piece I would say is being humble enough to know we're not all going to get it right, and that we have

to come with a sense of grace with each other and understanding that everyone's intention is not always negative, but that they're trying. And that as long as we're moving forward collectively and that as a group we try to implement the resources. And when we get it wrong, we sit back, we listen, and we kind of go through this cadence all over again – I think that's when you're going to start seeing the idea of things being able to move forward.

And with EBONY and JET as we bring those forward, we look for partners who are willing to do that type of work, that are willing to listen, willing to understand that assets – from advertising with us – when they send it over and there's not a person of color in that, that doesn't look good to run on our site. And that entity being open to understand why that's not appropriate, and what do we need to do to make sure when you want to talk to our audience, here's how it needs to be. And again, that listening to implementing. If it doesn't go right, that we go back to the table, we listen, and kind of create that type of dialogue with each other. So for me, that's kind of how I've looked at what has happened and my process of trying to understand how do we move forward the next steps that we need to take.

JOLEN ANDERSON: Yeah, I can't agree with you more. This concept of listening, leaning in, hearing, really thinking through the solutions and coming together to create the connections that are going to solve it is the first step. And that is one thing that I do believe always is that this is not something that we can solve on our own. It really is an ecosystem that we have to build between financial services, between entrepreneurs, between media, between communities, to really develop collective solutions. And that can only come through partnerships and listening to one another. So I thank you so much for sharing that perspective.

I notice in your wonderful sweatshirt here, your wonderful hoodie that I've been admiring this entire time on this chat, that the “B” is in red. Tell us why: What is the significance of that? Is that just fashion, or does it mean something more?

EDEN BRIDGEMAN SKLENAR: So most people I say internally said, "Did you all do that just because Bridgeman, and the B, and you guys wanted to highlight?" So it has nothing to do with my family's last name, I can start by saying that. But when Michele and I were thinking, OK, we have 75 years we're standing up on as far as legacy, heritage, we needed to come out and make sure that individuals understood that not only were we going to lean into that heritage and make sure that the new generation understood. I'm 34, and people might think that I'm young. But in truth, there are individuals that really did not grow up with EBONY as it's prominent. So we said, "We have to educate them on why EBONY is so important." Both historically, but also the idea of why it is relevant today. So the B's actually stand for some of our core values that we are leaning into and bringing forward.

We said we have to be *bold*. Bold in the idea of having the tough conversations. Being bold in the idea of remembering some of what John Johnson did within the idea of the covers, and the imagery, and the stories that are in the magazines that pass. We also said that we had to be *brilliant*. That the idea of being Black and what that means, that we are a brilliant community – and we want to show that brilliance. Not only from what happens within the company and what we're able to create, but the brilliance within the community. Making sure that those stories and those opportunities to share the

brilliance of African Americans, or really people of color all over the world, are brought out.

And then also we said *beloved*. That idea of community. The idea of we are all in this together. My journey might look different from yours, but that doesn't mean that I am at all your enemy or that I should be looked at as not someone to reach across and make sure that do you have what you need, and kind of vice versa for me to be able to ask, I don't have all the answers and you do, so within the community, let's work internally to lift each other's lives up. So there's a set of various different B's that we have identified. And that's where we wanted to make sure that that B was prominent in that you knew the EBONY is still here, but we're new. And we're going to lean in and bring our new, authentic self into the world.

JOLEN ANDERSON: Excellent. Beloved, brilliant, bold. Really good words, of course. And if you had the B, and the N, and the Y, then maybe that would be BNY, right?

EDEN BRIDGEMAN SKLENAR: I know.

JOLEN ANDERSON: Speaking of being bold, and brilliant, and innovative: We all remember the fashion that EBONY would bring, EBONY and JET would bring, and bringing bold designs in ways that were new to our community. Do you have thoughts on how you may partner with underrepresented talent, with fashion designers, with other content? What sorts of things have you started to think about in these early days in terms of features that you want to do to tap into these untold stories that often don't get the platform that they need?

EDEN BRIDGEMAN SKLENAR: Absolutely. So, one of the things from a business standpoint that entices me the most – because yes, we can sit here and talk about EBONY, the legacy and the feel-good nature of it – but I'm a businesswoman through and through. So there had to be a pull streamlined business kind of strategy in order for this to be a worthy investment.

So for me, when I stepped back and I said EBONY, JET, what is the real business behind this? It really was fact that the brands can move into industries in a way that others can't. It has the brand cache. So when you talk about fashion, EBONY not only from apparel like my own that can partner with different Black designers to create commerce in order for our consumers to be able to wear, but also the idea of making sure that we are highlighting the diversity within the fashion industry.

You know Eunice Johnson: her collection of couture gowns and such is legendary. And we absolutely want to make sure that EBONY is at the front of pushing the diversity within the fashion industry. Making sure that designers from models to also the supply chain. Again, making sure that it's the full ecosystem and not just the designers that are being lifted. Because again, who put this together? What was the fabric? Genesis within this hoodie was that a diverse supply chain. And if not, why? And how do we change that? And what are the resources that the community needs to know in order to not only be a designer, but have an opportunity to be part of the entire ecosystem?

So that's what I envision Ebony and Jet being able to do is to have its own platform that we're able to produce content, and have a diverse ecommerce, and move into spaces that the brand hasn't ever done before, but also to make sure that it is a platform that like you said, can be a spotlight, can also

be a fund within. What is the way that we're able to use the brand to fund the next big whatever it might be? Whether it's the next person who invents the next Tesla, the next Uber. All the different things that we feel the brand can live in the spaces that others couldn't.

JOLEN ANDERSON: Yeah, it's fantastic. As you mentioned, we know that innovation, that creativity, that design, that boldness, that brilliance is in our community. And it's wonderful to have a platform to ensure that we can tap into that and tell those stories.

Another thing that is quite a legacy within EBONY and JET is your home in Chicago. I'm sure it is top of mind for a lot of people. Will that be something that continues, or are you thinking about something different as you move forward in the new era?

EDEN BRIDGEMAN SKLENAR: I think if you would've asked me that pre-pandemic, I would have had a completely different answer for you. I think post, as we kind of head into more opening of things, and that the idea of a home office is very different than what I think we all traditionally thought. I mean, I'm coming to you from my home, which is something I never thought I would do. I thought I would be in my office, and that type of thought process. So for us, we said we have to be flexible. We have to be innovative. So Chicago will always be home. You can still see EBONY and JET in the skyline as you're coming into the city. But what is it about Chicago now? And who's making the waves? And how do we create an operation and an ecosystem around that?

Same thing we're thinking about in Atlanta, same thing in Houston and other cities. Again, it doesn't always have to be the major cities that we're operating in. We want to go where the innovation is happening, where our people need us to be, and showing up in ways that are new and are fresh.

So we talk about what is our EBONY with Historically Black Colleges [and Universities]. Not just from covering it on our platform, but the idea is what does that partnership look like? If we say there's not enough of us in STEM – OK, well how does EBONY create the partnership and actually have a possible brick and mortar of lab or innovation in order to facilitate that gap closing? So that's why Chicago is going to be home, but we're going to come to it and formulate it to what is necessary for the community so that it serves Chicagoans. Which, my husband is a Chicagoan. It's where we met. I lived in Chicago for six years. But we want to make sure that what we do there is authentic to the community, and not just another company there, and we don't have real ties on moving the local community forward.

JOLEN ANDERSON: Yeah. Chicago's an adopted home for me. I'm sure there's a lot of people are really glad to hear about the connections to the roots of the brand. But as you mentioned, really thinking about being borderless as well. I mean, you mentioned the emails that you got from Brazil and places around the world. So how do you create that same energy that we naturally get from the wonderful city of Chicago and put that in other cities that could equally benefit from that community? I think it's a good, challenging question. And glad to hear one that you guys are trying to tackle as you move forward to the new brand.

From a content perspective, you're putting fresh eyes on the magazine, on the digital platform, on all the things that EBONY can be. What's your vision for the new types of content that you love to see?

Are you going to think about expanding a subscriber base? Or you talked about the sense of home – how do those two things come together? And what's your vision from a content perspective with fresh look on what this can be?

EDEN BRIDGEMAN SKLENAR: Yeah, absolutely. So naturally, it's having the writer base, and being diverse with that. We said we have to have the established voices that can obviously get certain eyeballs. But how do we get the sense of citizen journalism? So much misinformation being out there with social injustice, to even COVID, to everything in between, that it's not just coming from a traditional standpoint of media and who gets the opportunity to share and to have their voice heard. To making sure that the community feels that their voice is heard. So that's where innovation and technology is going to be something that we said the company has to lead with.

We aren't a media company. Internally, we say we have to be a technology company in order to facilitate that, in order for content to be created and distributed in a way that all can consume. So whether it's through partnerships with Netflix and things like that, making sure certain stories are told, to the idea that EBONY can be that hub for content creators. The idea that you need to see it in your home with your people first. And how do we monetize that in a way that they feel, "OK, my home took care of me. And now I can go out into the world to do so." So that's the ideas that we're working on in say our innovation lab that we're building in order to, again, think of ourselves not just as another media company. Because there are plenty. We say we're not a shade room, we're not a WorldstarHipHop or Baller Alert, and we're not CNN. We have to be unapologetically EBONY. And what that's going to mean in the future is what we feel we have to be that diverse brand, that diverse platform that gives you everything that you need, and then the things that you didn't realize you needed it in the ways that you can consume.

What most people don't realize is that African Americans consume content the most and across all types of platforms. So for us, we have the fun of being able to not be boxed in. The idea that I can do podcasts, and I can do everything, and even create the next instead of just waiting for someone to create it. What is that innovation that can come out of the brand that leads it forward? We didn't know what Clubhouse was a year ago. Here we all are on it, and seeing...

JOLEN ANDERSON: On it, trying to get the invitation. Waiting, giving them out. Absolutely.

EDEN BRIDGEMAN SKLENAR: Exactly. Exactly. And that's the type of innovation that we're putting together and we're looking for that talent in order to create for us.

JOLEN ANDERSON: Yeah. Fantastic. Well, I mean you make it sound so exciting. And the possibilities truly are endless in terms of podcast, and digital, and blogs. And there's just so much to do. But I think you would appreciate that you're living the dream and changing the dynamic in the power seat, but I'm also excited for you in your journey as a new mom.

So two questions for you. One, talk to us about working mothers, and what you think that might mean for Ebony, and the role that you could play with the platform and being a voice for working mothers as well. And then of course, personally, I know you have that new addition coming. I'd love to just hear personally how exciting it is for you and your family and what it means for you as you take on that

new challenge as well.

EDEN BRIDGEMAN SKLENAR: Absolutely. So I think my mother, although she didn't go outside of the home to work, that was probably the closest as far as entrepreneurship. What she was able to do on managing the house, managing my siblings and me. The idea of making sure that that ran like any business needed to.

So for me, seeing the power of what my mom was able to do and the idea that it took a partnership as well. I think so many times – and again, I am just entering into this, so I could absolutely get this wrong. You could ask me in three months the same question, I can tell you a completely different answer. But what I can only say is my vantage point was in how my parents' structure was. And it really was a partnership, and it really was an understanding of each other's role. So for me, as I enter into being a working mom, it's yes, the excitement for that, but also the privilege of having a partner that we can work this through together. Because I can't do it all, and I don't plan to do it all at one time. But I know with the right support system, I'm going to be able to see my dreams come to fruition.

And the idea of yes, I'm beyond excited, but also the idea that we're having a girl. My daughter will be able to grow up and kind of see her in this role and kind of everything that I'm planning to do with these brands. I won't lie, it definitely makes me quite emotional, just the idea of having that be part of my family dynamic as well as I have two nieces and two nephews that they will be able to see their aunt in this role, and kind of managing it, and it being kind of a family unit.

And that's really how this second generation is being set up. My siblings and I and our significant others are that next team. So instead of it just being per se my parents, now you have an even launcher group to lean on. So my sisters-in-law, to my brothers. I'm very fortunate, and I definitely don't take my situation at all without understanding a bit of humbleness and appreciation that I do have that support system in order to be the Chairwoman, the owner of EBONY and JET and everything else that I try to pursue, as well as being able to have the most important role, which is going to be mom.

JOLEN ANDERSON: I love it. I love it so much. And I think this has been such a wide-ranging conversation. You've shared so much with our audience. I maybe just have one question for you. And we've talked a lot about legacy. And that's the work that we do with BNY Mellon, working with families like yours to really think about generational wealth, protecting for the next level of the family, building legacy. In 50, 75, 100 years, as we look back at the Eden Bridgeman Sklenar legacy of EBONY, JET, what would you hope some of the things that people would say about your time in the seat? What are you really hoping it will signify and mean?

EDEN BRIDGEMAN SKLENAR: I think for me, it would be that ... honestly, I don't even want necessarily anyone talking about me. I would rather the work that I was able to do, that my family was able to support, and that the true workforce is not me. It's from our CEO and all those individuals that will be part of we say the rebirth and building this legacy for the masses to be able to participate and to consume.

So for me, if I'm not part of it but the legacy is still continuing, then I can feel that I did a job well done.

Because that again goes against, we'll say the value system of being that servant leader. And that's where my parents instilled that in myself and my siblings. And that's what I plan on instilling in the next generation within our family. So that's how I would definitely want to look back and see not that I did anything, but others did through my servant leadership.

JOLEN ANDERSON: Fantastic. Well Eden, you've been fantastic. You've been so open. We've taken so much away from your perspective, your journey. Even doing it, you've already demonstrating that it can be done. As I mentioned, you already have a working baby who's holding on to allow us to hold this event. Because I know you're due any day now, and it just is demonstrative of how much your family values have really been instilled. And we are all here to support you as you continue the journey and bringing this iconic brand forward to the next generation. Because it means so much to so many of us. And it's so fantastic to see that you will be the steward of that brand for generations to come.

Eden, again thank you. We appreciate your friendship, your partnership. We wish you, and your family, and your daughter health and happiness. Appreciate it.

EDEN BRIDGEMAN SKLENAR: Thank you.