

with... Suhana Gordhan

In addition to her role as creative director at FCB Africa, where she's the creative lead on Famous Brands' Wimpy and Coca-Cola South Africa, Suhana Gordhan is a member of the Loeries board.

Gordhan entered the advertising industry in 2001 and has worked on some of the country's much loved brands, at agencies like Ogilvy, Black River FC and Net#work BBDO. She's passionate about the art of copywriting, building client relationships and working together to make iconic South African work. Some of her award wins include a Loerie Grand Prix, Black Eagle, Gold Pendering, Creative Circle Ad of the Year, a Silver Pixel at The Bookmarks and a Cannes Silver Lion. She's proud of African creativity and has a strong commitment to growing creativity in this country and on this continent. She was nominated onto the Loerie Committee by Neo Mashigo, current Chairman of the Loeries, and at the start of this year, was nominated on to the board...



Sometimes you need to put your head in the clouds.

1. Where do you live, work and play?

Gordhan: I live in Morningside, work at 164 Katherine Street and play at Sloane Square (behind the Chicken Licken) where I do capoeira – a Brazilian martial art.

2. What's your claim to fame?

Gordhan: Pissing off a dictator, and winning a Loerie Grand Prix for it. This was a piece of work called "[Last Dictator Standing](#)" that was created with the brilliant Ahmed Tilly and a very talented team at Black River FC while working on the Nando's brand. It was one of the most interesting pieces of work I've ever been involved in because even Robert Mugabe saw it, and I had no idea that dictators have time to watch TV. Anyway, he didn't like it very much – but that's a story for another day. More importantly, it was a chance for us to do brave work with a client that was willing to buy brave work. Even though the ad was pulled a week into flighting, we still achieved our targets in what was one of Nando's most successful December periods.

3. Describe your career so far.

Gordhan: Fear and Loathing. Love in the time of Cholera. My career started out with me sitting at my first Loerie Awards ever, wondering how the hell I would survive in an industry that seemed so crazy. My first job as a copywriter was at the

‘university of advertising’ – Ogilvy & Mather, [Rightford Searle-Tripp and Makin](#). Back then, it was very much a boys’ club with old-school creative directors who were scary, chauvinistic and somewhat cruel. I used to call my mum and dad from the office every night in tears. Then the opportunity came to be a professional dancer with a company in Durban called Flatfoot Dance Company and so I ran away and danced my heart out.

Eventually, I returned to advertising and started to let go of the fear of this mad industry and under the right leadership, I started to love copywriting and building brands and relationships with clients.

14 years later, I’ve realised that advertising has coloured my world with the ‘unpopular’ Crayola colours I might not have initially selected, and it has offered me some of my most memorable experiences. There are still days when I want to call home and ball my eyes out, but mostly there is an understanding that while what we do is incredibly hard, there is great reward in making and creating, and a simple love in seeing your ideas grow and find a space in the world.

4. Tell us a few of your favourite things.

Gordhan: I love words and one of my favourite things is the secret joy that comes from picking the best words – like picking coconut chocolate in the All Sorts box, and not orange crème.

I love the mountains – specifically a hike to Policeman’s Helmet in the Northern Drakensberg (where my selfie was taken). It is pure peace and beauty.

I love capoeira (even though everyone teases me because they think it’s a dance). It is a martial art that is over 400 years old, started by the African slaves in Brazil. It involves strength, flexibility, creativity, strategy, music and what is called “*manginga*” – trickery.

5. What do you love about your industry?

Gordhan: I love this industry because there is something new to learn every day. It keeps you young. I love the brains trust in this industry. And I love that you can say things like “Puppy Monkey Baby” and people will know what you mean. There is a power in creativity to solve problems and there is a beauty in making the things that were born in your mind.

6. Describe your average workday, if such a thing exists.

Gordhan: Coffee. Diary. Freak out. Coffee. Reviews. Reviews. Meetings. Meetings. “When will I pee?” Crisis. Crisis resolved. Brown rice and lentils. Walk talk eat. Hello client. Here’s my idea. You don’t like my idea? I have more! Traffic. Phone calls. Phone calls. Home. Ping. Whatsapp. Zzzz. Ping.

7. What are the tools of your trade?

Gordhan: I think we live in a time where people who enter this industry have to be multidisciplinary. They have to be

experimental and fast learners. You become so much more marketable if you can do more than writing or art direction. Having said that though, you still need to have exceptional skill at your core form – writing, design or art direction. And it also helps if you love your skill. Apart from the artisanal tools, I believe that in this industry, you also need emotional intelligence and a spirit of resilience.

8. Who is getting it right in your industry?

Gordhan: I think it's a really tough time in the industry. We're facing many issues like transformation, finding talent, integration between agency partners, and of course, an economic slide that has made our clients incredibly nervous, grumpy and fearful. The ones that are getting it right are the ones that have let go of the silos called ATL, BTL, digital and PR. They're the ones who are integrating seamlessly. They're the ones who aren't afraid to make truly South African work. They also have clients who are less clingy and more trusting, clients who respect expertise and who are willing to be partners in the process of making great work.

9. What are you working on right now?

Gordhan: Right now, I'm working on an Olympics campaign for Coca-Cola and some very exciting global work for Coca-Cola in 2017. I'm also working on a new product launch for Wimpy.

10. Tell us some of the buzzwords floating around in your industry at the moment, and some of the catchphrases you utter yourself.

Gordhan: I hate catchphrases so I try to avoid using them but sometimes catchphrases are like unannounced guests and suddenly phrases like "take this offline" and "unpack further" barge out of my mouth.

Some of the buzzwords floating around that need to be swatted are "content", "storytelling", "engagement", "ROI" and "relevant".

11. Where and when do you have your best ideas?

Gordhan: When I'm truly relaxed – in the shower, occasionally in my sleep and while walking. Basically, the best ideas come when you aren't wearing a hat that says, "I'm looking for a big Cannes Grand Prix idea."

12. What's your secret talent/party trick?

Gordhan: I can do the cancan and the moonwalk with my fingers.

13. Are you a technophobe or a technophile?

Gordhan: I'm a technophobe when there are too many cords involved and the UX sucks, and a technophile the rest of the time.

14. What would we find if we scrolled through your phone?

Gordhan: More than one to-do list. Random quotes that I like. Random pictures. My new favourite meditation app. And my inbox that has a red label over it reading 4,284. What?! I don't have time to delete emails.

15. What advice would you give to newbies hoping to crack into the industry?

Gordhan: Don't be afraid of hard work. Don't be afraid to learn from people around you. Don't sit down in an agency and become one with the wallpaper. Cynicism is your enemy. Find bits of yourself that you want to put into your work. And don't do this if you don't love it.

Simple as that. You can read more about Gordhan by [clicking here](#), tracking [her blog](#), following her fortnightly column in the *Business Day* and interacting with her on [Twitter](#)

Remember to visit the [Loeries website](#) and our [special section](#) to keep your finger on that creative pulse if you can't wait for Loeries® Creative Week™ Durban from 15 to 21 August.

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

Leigh Andrews AKA the #MilkshakeQueen, is former Editor-in-Chief: Marketing & Media at Bizcommunity.com, with a passion for issues of diversity, inclusion and equality, and of course, gourmet food and drinks! She can be reached on Twitter at @Leigh_Andrews.

- #Loeries2020: Behavioural economics as creativity, but not as we know it... - 24 Nov 2020
- #D2020: Ignite your inner activist - representation through illustration - 27 Feb 2020
- #D2020: How Sho Madjozi brought traditional Tsonga *xibelelani* into 2020 - 27 Feb 2020
- #D2020: Silver jubilee shines with Department of Audacious Projects launch - 26 Feb 2020
- #BehindtheSelfie with... Qingqile 'WingWing' Mdlulwa, COO at The Whole Idea - 26 Feb 2020

[View my profile and articles...](#)

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>