

Women challenge the norm, so what?

 By Sarah Dexter

30 Aug 2018

Sometimes I wonder whether specifically calling out 'gender inequality' in terms of women leadership roles in the workplace - particularly within the advertising profession - actually amounts to anything. I sometimes wonder if it's adding any value to the overall inequality we see across all industries, not just our own. And I wonder whether we should be putting the advertising industry on a pedestal on its own.



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And then there are days when as a team, we walk out of a pitch, a presentation or a strat session, and there are no men or women in my mind, just a team. A group of dedicated, hardworking individuals that work as one, challenging the status quo, driving change and creating creative magic. Should this not be the preserve of any business?

The reality, however, is that women are under-represented in general. Whether it's in advertising, medium sized business or large multinational organisation. Perhaps my views are sometimes skewed. And for good reason.

Our aim is to have the best team possible working on a client brief. The strongest team available to provide brands with a communication campaign that just hits all the right notes and delivers.

It just so happens that at my agency, this team is predominantly female.

No place for mediocrity

Our total staff complement is 61% female. Women account for just on 60% of all senior roles within the agency, and our board has a 50-50 female/male split. This is an anomaly in the industry and outstrips the workforce stats in South Africa where women fill 44% of all skilled posts. Not a great stat when you consider as women, we account for [51% of the total population](#).

Yes, women in the marketing and advertising fields need to be recognised and celebrated for their work. But so, should everyone. Why do we speak of teams, if those teams need to conform to some or other imposed societal obligation? This is business! There is no place for mediocrity. It's about winning. Challenging the status quo needs to be met with real-world results.

Keep challenging the status quo

Regardless of gender, we need to keep challenging the status quo. Let's not simply aim to be representative of the stats. As women, we should all strive to effect change, but not in a simplistic manner that keeps us subjugated by 'labelling' us. Attack from both ends, start at the bottom, and at the same time at the top. Challenge everything.

When you apply a challenger attitude, you will win. You will rise above. Like writer and philanthropist Charles Buxton famously said,

“ *“You will never win if you never begin.”* ”

ABOUT SARAH DEXTER

Sarah is the CEO of MullenLowe South Africa. What she has learned about both knowledge and approach has put her in good stead when taking the MullenLowe challenger attitude into the market. MullenLowe is focused on delivering an Unfair Share of Attention for clients' brands and is consistently ranked among the most awarded creative and effective agency networks in the world. Sarah chairs the Education Portfolio Committee at the ACA and regularly speaks at industry forums.

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