

TJ Njozela, creative director at Grey Advertising Africa

 By [Evan-Lee Courie](#)

1 Dec 2021

This week, we chat to TJ Njozela, creative director at Grey Advertising Africa.



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■ ***You were selected as a jury member for the ADC 101st Annual Awards. How are you feeling and what does this mean for you personally?***

When I got the invitation from the ADC 101st Annual Awards, my first thought was, “How’d that get past the spam filter?” Being a juror at one of the most prestigious awards shows wasn’t in my mind space. I legit thought I was getting scammed. So I did what anyone would do...I went to the official site to verify details and also checked LinkedIn. Eish, guys, sometimes you just can’t believe it. When it finally hit that it’s for real, I felt truly honoured. It’s an opportunity to get to see some of the best-crafted work in the world, which will inspire, motivate, and elevate my level of creativity. I am really looking forward to it.

■ ***Could you briefly explain what your role entails?***

Ja neh! Being a creative director ain’t easy. I equate it to being like the wind. When situations are heated, we’re the gentle breeze that keeps everyone cool. When there’s a mountainous challenge ahead, we find a way around, or reshape it. Occasionally, when we see that people ba taaida, we’re also like a nice sand slap on the legs when you’re walking on the beach.

It’s a role that has a lot of pressure because everybody’s relying on you: clients, the creative team, the ops team, as well as your boss. Mara at the end of the day, we make sure that the things that make the creative pots are done.

▣ *What's really behind your mask - literally and figuratively speaking?*

A dashing handsome, charming, fun, confident and clearly modest guy. I suppose you could also add wit to the list...If you insist. JK. That's the mask.

I'm actually a chilled person. Probably one of the last people on the planet who still lays in bed listening to music; and could do it all day. For real. Matter of fact, nothing is probably the thing I enjoy doing the most. I also enjoy doing the stuff everyone has on their Bumble profiles like reading, meeting new people, travelling, going out, theatre, adventure, etc. The most fun and exciting thing I've ever done was dune bugging in Namibia.

▣ *Growing up, what did you want to be?*

I mean...like every Mzansi kid at that time, there was only one thing I wanted to be. I wanted to be a Simba chippy. Unfortunately, I was born too human for that. I also wanted to be a chess grandmaster, or an actor, or a basketball player. I only ever got as far as provincial colours for chess, dropping out of Wits School of Arts, breaking a few homies' ankles on the court (OG ballers know what I mean).

I know one of the running jokes in the industry is "...then you shouldn't have gotten into advertising," but, on the real, me I like this thing. I genuinely can't think of anything else I'd rather do.

▣ *How did you end up in the creative industry?*

So that Wits School of Arts part I sort of brushed through in the last question is actually how. It's a long story that involves dropping out of TUKS from a BSc in Biological Sciences (I know, right?!), my mom not wanting me to switch from that to a BA in Dramatic Art, not paying tuition fees, sleeping anywhere I could lay head, and finally deciding to get a part-time job to try and pay for the fees myself. My girlfriend at the time campaigned for me to get an internship at Y&R. I got the gig, but unpaid. It turned out that I enjoyed advertising more than my aspirations of being an actor, so I've been doing it since.

▣ *You joined Grey Advertising Africa as creative director earlier this year. What has the journey been like?*

That time it hasn't even been a year yet and already I feel like a grootman. It's been great! I mean...the leadership we have is inspiring, caring, driven, and genuine. The people that I work with are some of the best in the world. The work is solid. The network is really connected...like for realsies. I joined at a time when Grey is building momentum, and it's exciting to be a part of a new phase of an agency's journey. To be honest, I see myself going from a grootman to a madala here.



TJ Njozela joins Grey Advertising Africa as creative director

Grey Africa 24 Feb 2021



▣ *Grey Advertising has won several awards this year. Can you comment on these milestones?*

Winning awards is always dope, and yeah, Grey has won quite a few this year. I think what's more important is that when you look at the kind of work that has contributed to the awards tally, it's work that embodies the agency's philosophy of being famously effective. The work isn't only recognised by the international creative community that sits on awards juries, mara it's also recognised for the value it creates for our clients and the people who buy their things.



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Evan-Lee Courie 25 Nov 2021



Personally, I vibe with that. Making work just to win gets you the fame, sure. When it's making a real difference for clients and society, that makes it more meaningful.

■ ***What excites you most about your career?***

It never gets boring for me. Ja, for the most part, there are briefs that come that don't have much room to be creative, but, for me, making something out of nothing is one of the greatest skills a creative can have. Those many, many, many moons ago when I was a young blood, I used to write the "Kellogg's Cornflakes now R39.99" ads for radio, TV and catalogues. And yazini, if it so happens, I'd write them today even. Maybe I'm just weird but, for me, knowing that I've given 100% at the end of each day is very fulfilling.

■ ***What has been the highlight of your career?***

You know that feeling when you leave high school, go to tertiary (after O-week, when the actual lectures start), and you wonder why you were never prepared for this? That transition is rough because there's a huge gap in content, structure, methodology...everything. In some ways, the gap between tertiary and the first job is a lot harder. That's why one of my biggest passions is making sure that young people who get into the industry don't have to struggle. The highlights of my career are all the interns that I've had the pleasure of mentoring, who are now making a living for themselves, whether in advertising or not.

■ ***When you're not busy working, what do you do? How do you socialise these days?***

Me, I'm a sucker for groovas! Before covivi came through, I would find different places to go. New spots that just opened up. Places I've never heard of. I'd even go to places most wouldn't even think to go. From gontjies to rooftop bars, it was my thing. I still go out, although every now and then, and mostly with my close friends. These streets ain't safe no more, so I don't go to places that are extremely crowded or where people get too friendly and start hugging you like you've been friends since. I'm double vaxxed and all, halala, but not everyone is, and me, I like my life.

■ ***You were involved in an initiative called #30days30wheelchairs. Could you tell us about this?***

I got injured playing 5-a-side and had to be on crutches for a few weeks. At the time I lived Centurion, worked in Bryanston, and was part Mexican because I was Car-los (total dad joke). I had to take the Gautrain to work. Which also meant busses. Also the crowds. It wasn't much fun in crutches. I also couldn't shower or even play with the kids. I knew that it would be weeks, and a lot of fun in physio before I recovered, but I thought about people who never recovered and had to live unable to walk.

Then I thought about how it must be to not even have a wheelchair to allow you to be mobile. Can you imagine being so incapacitated you can't do anything yourself? A simple thing like a wheelchair could also be the difference between being able to go for interviews, meet up with friends, and more. So I decided I would use the thing that I would get back that most

people don't, and walk from Joburg to Cape Town to raise funds to get wheelchairs for the people who need them most.

It was physically and mentally straining, but I made it and made a difference for the people who needed it most.

▣ ***How will you be ending off 2021?***

I dunno, NYE has never been a thing for me. I really just don't get it. So, instead of killing the vibe by being that guy who's ruminating on the significance of a digit change on the calendar, and why 1 January is a day to start afresh, when a fresh start can be had any moment. But then again, I also like things, and NYE is a parte after parte.

Right now, I'm leaning more towards just getting a good night's sleep. Hay', I'll see it when I see it.

▣ ***What's next for you?***

Probably one of the most underrated answers ever was "The same thing we do every day, Pinky. Try to take over the world." Okay, I'm not trying to take over the world with half-baked ideas, but I am trying to make a difference in the world. Every day. I think I'm in an industry that celebrates that, a company that embodies it, in a time where society needs it.

So what's next for me is the same as what's now for me – finding ways to make the world a better place, one brief at a time.

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