

How Lyft's VP creative Karin Onsanger-Birch walked away from ego

 By [Karabo Ledwaba](#)

7 Oct 2022

Karin Onsanger-Birch left a high-profile CCO position to join Lyft - a ride-sharing company - after she had a wake-up call during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic.



Source: www.unsplash.com

Onsanger-Birch was speaking at the DStv Media Sales International Seminar of Creativity on Thursday, the VP of creative said she decided to take her new job because she wanted to move away from making ads that were being specifically made to win awards.

She said disrupting the ego of both client and agencies is key to great creative work.

Disrupting the ego

“[To join Lyft], I would be walking away from a CCO title and Cannes and winning awards and being a woman who worked my way up in a boy’s world. Would my ego be able to deal with walking away from that?” she asked.

One of her biggest challenges working for an agency was balancing two different objectives: that of the agency and the

client.

One example she used was of a cleaning brand that overnight became one of the most sought-after products in the US because of Covid-19.

A product that was never cool became something everyone wanted, and they could not keep it on the shelves. People were fighting over this brand and hoarding it.

A conflict of interest

The right thing for the brand in this situation was to go “dark” and not comment on the situation but just get more products on the shelves.

“But at the same time I’m getting calls from corporate global leadership because this is the most fantastic once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to make incredibly famous work that would make the agency famous because this boring product is now at the centre of culture,” she said. “That conflict of interest between client and agency has always existed. But Covid-19 made me rethink a lot of things and it made me rethink my values and I realised dancing around this issue had cost way too much of my energy.”

She said some of the key challenges faced while working in an agency include not having a seat at the table with key decision-makers, prioritising billable hours and a slow downed decision-making process.



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“All of these things get in the way of creativity...up until Covid-19 I had just accepted that this goes with the territory and now at this point I was CCO and co-president of a San Francisco branch, a widely successful role...but it just did not feel right.”

Osanger-Birch said this was how she knew she needed a change - and it was at this pinnacle in her life when she got a call from Lyft that changed her career trajectory.

“We would all be working towards the same objective, just a single-minded focus,” she said.

Disrupting a clients ego

Before joining Lyft, Osanger-Birch had worked on highly successful campaigns like rebranding clothing brand Levis.

According to Osanger-Birch, it was difficult to change the brand’s mind on moving from the cliched ad method of “boy meets girl” despite declining sales.

Osanger-Birch said Levis was seen by young people as a brand that their parents used to wear “when they thought they were cool”, even though it was marketed to young people.

She said their new ad went in a different trajectory from their decades-old ad ideas and this was well received. She said revenue sales increased by up 23% and the white Levis logo shirt became an iconic wardrobe staple. All because the client agreed to let go of ego.

Osanger-Birch's career trajectory has taught her that a disruption of the ego may bring out better creative work and decision-making by both creatives and brands.

ABOUT KARABO LEDWABA

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