

# 7% Tribe launches to advance the female workforce

 By Jessica Tennant

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Tammy Menton, head of marketing and events at Steyn City (Johannesburg), had initially planned a Women's Day event to acknowledge the important role the female consumer plays in the global economy. Due to much enthusiasm and overwhelming response, she decided to create something far bigger than a celebratory event, a platform to catalyse a movement with potential to effect real change.

Inspired by the insight that only 7% of executive directorships in South Africa are held by women (despite the fact that women make up 50% of the working age population), the 7% Tribe is a movement which aims to equip women with the skills and networks they need to get ahead in the workplace. It celebrates women who have set a new standard of excellence in their sphere, whether commerce, entrepreneurship, philanthropy or community work. And it starts today with a gala dinner event to launch the foundation, which will rollout countrywide with ongoing workshops, mentorships and empowerment programmes.



Tammy Menton

Here, Menton, who co-founded the movement with Janez Vermeiren and Yusuf Stevens of Cheeky Media, says that 7% is just the starting point. Their hope is that next year they will all be gathering for the 10% Tribe and the year after that for the 15% Tribe and so on. Although, their endeavour is not just about getting the percentages up. Rather, they want to spark a definitive shift in perceptions of gender equality in the workplace...

## **You're launching this evening – tell us about the launch and the rollout.**

Our lineup for the evening includes an interesting debate around pressing issues affecting women in the workplace. We're also going to discuss what the movement can do to grow the percentage of female executive directors on boards in the private sector, so that we can ultimately see measurable change year on year within all companies with regard to initiatives that facilitate female advancement.

*“ Our endeavour is not just about getting the percentages up. Rather, we want to spark a definitive shift in perceptions of gender equality in the workplace. ”*

The event also includes fantastic networking opportunities and entertainment by Donovan Goliath and concludes with a five-star gourmet dinner in the presence of our media partners: Metro FM, Independent Media and The Morning Show.

Following the launch, we have planned a programme rollout for the remainder of the year which includes mentor speed-dating sessions and workshops, an online portal (similar to a virtual network, where young women can access advice), referrals and applications, and an annual award ceremony to recognise companies that have successfully nurtured corporate cultures that support women. Our first speed-dating session is scheduled to be held in Gauteng at the end of October.



### The 7% Tribe event supports South African businesswomen

Grapevine Communications 10 Aug 2018



#### ■ **Why is it important to empower women in the workplace and society given the current business and social context?**

Statistics tell us that women account for over 50% of the population – and yet, only 7% of executive board positions in South Africa are held by women (hence the name of our movement). This is hugely disempowering, especially when you consider the critical role South African women play as a pillar of society.

“The fact that movements like #MeToo, #LeanIn and #SheInspiresMe exist proves that in spite of past and present initiatives to empower women, there has, in reality, been little change in women’s status. This is all the more important given the prevalence of gender violence in South Africa, which is often a consequence of a patriarchal culture. We have to change the attitudes of men, but also of women: we have to give them the confidence to take their place in society.”

#### ■ **Comment on the current state of female empowerment and gender discrimination in South Africa. What has the response been so far?**

One of the issues we hope to tackle through the movement is the fact that corporates appear to pay lip service to the concept of female advancement in the workplace. Although government has flagged this as a priority, little is being done in real terms, at corporate level, to advance women.

This is why we see so few women at board level, when the percentage of female graduates actually outnumbers men. Somewhere, women are slipping through the cracks. Why is this happening? Where is the gap?

Something else to consider is the gender pay gap, which in South Africa stands in the region of 60%. That’s enormous: we have to ask, why are women paid less than men for the same job? Are we being penalised for the biological fact of maternity and motherhood?

I think that South Africa is particularly behind in this area as women’s issues have been side-lined as we work towards greater racial equality.

■ **How do you plan to equip women with the skills and networks they need to get ahead in the workplace?**

We have a multi-pronged approach in this regard: firstly, we are rolling out a series of speed-dating style mentorship workshops. We have recognised mentorship as one of the key tools in female advancement: often, the best person to learn from is someone who has walked the same road and therefore understands the very challenges you are facing.



**7% Tribe launch draws female headline-makers**

31 Aug 2018



We are also creating a virtual online network that our members can tap into. This is vital, as women often cite the lack of networking opportunities as one of the reasons they struggle to compete against male colleagues.

If you're a mom, it's hard to find the time to hang out on the golf course with people who can further your career, or to take out an hour for after work drinks. Our virtual network will also help members nurture contacts in their respective industries.

We are fortunate to have high profile media partners, who will be featuring easily accessible content that offers information on everything from basic career tips to debate around more sophisticated issues.

We believe this is important because not all of our members are at executive level – many are grappling with simple issues like black tax or the lack of support in the community for females entering certain professions – these portals are essentially a sounding board for women who have no other channel to ask questions or seek advice.

These initiatives will culminate in an annual awards ceremony, recognising companies that have made the most progress in terms of female advancement. This, hopefully, will spur other companies to take action.

■ **Comment on the power of dialogue in this regard.**

Dialogue really is the first step. We can't change anything if it's not on our radar. It's important to have a forum where we can raise awareness, exchange ideas and jointly solve problems. Naturally, there's the danger of falling into the 'talk shop' trap, and we'll be guarding against this carefully.



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■ **What is your hope/vision for this initiative?**

I hope to start a conversation, which with our media partners and supporters we are able to amplify.

To include, share and collaborate collectively with the various empowerment foundations and organisations that are working towards affecting change.

“ If we are all making a small, or even medium size ripple in our circles, imagine the waves we could make when the voices stand together. ”

■ **What change do you hope to see and achieve through it?**  
The status quo needs to change. Business and corporates need to understand the power of the female consumer. There is a strong business case for more female representation in senior management positions. Women know what women want. And despite the fact that we control 70-80% of global spending, the lion's share of services, product innovation, design, marketing and advertising is led by male-dominated teams.

With all of this data, you'd expect companies and businesses to invest heavily in balanced or female-heavy teams to better understand and engage with their customers, many of whom are women.

#### ■ **How can one get involved?**

According to Tarana Burke, the founder of the #MeToo movement, one of the key drivers for success has been making it easy for people to commit to the cause, and we believe this is essential.

7% is ultimately just a number, a starting point, a place to draw our line in the sand to monitor and track our success, so we have a goal to work towards to see meaningful change. The hope is that next year we will all be gathering for the 10% Tribe and the year after that for the 15% Tribe and so on and so forth.

To #jointhetribes, contact [SevenPercentTribe.com](https://www.sevenpercenttribe.com). Follow @7percenttribe (#7percenttribe; #jointhetribes) on [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#).

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