

# Merlin Norman of Ackermans, marketing maven and mentor



By [Lauren Hartzenberg](#)

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Merlin Norman has steered the marketing of big-name brands at some of South Africa's premier retail and FMCG companies - among them Rhodes Food Group, Pioneer Foods, Woolworths and TFG.



Merlin Norman, chief of marketing, Ackermans.

In March 2020, she stepped into the role of chief of marketing at Pepkor's [Ackermans](#), driving a clear marketing vision to deliver on the business's growth objectives in a climate where value retail is proving its mettle.

Norman brought with her 20 years' worth of marketing expertise, and came equipped with a Business Administration Associates Degree from Northwestern State University in the US, a Bachelor of Philosophy Honours in Marketing from IMM and a qualification in Executive Leadership Development Programme from UCT Business School.

For [Women's Month](#) this August, we chatted to Norman about her path to professional success and why she views leadership and mentorship as going hand in hand.

**Merlin, tell us a little bit about yourself and your career journey.**

I am married with two boys. Over the weekends we love to mountain bike as a family.

After school, I played tennis in America for a few years and when returning to SA I wanted to combine my love of sports with my career and started off in a small sports marketing agency.

This is where my love for marketing grew, and I chose to progress my career in this field. I have had the privilege to work for leading retail and FMCG companies during my career.

■ ***As a seasoned marketer, particularly in the retail and FMCG space, what drew you to your current role at Ackermans?***

Ackermans is a leading retailer in SA. I did a lot of research on the opportunity to understand the Ackermans brand more before joining the team.

As a brand for a mom with kids in her life which was also voted Number 1 children's brand by Ask Africa (a big national research house) and being a value retailer (so accessible to everyone in SA), my interest was piqued, and I knew I wanted to explore this more.

I got excited about the business and the opportunity because I am a mom and was and still am a customer of Ackermans. It was also an amazing opportunity to get back into retail – an area of marketing that I love – with a business that I respect.



Women can, and should, occupy more space in FMCG

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■ ***How would you describe your climb up the career ladder in your field?***

Nothing comes without hard work. I have always strived to be the best that I can be in whatever I put my mind to. I have always been hungry to learn and grow so that I can keep setting the bar higher and higher for myself.

I love to challenge myself and the status quo. This has come with many long hours but when you are passionate about what you do you are always wanting more, and this has paved the way to where I am today.

■ ***Are there any female figures who have had a particularly positive influence on your life?***

My mom has been my biggest inspiration and influence in life through her soft but empowering nature. She demonstrated that hard work and determination always pays off and that there is no task too big or too small. She showed me that through hard work anything is possible.

From a young age, my mom always taught my sisters and me the importance of giving back and lending a helping hand. How something one believes is so small can transform someone else's life.

■ ***You have a keen interest in knowledge-sharing and mentoring others in the workplace. How do you approach this and why do you believe this to be important?***

Being a leader, I believe, comes with the sense of duty to bring the best out of those that you lead. Simply put, when you are taught something new you almost always feel that you want to teach or share it with someone else.

Not everything can be taught through studies or theory. Sometimes the best way of learning is to learn from someone who 'knows', like a mentor.

I love this quote: "A mentor is someone who sees more talent and ability within you, than you see in yourself, and helps bring it out of you." – Bob Proctor

■ ***Having been in the industry for quite some time now, how do you see the role of women changing your field?***

I don't see the role of women changing in my field. I do however see women making an even bigger impact in organisations going forward as more women enter leadership positions through approaching a company vision through a different lens. For example, diversity allows leaders and employees to relate to a wider customer base which allows for differentiated business approaches and executions.



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■ ***Could you share some personal tips for getting to the top in your industry?***

- A passion for what you do.
- Hard work.
- Perseverance.
- Keep challenging yourself, keep pushing the boundaries, never give up!
- Never allow anyone to tell you "You can't" or "That's impossible".

■ ***What would you like your professional legacy to be?***

- That I have had a positive impact on those that I have lead or engaged with through connecting, developing and inspiring.
- That I always put people first ahead of targets and results.
- That I provided an environment that allowed others to feel empowered.
- And that I always lead by example.

## ABOUT LAUREN HARTZENBERG

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