

A journey of transformation

 By [Sheila McGillivray](#)

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Gill Randall, joint chief executive officer of Spark Media, chats to me about how women in the advertising industry are faring at the moment and what the future for women in marketing holds. These are her thoughts and valuable insights...



Gill Randall, joint chief executive officer of Spark Media.

"There's still not nearly enough representation by women in our industry. For example, only around 3% of creative heads of are women, yet females account for the vast majority of the purchasing activity. In media particularly, I believe that the numbers of women in marketing leadership positions has actually gone backwards.

That said, at Caxton Publishers, we've always had lots of females employed as publishers and editors, but I don't believe this is true for the national and regional media players. The irony is that there are more women in media than most other industries but very few rise to the top.

At Spark Media (a division of Caxton) I've made it my personal mission to cultivate a women-friendly culture in our workplace. We understand that if we don't offer a flexible work environment (especially for moms) we risk losing wonderfully talented women. So, I try to make flexible work hours a possibility and generally instil a culture of "family first".

Unicorns or specialists

When it comes to the debate about women being either "unicorns" (that do it all) or specialists, there is an argument for both. Firstly, because the industry is moving at record speed, in many instances skills need to be agile.

On the other hand, I've found, when looking for specialists, that some of the services don't exist, or are in short supply. That's where the up-skilling of existing staff comes in; with your team of writers (for example) who can be mentored to become copy writers, content writers and digital content creators. Ultimately, it would be great to have "specialists", who have a broad understanding of related skills but a deep understanding of how their role fits into the overall picture.

At Spark Media, we've been on an intense journey of culture transformation. We are working with a professional in this field to understand what issues are limiting our performance and how we go about addressing this entropy to create a happy, high performance organisation.

Shifts in attitude, happiness levels and productivity

We have already seen major shifts in attitude, happiness levels and productivity. Operationally, we have also invested in more creative skills which is showing positive results. Because we are very science and data heavy, focusing on this resource will take us one step further to showing clients creative and effective ways to implement our "proposals" effectively.

In the next couple of years, I think there will be a "bloated" investment and resource allocation into digital and social media (both on the editorial and advertising side). This will happen at the expense of the focus on traditional channels. There will be more pressure on employees to deliver, but less knowledge about how to do this.

In the South African landscape pressure from government to transform the media industry (and others) will become more apparent and I foresee more interference in editorial, and media ownership.

Be more kind

On a personal note, since you asked, I play golf, love spending time with my family (especially my three grandchildren), have a wide social circle, am an avid traveller, hiker, bouncer (funny rebound boots), belong to a poker group and really enjoy live music.

To my younger self I would say, “Be more kind.” Guilt and fear are such destructive emotions. As women, we expect to have super-powers and worry that we haven’t given enough time and energy to work, children and home. I know now, that whatever I do, I am doing and giving the best of myself that I possibly can. That has to be enough.”

Thank you, Gill, what an inspiration you are.

ABOUT SHEILA MCGILLIVRAY

Sheila McGillivray's knowledge of the advertising industry spans four decades. Sheila's energy, enthusiasm and passion for her work has grown with every new position and challenge. Her experience in the industry is exceeded only by her willingness to keep learning and innovating.

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