

Our super power is that we are women

Women's Month is a time to honour women in their daily lives - as working professionals, mothers, sisters, daughters, and people who make a difference that matters.



Lauren Rheeders, Bonolo Diseko, Leigh Harris, Kim Stewart, and Juanita Parkins.

Five women at FoxP2, a mid-size creative agency in South Africa, shared their stories in light of this idea. They are:

- Bonolo Diseko, digital art director,
- Lauren Rheeders, senior strategist,
- Juanita Parkins, account manager,
- Kim Stewart, business unit manager,
- Leigh Harris, TV producer.

With experience of up to 23 years in the industry, these women shared their inspiration, achievements, and lessons learned during their time working.

These are their stories...

Bonolo Diseko

Diseko has been in the industry for five years and specialises in multimedia design. She was ranked as 2nd Best Creative in 2021 by The One Show.

“One of my greatest industry achievements is being part of the team that created the world’s first temperature-based media platform,” said Diseko. “Giving beer outlet owners advertising space in exchange for keeping their beer extra cold, under the Castle Lite brand.”

A pivotal learning experience in the industry, for Diseko, happened during work on a project for the Hackathon competition. During the time she was working on it, the last-minute decision to submit a second project idea ended up winning. “The lessons that incident taught me are: Listen to your gut, never give up, and keep pushing. The worst that can happen is that you get a ‘no’,” said Diseko.

One change Diseko would like to see in the South African industry is more Black women in leadership positions, throughout the marketing and advertising industry.

Lauren Rheeders

Rheeders has 12 years of multi-faceted brand, strategy, and integrated communications experience. Her job is to figure out how brands stand apart from their competitors and remain relevant.

Rheeders believes the most important lesson to take from her time in the industry is to never stop learning. “Marketing and advertising have become this ever-evolving landscape, and future-proofing yourself is one way to make sure you survive it all,” she said.

Working with the First for Women brand is something Rheeders regards as a highlight in her career. “The brand has such a clear purpose in inspiring women, and it really has become such a passion project for me,” she said. “The work that we have done for the brand over the last two years is really something our entire First for Women team should be so proud of.”



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Equal pay for women should be a point of priority in the industry, said Rheeders. “The gender pay gap is a very real thing the world over, and I know other women in the marketing and advertising sectors in South Africa are not treated as equally

as we are at FoxP2,” she said. “Every woman I know works so incredibly hard to be where she is; my wish is that it gets recognised, remunerated, and rewarded appropriately without a gender label.”

Juanita Parkins

Parkins has been in the industry for five years, with a speciality in digital/social media campaign management. At FoxP2, she has found success in running social campaigns that saw lower engagements in previous years. “We managed to increase campaign reach and impressions well over the three million mark,” she said. “This felt like a huge milestone to me, and what a good feeling to see clients’ goals matched with great creative ideas win.”

A standout lesson for Parkins is that “nothing in advertising ever goes according to the timing plan.” Understanding what agility means in the context of her career, and how to master it, was also a notable learning experience.

“A more digital innovation focus will drive new ways of doing things, creating new and exciting business models, and ultimately reaching customer needs more efficiently,” Parkins said on changes she would like to see in the industry.

Kim Stewart

Stewart has been in advertising her entire career - 18 years, to be exact. “My passion is people and business, so account management is a natural fit for me,” she said. “I have been privileged enough to work in some of SA’s best agencies.” To get the job done slightly imperfectly, than not at all, while aiming for perfection is a pinnacle lesson she has always remembered.



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Stewart has felt fortunate to work on many campaigns. From the 2010 World Cup to working with the Endangered Wildlife Trust, she has found that each brand she was worked with has infiltrated her personal life. “From banking with FNB to making MTN calls, using Environ skincare, dates at Nando’s and obtaining a Unisa degree - all because they were clients and brands I became passionate about by working with these marketers,” she said. “The most outlandish experience would be jumping off the Moses Mabida stadium arch just because I was asking my client to do the same thing on a Loeries weekend!”

A change Stewart wants to see in the South Africa industry is a non-negotiable respectful relationship with clients. “Creativity and great work are nurtured in fearless and respectful soil,” she said.

Leigh Harris

Being in the industry for about 23 years, Harris has experience ranging from TV production to copywriting. However, she has also dabbled as a Pilates instructor and house-flipper, before going back to advertising.

The First for Women 16 Days Campaign was not only an inspirational experience for Harris, but she also regards it as a significant achievement in her career. ‘It felt like it was so much more than putting an ad together - it was shining a light on GBV, and it felt like I did something important - something that mattered, and that potentially saved lives,’ she said.

Harris recognises that the industry has become much better at recognising powerful women and promoting them into leadership positions. “I wish it just could have happened sooner than it did,” she said.

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