

Zwelethu Radebe, TVC director at Egg Films

 By [Evan-Lee Courie](#)

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The recent Metropolitan 'My People. My Everything' campaign encourages South Africans to celebrate their collectives. The campaign kicks off with a TV advert that pulls at the heart strings. The TVC was directed by award-winning television commercials director, Zwelethu Radebe from Egg Films.



■ ***Where did you grow up, and who would you say forms part of your collective?***

I grew up with both my parents until my dad passed away when I was 14, so my mother remained a single parent after that. I've got two sisters and a brother. We are a close-knit family. The passing of our father brought us even closer.

■ ***Describe a moment/s or interaction/s that you believe formed part in enriching your life today. What was your takeaway from it/them?***

My primary school headmaster, he once said to me in a classroom, while reading, that he had a vision of me in front of the camera, reading the news. What I understood from that was that he saw me doing something influential. I was a very shy child then and didn't think I had a loud enough voice. That stuck with me and helped me become less of a shy guy.

Another moment was when my friend's mother took me to an interview at the film school I went to. My mother wasn't available to take me. The support was in the fact that nobody said I couldn't do it. I had my own self-doubts in my ability to do film. They didn't doubt my capabilities.

■ ***How did they influence your choice of career?***

I count myself lucky, always knowing that I wanted to be a filmmaker, and my mother and siblings have always been supportive along the way.

■ ***As a film director, what does an average day look like for you?***

If we're in the pitch process, we're working tirelessly with a research team to get the right references to create the best vision for the script the agency has written. My process is to always find the universal theme or truth in the script and approach the treatment from that angle. During production, a lot of things need to happen before we get to a shoot day.

To list a few, we need to brief the departments we work with collectively, from the Art Department, location scouts, casting directors, and stylists, etc. A day might find me watching casting tapes trying to short list the cast or briefing the music department on creating bespoke music for the ad. This applies to the other departments that help shape the project before execution.



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■ ***What sparked your interest in getting into film?***

I fell in love with the power of film, how it can move audiences and cause us to think more about our lived experiences and the world.

■ ***How did you get into the industry?***

I was cast as a caricature of cricket legend Lance 'Zulu' Klusener in a washing powder commercial. That's when the bug bit.

■ ***What excites you the most about directing films?***

The ability to make something that evokes a particular human emotion from someone/people.

■ ***What was your vision for executing the commercial?***

I directed the Metropolitan TV commercial with Melusi Tshabalala, executive creative director from Black River FC who conceptualised this great idea.

“ When thinking about the execution of the film, it was important for me to identify a human truth. ”

What stood out in this story was the spirit of Ubuntu and gratitude, and that this can be more than an advert in the traditional sense. It can teach the lessons of thanksgiving. Have we actually said thank you for being the people we are today as a result of those who've raised us, and those who have been part of our journey? I hope it does that for audiences when they watch the film.

■ ***What inspired the vision? What did you enjoy the most about working on this project?***

Some of us were raised by grandparents, uncles, aunts, neighbours, single parents, etc. that was a great point of reflection for me and what I wanted to put in the film. So, the vision became how do I make that feel authentic and real. This was well executed by the cast that reflected that very reality and brought a wonderful relatability to film.

I enjoyed being able to make something that evokes emotion and working with actors. If you have a good enough cast, you can trust them with what they have to do. Getting the cast right makes the job easy.

■ ***Besides directing films, what other talents do you have?***

Let's say I've focused on my strengths, I write screenplays and also enjoy writing poetry and doing cross-fit.

■ ***What would you say are the qualities a film director needs to have?***

A strong vision, a collaborative attitude and the humility to accept that you don't know it all.

■ ***What is the one project you have worked on that you are incredibly proud of?***

As a commercial's director, I was very proud of a content film we made about the effects of underage drinking with South African Breweries titled *Vuka* and a film I made a short film titled *The Hangman* which won numerous domestic and international awards.

■ ***What are the victories that you've had since starting out?***

I've won several Loerie awards, a One Show award, received a Cannes Lions short list and won an Oscar Qualifying film festival award.

■ ***If you could travel back in time, what advice would you give yourself?***

I would tell myself to enjoy the journey.

■ ***Where do you see yourself in 5 years' time?***

I don't like to hold myself to a particular time frame. I believe that I'll be where I need to be at that particular time according to where God wants me.

■ ***As we celebrate Youth Month, do you have any words of encouragement for the youth?***

What I would tell the youth is to be true to yourself and tell your own personal story because there isn't anyone like you and there never will be. So don't deny the world of you.

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