

Stop talking about gender diversity – let's spearhead tangible change

AT THE 3% Conference in New York in 2017 – an annual event to promote women in creative leadership at ad agencies – one of the most common experiences recounted was of young black women walking into new jobs and every member of management is an older, white man.

Whether globally or closer to home, we need to raise awareness about the lack of female leadership in the advertising world, primarily because more than ever before, we are servicing a multicultural client base who are demanding much more and far better from us.

A key finding of the research by 3% was the things women cared most about – fair pay, meaningful work and a culture free from sexual harassment and unconscious



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bias – were directly correlated to how many women were in senior leadership. This means agencies need to make a real commitment

to retain and promote women in leadership to enable meaningful and lasting change. Good intentions are not enough – there is more work to be done before equality comes close to being achieved.

In South Africa, although the number of women in leadership positions in the ad industry has improved, there is still a gap.

A business imperative
Globally, it is estimated that women control 85% of purchasing choices, yet more than 91% feel marketers don't understand them. It's for this reason that gender parity has become a business imperative in today's economy. Research over the past two decades has shown that there is a link between a higher female representation in the workplace and various company performance measures including

better financial performance, higher return on sales, equity and invested capital and improved operating results.

Organisations are failing to build future female talent pipelines – current hiring, promotion and retention rates are insufficient to create gender equality by 2025, according to the 2017 Global Women Thrive, Businesses Thrive Report, by global human resources consulting firm Mercer.

According to the report, while there is increased focus on the hiring and promotion of women into executive ranks, these appear ad hoc and not supported by systemic practices. Yet, studies have shown women bring different insights and skills to organisations, leading to products and services that better serve the needs of

diverse groups of customers.

An inclusive workplace is one where a diverse workforce is engaged. The reward will not just be a thriving workforce, but successful businesses able to capitalise on the talents of all their people to drive innovation and growth.

Increasingly, particularly in South Africa, diverse teams are being seen as the baseline for agencies who seek to work with big brands. Clients are insisting on working with transformed businesses, and yes, in some cases, this is due to the country's B-BBEE policy, but either way, it goes a long way in creating the kind of culture that will cultivate an inclusive approach to how we do business.

The role model effect
One of our passions at Collective ID, is identifying future black female

leaders in the agency and upskilling them through training and development. This is not simply a box-ticking exercise. It's about creating meaningful change in the industry. As a woman who has been inspired by other women, I know that women in positions of leadership can provide solid role models for the next generation and help to give them the ability to aspire to leadership positions of their own – it's the role model effect.

This has been shown to help people advance in their professional lives by creating images of people that women can relate to, and whose success seems attainable.

In this country women and men, girls and boys, need to see more examples of strong women at the helm across all sectors. Observing women in charge changes

perceptions and gives hope, which can have a profound and much-needed impact on society. The role model effect breaks down gender stereotypical beliefs and empowers women to rise in their careers.

To celebrate our Africaness, which I see as a fusion of classes, backgrounds, lifestyles, languages, cultures, ethnic groups and political leanings, we need to collaborate across gender and race groups.

There is great power in being 100% South African. Some of our most loved ads are based on local insights and authentic stories. Our diverse culture is a rich breeding ground for compelling stories and, as women, we need to produce them, tell them and be them.

■ *Khumalo is the managing director of Collective ID*