

Women CAN HAVE IT ALL

Canny, brave and engaging, the new managing director of Collective ID attributes her success to hard work and a solid support structure. This fearless woman took a leap of faith that paid off, writes **Sue Grant-Marshall**

Brenda Khumalo, the recently appointed MD of Collective ID advertising agency, has had a swift and brave rise to the top.

Crying all the way from Durban to Johannesburg, on her own in a bus, doesn't sound like a particularly illustrious start to a career in the tough world of advertising.

Yet Khumalo, of the former Ireland Davenport, tells the story with gusto.

"I knew when I was in Grade 10 that I wanted to be in advertising because the creative aspect of it intrigued me," she explains.

Sitting in her glass-walled office in Illovo, Sandton, Khumalo can see everyone else in the agency. The office perfectly sums up her clear-eyed and gutsy approach to life.

In her 13 years of experience in advertising, the MD has worked for several agencies, ranging from Ogilvy & Mather to The Jupiter Drawing Room and Mortimer Harvey, on accounts that included Standard Bank, Edcon, Vodacom and Absa.

In November 2015, she was given the opportunity to present the Vodacom summer campaign in London.

"Who would have thought that a Zulu girl from Umbumbulu, with a coloured-community accent, would have such an opportunity?" she exclaims with a chuckle.

Her story starts with a taxi-owner father and a mother who gave birth to four daughters and a son.

"It was the exact reverse of what my hard-core Zulu father wanted - boys, lots of them!"

When she was six years old, the family relocated to the coloured township of Wentworth in Durban's south basin, noted for its gangs and drug abuse.

"I was in an after-school programme that kept us off the streets. I played netball and did debating and that kept me so busy, I never had time to get into trouble," says Khumalo.

Shortly after leaving school, she was hired on a short-term contract to help launch a casino.

There she met and chatted daily, in her engaging manner, to the MD of Ogilvy Durban, John Gale.

She had no idea of his position and was stunned when he offered her a junior account executive job.

Later on, a short training course in the company's Johannesburg office made Khumalo resolve to work in the city of gold against her father's express wishes.

Nevertheless, she packed two suitcases, boarded a bus and wept all the way to the Highveld. Her father was upset, but she had proved herself before the end of her first year at Ogilvy. "Now my father is proud of me and the reality is that he made me what I am."

Khumalo tells the story of his ambition to build the family a home on the Bluff in Durban when she was still at school.

He ensured his children rose at

Sam on weekends to clear the area for construction "and we'd return home at night exhausted and covered in dust, but it taught me the value of hard work".

As Khumalo's confidence in her role in the advertising world grew,

she moved from agency to agency.

It was while she was group account director at Collective ID that the opportunity to present Vodacom's 2015 summer campaign came her way.

She took time out to have a baby and was working as a business unit director on the Standard Bank personal and business banking South Africa account when

Collective ID enticed her back. Last year, the company's black ownership grew from 25.1% to 52.6% and in February this year, Khumalo became MD.

One of the company's visions is to improve lives and it is

sending the son of a female security guard to the AAA

School of Advertising.

Other plans and initiatives pour from the lively MD.

She relaxes by watching the Crime & Investigation channel and spending time with her young

family.

Khumalo says it is possible for women to have it all with the right support structure, "and it's also okay to slow

down when you need to".

Winning
women



BRAVE Brenda Khumalo, managing director of Collective ID

PHOTOS: SUPPLIED

LITTLE **black** BOOK

Business tip: Be brave. You can overcome almost anything

Mentor: My father, who never gives up on his dreams

Inspiration: John Gale, MD of Ogilvy & Mather Durban, who made so much possible for me

Favourite book: I read everything online that's related to marketing, trends, banking and advertising

Wow! moment: Presenting the 2015 Vodacom summer campaign in London
Life lesson: Trust your gut and listen to your intuition
