

SheSays: Do you have the edge to break into the advertising industry?

By [Juanita Pienaar](#)

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What do some of the most sought-after companies look for when hiring talent? SheSays invited a panel of top ad agencies to answer this question and to share how you can best present yourself to snag that dream job - whether you're starting out, moving onto senior management or making a sideways shift.



Speakers: Larissa Elliott, a freelance art director/creative director, Vicki Buys, the MD Ogilvy Cape Town, Matt Ross, executive creative director for King James Group, Tabitha King head of talent at King James Group and Nondu Pettele, content director for VML. © [She Says CT Facebook group](#).

In the first part of the discussion, the panel spoke about the skills of the future, what skills freelancers need to focus on and how you can get to the top following a non-linear career path.

The speakers included Vicki Buys, MD of Ogilvy Cape Town, Larissa Elliott, a freelance art director/creative director, Nondu Pettele, content director for VML, Matt Ross, ECD for King James Group and Tabitha King head of talent at King James Group. The panel was moderated by Annette Muller, founder of Flexyforce.



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Skills of the future

After the speaker introductions were made and the audience had settled down, Muller jumped right into the discussion, asking the panellists to make sure that the advice they share is practical advice because they really wanted the audience to leave with practical tips and tools that they can easily implement.

Muller: What do you believe are going to be the skills of the future as we are already experiencing a shifting in the world of work? And how can we approach and navigate the fact that skills are rapidly changing and that what you are doing right now might a) be automated or become irrelevant or b) the requirements will change, business

models can change, etc?



Matt Ross, the executive creative director for King James Group.

Ross: As a parent of two little girls I often think about their futures. I had read a fair bit about the future of robotics and the changing nature of the working space. And across the board from a practical standpoint, I've read about the five Cs (creativity, collaboration, critical thinking, communication and compassion) and I think these are guidelines that are very applicable and will also be applicable in the future.

This is essentially what we do on a day-to-day basis. The best service people understand collaboration, the best creatives understand creativity and critical thinking. The other thing within that is that hard work and time spent are things that will always trump anything else. It was true 600 years ago and it will be true in 600 years time.

“ There is an innate belief that talent is the thing that takes you further. And as an industry, frankly, we really do celebrate talent and we should be. But what is beneath that veneer of talent is people who work immensely hard. And that is the distinguishing factor. It's literally hours put in. ”



#BehindtheSelfie with... Matt Ross

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Buys: I think Matt is right. Hard work is never going to go out of style. But also people are not staying in the same job, doing the same thing for 20 years like our parents and grandparents. So try new things. Those of us who have been in advertising for a long time have seen new jobs come up and people who have been in advertising for a long time are probably a dying breed. Nowadays people start off in one place and end off in another.

“ Be prepared to let your hard work and passion lead you to where you want to be. ”



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Petiele: Just be curious. Want to know about different things. Want to know what your friend, the strategist is doing.

Want to know what the creatives are doing and be involved in their processes. Being curious was my thing. And because I was curious, people said, 'She's a bit of a unicorn, what do we do with her?' And then they created a position for me that was needed in the company. But then I got to step into that position and I made it what I wanted it to be.

“ Advertising is such a dynamic industry and people are constantly looking for new ways to switch it up. So when they are switching stuff up, be the one that they're switching that stuff up with. ”

I didn't even know what I wanted to study and I studied three things. But all those little things helped me to get where I am today. So just be interested.



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King: I'd be terrified right now if I was entering the workspace and not just in our industry - I read somewhere that the top 21 jobs in the next decade haven't even been identified yet.

I probably receive between 40 and 50 CVs a day and what's interesting is that the skillset is so vast. Maybe 10 years ago, you got CVs and the person was a copywriter or an art director. Whereas now, the CVs that I get, there's a skillset list of somebody that should have been in the business for 20 years.

The copywriters know how to design and the designers know how to copywrite. There's just a multi-skilled talent force out there which is incredibly exciting. But I think that on a practical note if you're trying to get your foot in the door, pick something.

“ When you're trying to get noticed or when you're trying to get your foot in the door or trying to get your CV read, just tell me what you're really good at. And more importantly, tell me what you love. Because everyone has that same list of skills coming out of education these days. ”

Elliott:

“ I think it's quite important to identify yourself but I think once you're inside an agency-structure, make the most of being in there and learn from every single department. ”

It's quite important with our clients asking us to be more agile. You need to be able to sit across a table with your client and talk about business interests. Talk about stats and talk about strategy. Talk about what is the relationship with your suppliers and your distribution.

Because clients are starting to ask more of us than ever before. If you can make the most of being inside an agency, talking to the accounts department, the strat department, the digital team, everyone. And even the receptionist and how she greets clients. All of that stuff allows you to function as an entrepreneur inside an agency and those are the skills that you eventually want to lead with should you start your own thing or if you want to take it to the next stage.



Larissa Elliott, a freelance art director/creative director.

Define your niche as a freelancer

Muller: *Larissa, as a freelancer, what skills have you found in the free world that you probably have to also get, now that you're no longer full-time employed.*

Elliott: It can be overwhelming. Dealing with clients, especially when they are startups themselves, they are going to want more bang for their buck and they want you to do a bit of everything. I would say don't restrict yourself if you have interests in many different fields. If you want to do a bit of design, a bit of copy, a bit of social media. I think, yes, do that and explore those things but know that everyone will advise and the guys at the top of the chain will say, 'Define your niche'. And I think the way you can do that is to look at an industry that you can cater the best towards.

Tips on how to get to the top

Muller: *Vicky, we're seeing the entry of this non-linear career but right now there are still different positions and you still need to get that pay rise. What were the important things that you did right or wrong in order to get to the top of the ladder?*



Vicky Buys, the MD Ogilvy Cape Town.

Buys: What I did was I had always said from the day I graduated by the time I am 30, I want to be a marketing director. LOL. But honestly, I was always very clear on what it was I wanted. And there's that saying that goes, 'Figure out what you want, write it down and work every single day to achieve this'.

So I've been very clear on what I want and I think in watching other people navigate it, I think people who aren't clear on what they want get frustrated, and I think what I have certainly observed at many different agencies is people have an expectation that the agency is going to automatically grow them.

But as someone who has managed people in different ways, we can't manage what we don't know that we want. So if you aren't clear on what you want, people aren't necessarily going to help you get there. People also get distracted, so you have to shut out the noise and go, 'What am I good at?' and 'What do I want to do?' and 'How am I going to get there?'

Read part 2 here:



Juanita Pienaar 28 Nov 2018



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ABOUT JUANITA PIENAAR

Juanita is the editor of the marketing & media portal on the Bizcommunity website. She is also a contributing writer.

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