

Advice from the top for Africa's future female leaders

This International Women's Day, female leaders across Publicis Groupe Africa share their advice, tips for success and pearls of wisdom for African future female leaders in the advertising, media, production and communication industry.

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The UN's official theme for this year's International Women's Day on 8 March is: 'Invest In Women: Accelerate Progress' "At Publicis Groupe Africa, we are proud to have incredibly strong and talented female leaders within our business, headed up by the first female CEO, Koo Govender," says Yevenia Naidoo, chief people officer. "Our teams across the board are made up of 62% female talent and we are proud to say that this number is reflected at an exco level of 62.5% as well," she says.

"In celebration of International Women's Day, we asked some of our leaders and senior team members across different practices and agencies to answer the following question: **'As a leader, what advice would you give to young women who aspire to leadership roles in our industry?'**," says Amy Hopkins, PR, comms & marketing director.

Here is what they had to say...

“Trust in yourself and work on honing your communication skills. Get crystal clear on your goals and never stop learning. Continuous learning towards a clearly defined goal will set you up for success. Your network is your net worth – build your network and find a mentor within the industry. Having a mentor can make all the difference in reaching your career aspirations. Believe in yourself and always stay true to your values – never forget where you came from and always lift other women up where you can.”

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Yevenia Naidoo, chief people officer, Publicis Groupe Africa:

“Be in the driving seat of your career. Set clear goals and milestones for your development and be vocal/transparent about them. Have several mentors and coaches to support your growth. Be patient, work hard and have fun!”

Celia Collins, senior vice president, Publicis Media:

“You are the only one who can live your dream, no one else can. It takes persistence to climb the ladder, failure is part of the process, but you will get back up, dust yourself off, and try again. You will succeed if you surround yourself with the right team – teamwork makes dreams come true.”

Esinam Donker, head of traffic, Publicis West Africa:

“Be curious, research, learn and then be confident. Develop your emotional intelligence. Learn first – it helps to do what you enjoy.”

Heidi Nelson, senior vice president, Publicis Production:

“Have a plan, stick to it, work hard and show up each and every day, even when it’s tough – it’s all about being resilient.”

Neo Segola, executive creative director, LePub:

“Be absolutely fearless, intentional and resolute about your goals. Say the thing you want to say – at that moment. Ask the question. Take up that space. And always show up as yourself. What’s the worst that can happen? There’s no worst outcome, except a bit of embarrassment because you’ve maybe said the wrong thing. But I’ll tell you what I believe the best that can happen is: you grow, you get braver and you get stronger. And you trust your voice more. And you learn. I would love for us all to transcend the narrative that our gender or race are limitations – especially in this industry. No, it’s not easy because it requires unlearning everything society has taught us. It requires grit, tenacity and unwavering determination to the best... Not just the best woman. But the best. No one is the best at this, by the way. I certainly am not. Everyday is an opportunity to get that little bit closer. We’re only human and are all constantly learning. Give yourself and others around you the space to do that.”

Penny Macpherson, managing partner, Publicis One Touch:

“Reflect on what brings you joy and then follow this passion. Remember to surround yourself with people who believe in you and remind you of your strengths and support you.”

Lindsey Rayner, managing director, Machine_:

“This gig requires major courage. Courage to have your voice heard, to stand up for what you believe in, the courage to be unpopular or to just listen. The courage to sometimes go at it alone or to put your hand up to ask for help. The courage to balance humanity with performance and set (and hold) a new bar for excellence. Not necessarily because you are a woman but because everything you have faced to date has put you in the right place, at the right time, to have an impact. Lean into building your capacity for being courageous.”

Lynette Naidoo, managing director, Zenith:

“Believe in yourself and your capabilities, you can and you will! Surround yourself with advocates who support and uplift you, always pushing you forward towards success.”

Najwa Millward, HR lead, Publicis Commerce:

“Stay true to who you are. Building relationships by making each person you speak to feel important.”

Abo Gugushe, category lead, Publicis West Africa:

“Develop skills, be resilient, advocate for yourself, challenge stereotypes and lead by example.”

Sibongile Mqakayi, general manager, MSL:

“Build a strong network, seek mentorship and continuously invest in developing both your technical and soft skills. Be resilient in the face of challenges, advocate for yourself, and champion inclusivity. Your leadership style can be a powerful force for positive change, so lead with authenticity, empathy and a commitment to fostering a diverse and dynamic industry. Leadership is a journey, not a destination. Stay focused on your goals, stay true to your values, and be open to growth and learning along the way.”

Sue Napier, managing director, LePub:

“Best advice I ever received, at the very beginning of my career, from the incomparable Nunu Ntshingila, which I have striven to live every day since: Be the woman you would look up to.”

Zoe Lansdell, managing partner, Publicis Groupe Africa:

“It’s okay to wear your heart on your sleeve. What’s not okay, is allowing others to belittle you for it! Own your emotions and use them to empower you, over time you’ll learn what’s worth a tear and what’s not. Remember that growth doesn’t come from sticking to your comfort zone, but always staying true to who you are and what you stand for. When you sense you’re losing the best parts of you, you’re either in the wrong place or surrounded by the wrong people. Finally... Trust your gut, usually on your side.”

Sarah Kennedy, digital strategy lead, Zenith:

“Believe in yourself, find your passion and stay curious. Remember to be kind to yourself along the way, learn from mistakes, and never settle for the status quo. You will be surprised at what you can do when you just believe in yourself.”

Rehana Sherriff, HR director, Publicis Groupe Africa:

“Be willing to step outside of your comfort zone, take on new challenges, and seize opportunities for growth. Don’t let fear or failure hold you back from pursuing leadership roles. Be your own biggest advocate, navigate office politics with grace and dignity. Always seek feedback and learn from any setbacks. But above all, stay resilient and persevere!”

Kershnee Pillay, business development director, ARC:

“Be gentle with yourself! The bravest thing you should do is learn how to love the things that made YOU – personally and professionally.”

Tafadzwa Mazuwa-Penny, strategy lead, Machine_:

“Know your ‘why’, to help you better navigate the challenging moments. Being a leader doesn’t have to start when you get the title. Start considering who you are as a leader from day one – and in your every day.”

Aelita Goncharova, business lead, Publicis West Africa:

“Be clear about your personal goals and capitalise on your strengths. Remember that strong teamwork makes each individual shine brighter. Don’t be afraid to fail – it’s a great way to learn. Be honest and kind to yourself and make sure you enjoy what you do.”

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