

How ad agencies can apply their creative smarts to inspiring and nurturing talent

By [Wouter Lombard](#), issued by [M&C Saatchi Abel](#)

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As the insiders well know, the world of advertising is driven by the need to deliver something unique, compelling and commercially powerful - every day. For those working in this dynamic and fast paced environment, it is imperative to have the freedom of thought and internal energy that daily, creative work demands. From creative directors to strategists and account managers, everybody needs constant motivation, affirmation and inspiration from those around them. In short, staff members need emotional and mental fuel to keep stoking that creative fire.

It often happens, however, that leaders and managers within advertising neglect this need – and focus instead on external affirmations and industry recognition. Instead of spending resources on training and excursions that can refresh, inspire and reinvigorate staff members at all levels and across disciplines, they can tend to rather direct their focus towards award entries and attendance at glitzy award ceremonies.

While awards certainly have their part to play and keep agencies on the global map, it is just as beneficial to be devoting time and money to the most essential organisational asset: people.



Wouter Lombard

Arguably, if agencies channelled just a small portion of the resources that they spend on awards on people and training, engagement levels and performance would be positively impacted. (Particularly because what agencies are spending today on awards – in the form of both human resources and money – is no small amount!). That sizeable investment would surely also affect the quality of agency work - and in return, improve the likelihood of delivering award-winning creative work!

As an agency that values creative solutions and brilliant ideas, this year we sent 90 staff members across all departments (including Production, Traffic, Strategy, Account Management and Creative) to Design Indaba. Notably, we also sent interns and juniors to the event, having recognised that training, development and creative nourishment is so important at this early stage in careers.

(Oddly, it is an industry tradition to only send the more senior people to such events, which ignores the fact that young staff are both hungry and receptive to ideas and inspiration gleaned at these conferences).

It is also worth noting that training and nurturing young talent doesn't always require money, but simply creative input and time.

In a really brave move, we recently shut down the entire agency for one full day and invited the top talent in our global network who were here for another meeting, to spend a day to inspire our staff. It was world-class event, something audacious, that would otherwise not have been accessible to staff.

At M&C Saatchi Abel we created a weekly inspiration session called the 'FRIDAY FRAME' which happens in both of our Jozi and Cape Town offices. Every Friday morning, all staff gather to learn something new from people who have travelled to a conference, a workshop or garnered ground-breaking insights from clients and other important sources.

Essentially, we see ourselves as a creative company. Not a company with a creative department. This means that everyone plays a part in driving a creative culture...and so the investment to inspire creativity needs to cross all departments. We call this, "M&C Saatchinspire".

As Mike Abel so wisely put it: 'A candle loses nothing by lighting another candle.'

We are all acutely aware that there is a skills shortage – within our industry and in the country at large. As an industry, we must be part of the solution - and for us, that means investing both our time and money into our most valuable asset, our people.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Wouter Lombard is the Talent Partner at M&C Saatchi Abel.

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