

International Women's Day: Celebrating SA women in marketing

 By [Danette Breitenbach](#)

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International Women's Day, is a global day celebrating the social, economic, cultural, and political achievements of women. Two successful women in the marketing and media space, Taryn Sharman and Leandre Kark, share some of their story.



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For both, it's been a journey where they have had to work that bit harder and do that bit more.

"It's tough to make your mark with assumptions and perceptions in place as a result of historic ideals of how the world of business works," says Kark, head of brand at Virgin Active.

"Women in business more often than not need to work a little harder to prove their worth and that they've earned their place in their industries – regardless of the sector focus," she says.

Sharman, who heads up Faith & Fear with a partner, agrees assumptions will be made about you before you even get to the boardroom table. "So be sure that when you get there, you have the knowledge and can use your experience (in any field), to add value to the conversation."



Taryn Sharman, founder Faith & Fire

Few female executives

Sharman has a particularly interesting story that led her to enter the public relations (PR) industry.

“In 2005 I was lucky enough to make it into the top three of South Africa’s *The Apprentice* with Tokyo Sexwale,” she explains.

After the show finished she was headhunted to run an agency in Parktown North. “At that point, I didn’t really know what I wanted to be when I was all grown up, but I decided that the agency was a good place to start finding out,” she explains.

She ended up becoming MD of that PR company, Ebony & Ivory, and in 2015, she launched Faith & Fear. While it says like a fairy tale, she says she has been on her own personal journey in this sector for almost 20 years.

“And there are still very few female executives in this industry. The title of MD or creative director is still only held by a handful of women in this country,” she says.

End gender stereotypes

“The client-side looks the same. The corporate space is largely dominated by men, and so we have the added challenge of gender bias when we should be taken seriously in strategy and business development,” she adds.

She cut her teeth with large corporate clients in industrial finance and the tyre industry. “There was not one female in any of those boardrooms for over seven years.”

She made it her single-minded mission to learn more about those industries than any of the men she dealt with collectively to end gender stereotypes and to prove that women deserve a place at the boardroom table.



Leandre Kark, head of brand, Virgin Active

Kark worked in marketing across the globe, in industries that are male-dominant for most of her career, before returning to South Africa.

“I’ve seen and been on the receiving end of some pretty bad behaviour, but I believe that for the most part, it stems from ignorance more than malice and is something that we can change as the world shifts to a place of equal standing and mutual respect,” she states.

Stand your ground

Her advice is to always speak your mind and stand your ground. “Men tend to do this far more easily without fear of whether they’re actually adding value or not. I find that as women, we tend to hold back in case we’re not adding value, or because we believe our idea may not be the best or our opinion may not be needed – and it’s time we stopped.”

She says women should also call out inappropriate behaviour or comments too. “By doing this, we help bring about change in the workplace.”

Most importantly, however, she says, women need to support each other. “I’ve seen the entire dynamic of a male-dominant management team change for the better, through the women finding their voices, standing their ground and creating a collaborative environment, for everyone.”

Toot our own horns

Sharman adds that women in general struggle to ‘toot our own horns.’

“We prefer to do things under the radar, and we don’t celebrate our successes. Women who strive and succeed are often shy about sharing their accomplishments. We are scared of being labelled as proud or boastful people.

“It’s why we hear about hugely successful businessmen and male entrepreneurs far more than their female counterparts. Men hire PR teams. Women seldom do – at least not to build their personal brands.

“Women need to stand by their success and let people around them recognise it,” she states.

ABOUT DANETTE BREITENBACH

Danette Breitenbach is a marketing & media editor at Bizcommunity.com. Previously she freelanced in the marketing and media sector, including for Bizcommunity. She was editor and publisher of AdVantage, the publication that served the marketing, media and advertising industry in southern Africa. She has worked extensively in print media, mainly B2B. She has a Masters in Financial Journalism from Wits.

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