

You're fluxed!

 By Leigh-Anne Salonika

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A lot changed in the summer of 2019. Unbeknown to all, the world was at the cusp of closure, while mine was just beginning to open up - after I resolved to found my own creative firm after decades of working with some of the country's biggest brands.



With OnlyKind, I wanted to bring the authentic expression of humanity and kindness to brand stories. In a period of short three months, a one-of-a-kind pandemic forced a rethink of what most of us take for granted.

Lockdown, quarantine, isolation, social distancing all entered the popular lexicon. So much so, not washing hands became a matter of life and death. And it's through this lens that I have identified the following trends.

Planetary kindness: The widening divide between saying and doing.

While not a new trend by any stretch data suggests that there is heightened consumer pressure for brands to produce eco-friendly products using environmentally sustainable processes.

According to Forbes, 61% of consumers seek out energy-efficient labels when making purchases. But herein lies the paradox; while consumers are increasingly demanding businesses and corporations play their part, as they should, there is

little appreciation or awareness of the impact of their changing behaviours surrounding consumption and the impact thereof.

We hold up our proverbial placards by posting on social media while hopping on planes, driving cars, sitting at our home desks in front of multiple devices or watching Netflix while ordering Uber Eats and browsing Black Friday deals.

A study by NBC News reported that trucking operations across the city of Los Angeles racked up \$642m in public taxes for noise, emissions, accidents, and road damage last year alone by Amazon on Black Friday. This statistic is as staggering as it is worrying.



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We all know that there is no silver bullet to sustainability. But that this will only be achieved when business and consumer behaviour shifts are surely beyond reproach, having said that I believe that brands have an obligation to lead.

For example, Checkers is making an impact; groceries delivered through the Sixty60 app are packaged in paper bags. Convenient and affordable delivery also encourages customers to not venture out in cars for small purchases. Moreover, as customers receive new deliveries, they return all used paper bags to the driver who, in turn, returns them to the closest Checkers for recycling.

This initiative forms part of Shoprite Group's broader recycling programme that, in the last financial year alone saw 37 312 tonnes of cardboard reused and recycled, and 4 410 tonnes of plastic recycled from their distribution centres. Hopefully, the 68% of the consumers polled in a recent Forbes survey who demand greater accountability from corporation's place return the favour and bags by changing their own behaviours. Kindness to our planet, it's a virtuous circle.

The outdated workweek

Before the pandemic, working from home was beyond the paygrades of most South Africans. Circa 2020, going to work is now looked down upon! Sneeze in the lift if you find yourself in the office and the cold looks are likely to give you hypothermia.

Work from home (WFH) is now responsible behaviour and not an alibi for a hard Thursday night. Traditional boundaries governing work-life balance have disappeared. Furthermore, countries like Portugal successfully navigated some of the potential pitfalls with their ban on bosses contacting employees after working.



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In South Africa, a variation on the trend is starting to take off; the agency Happy Friday, have implemented a four-day workweek that works well, while Iceland has had great success in this approach too. People want to work for a company that enables them to integrate personal life and a career with flexible hours, while still feeling respected. According to Edelman's Trust Barometer, 76% expect more from their prospective employer than pre-pandemic.

The trend is only likely to get more traction as the virus mutates and variants cause havoc in the new normal. A focus on creating work environments that both meet the needs of the job, while being mindful of their people's needs will become commonplace and not a differentiator. While the news of the death of the office cubicle is exaggerated, corporates will

really have to think hard between the walls to entice people to return.

Talent transformed

The way we retain and train employees has changed and will forever keep changing. The pandemic forced a lot of things inside the box though for training employees, keeping them engaged and connected to culture, corporates had to think outside the box with online learning. The silver lining has been the ability of employees to integrate personal life and career as well as have enough bandwidth to upskill.

The various alert levels and lockdowns has proved one thing, the human spirit cannot be caged. As humans, we are the OnlyKind in the universe. We have battled pandemics before and we know in the dark depths of our minds that this is not the last one. Let's remind ourselves that the sense of vulnerability we feel is not a weakness, but a sign of endurance.

ABOUT LEIGH-ANNE SALONIKA

Founder at OnlyKind (Pty) Ltd
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