

Jennifer Leppington-Clark, MD of Hill+Knowlton Strategies, South Africa

By  Evan-Lee Courie

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With more than 17 years experience in numerous sections of the communications industry - internal communications, public relations, stakeholder management and crisis and incident management - Jennifer Leppington-Clark has advised clients on local and pan-African strategies to deliver tangible results.



She has extensive experience in crisis and issues management having helped clients from range of industries from travel and tourism, property, automotive, financial services and consumer goods. She has also delivered crisis preparedness training for a number of clients, putting spokespeople through their paces to ensure they're ready. During her time at Hill+Knowlton Strategies, Leppington-Clark has worked on a range of corporate and consumer brands.

■ ***As managing director of Hill+Knowlton Strategies South Africa, could you briefly explain what your role entails?***

I would broadly define my role as one where I help to make sure we're looking after our team, looking after our clients, and growing our business. It's also thinking about the direction of the business, troubleshooting and, as we learnt in 2020, being resilient, agile, and ready for anything!

■ ***What's really behind your mask - literally and figuratively speaking?***

I think my figurative mask is my composure. My calm nature masks the fact that there's always a lot going on in my head, and I try to think about all the outcomes and implications of each situation. As for what my literal mask covers, I've lately decided to start wearing lipstick again every day, even if I'm not going anywhere. Lockdown has made us all a bit lazy, I think, and I'd forgotten how good a great shade of lipstick can make you feel!

■ ***Growing up, what did you want to be?***

This changed a lot when I was at school. A lawyer and then a doctor at first, but I realised I didn't want to spend years studying, and so I followed in my late mum's footsteps and initially became a mathematics and English teacher.

🔸 ***How did you end up working in Public Relations?***

After teaching for four years I felt like I wanted to try something new – more to see if I could do it – and so I worked in many sectors of the comms industry in both a corporate environment and at agencies.

“ This gave me a great overview of all the elements of communications ”

. Then, when the contract I was working on came to an end I joined Hill+Knowlton Strategies. That was almost nine years ago. The rest, as they say, is history.

🔸 ***What excites you most about your career?***

Working in a dynamic industry such as PR means that no two days are ever the same. I am also blessed to work with such an amazing and diverse team of colleagues in the South Africa office, across Africa and across the globe.

“ I learn something new every day and love working for a company that firmly believes in innovating and adapting to best meet the needs of our clients ”

. We call it being “always in beta”.

🔸 ***You have more than 17 years experience in numerous sections of the communications industry. What advice do you have for the youth entering this industry?***

You can learn skills – and you should accept every offer to learn and develop – but your attitude is key. We have often hired people, especially junior staff, on attitude alone. Be open-minded and work hard.

🔸 ***Where are you based during lockdown?***

At my home in Johannesburg. During lockdown, my partner and I converted our garden cottage into an office for me. The best part is the extremely short commute (about 10 steps) and that my animals can visit me all day at work. They say that stroking an animal is a great stress reliever, and it's true. Having said that, dealing with frenetic barking when on an important Teams call can be tricky...

🔸 ***When you're not busy working, what do you do? How do you socialise these days?***

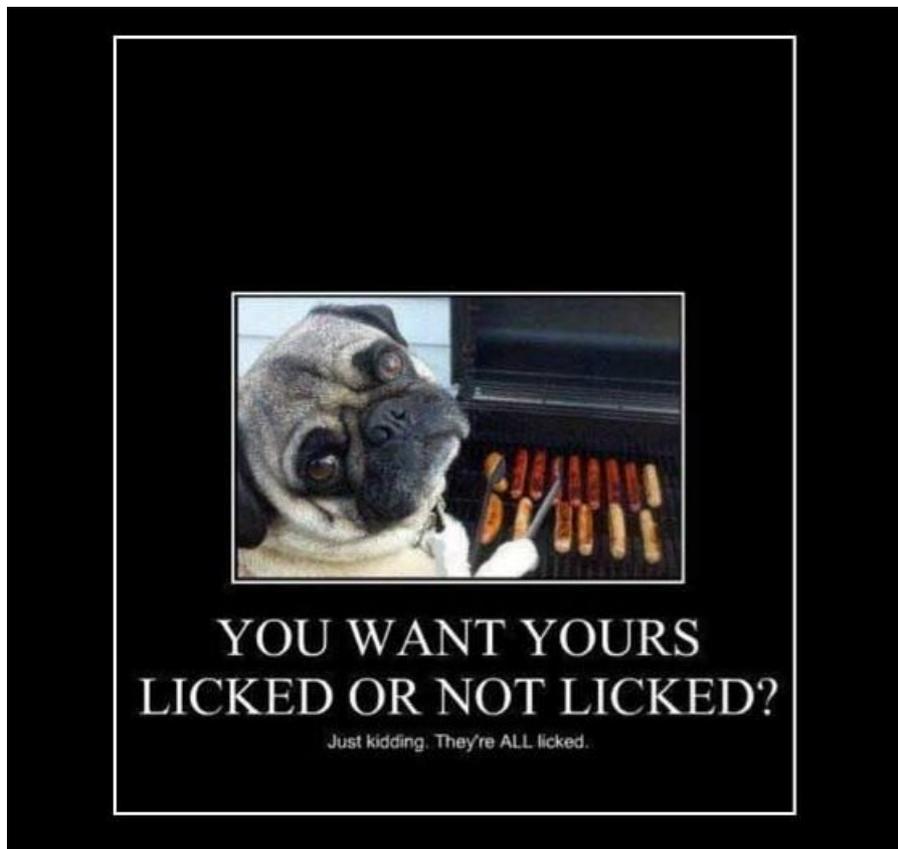
I enjoy spending time with friends – while maintaining social distancing of course – and I love cooking, especially experimenting with new ingredients and recipes.

🔸 ***What's the one thing about you that not many people know, but should?***

I love singing, so if we're ever in a car together, be warned that I'll definitely start belting out some tunes.

🔸 ***What's your favourite meme/gif of all time?***

I am an animal lover and my fur-babies (two dogs and two cats) could probably provide many memes if I took the time to create them. But this one always makes me laugh.



▣ **Are you watching any series? Reading any books at the moment?**

I used to be such an avid reader – I got through 35 books in 2019. But sadly, not doing as much travelling in the last year has meant that my reading rate has declined significantly. I think it may have been replaced by a love of series, though. I adore series. My all-time favourites are *Downton Abbey*, *This Is Us* and *Parks and Recreation*.

▣ **What's next for you?**

I believe in life-long learning and in 2020 we all had loads of that! My key takeaway from 2020 was that we are all human. Some days we fall down, some days we can conquer the world. All of those things are ok. Trust the process. And looking ahead, that's just what I am going to do. Trust the process. Watch this space.

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