

"Step into your power, find your voice" - Suhana Gordhan

 By Leigh Andrews

16 Aug 2018

With Suhana Gordhan's two-year tenure as Loeries chair aunty coming to a close this Women's Month, I caught up with her to find out what she's learned herself from the past 24 months of creative leadership.



Suhana Gordhan, outgoing Loeries chairperson.

Gordhan has been in the SA creative industry since 2001, and since then has made a name for herself. When she took on the reigns from former Loeries chair Neo Mashigo back in 2016, Gordhan was looking forward to...

“Continuing to uphold the iconic creativity that comes out of this continent. As a woman, I consider it a privilege to be able to use my own experiences and that of my esteemed peers to invest in, and to inspire other young women coming up in the industry to unleash their own power of creativity and to aim for those Golds and Grand Prix awards.”



Suhana Gordhan appointed chairperson of the Loeries

Loeries 22 Aug 2016



She's certainly achieved this, having gone on to launch the Open Chair initiative at the Loeries last year, which built on her vision of creating a "village of aunties" to mentor SA's fresh creative talent.

Here, Gordhan specifically shares the power of standing up to be part of the conversation and why she'll always enjoy being an 'aunty' in the industry...

■ Your run as chair aunty of the Loeries is also almost up, what has been most special to you about this role?

The industry faces so many challenges, but The Loeries is a fantastic organisation in that it continues to cherish and celebrate one simple thing – and that is the undeniable value of creativity. Our job is to recognise, reward, inspire and foster creative excellence so those four doors open up numerous opportunities to bring real change.

The chairperson platform gives you the space to tackle if you choose, the issues that stand in the way of protecting our creative currency.



#LadiesofLoeries: Chair aunty Suhana Gordhan on the mayhem and magic

Leigh Andrews 25 Aug 2017



When I took up the role as chair aunty, I never knew how much value it would bring to my life. I have learned so much about myself – about stepping into my own power and finding my own voice. Mostly, I have seen that there are so many people with a spirit of generosity – people that will share your passion and help propel you forward when you're fighting for the right things.

This collective energy helps to silence the naysayers and move the immovable ones. At one stage, things got too difficult and I wanted to quit but a colleague and friend, sat me down over dinner and said, "No! You cannot quit." He said, "Do you realise how important it is not just for someone of colour like me, but for all of us to see you in this role? It gives us all hope."

I'm sad to say goodbye as chairperson, but I'm excited for the new chair to bring their energy to the game. Also, while I will no longer be the chairperson, something tells me that I will always enjoy being an 'aunty' in the industry.

■ ***That's so good to hear. It's a year since the launch of Open Chair, what stands out when you think back to August 2017? How has Open Chair grown since then?***

August 2017 was such a highlight in that Open Chair was launched. It was a special event because I saw that many of the issues that plague women of my generation are not the same issues that trouble these young women.

“ I saw a future of bright, charismatic and ambitious young women who are focused and interested in growing and getting to the top of their game. It was hugely inspiring and something that I know we desperately need to do more of. ”

I'm very sad to say that it's been a bit of a challenge to keep Open Chair alive this year due to a few issues, mainly sponsorship. But we are working on some plans.



#Loeries2017: Open Chair starts a movement amongst women in advertising

Jessica Tennant 10 Aug 2017



Open Chair is still our very precious baby and very much close to my heart. We will find a way to make it thrive.

■ ***Amazing. Have you noticed there's more openness to share experiences and learning curves amongst female creatives this year, especially with the #MeToo and #TimesUp movements?***

I definitely feel that the consciousness and the conversation is growing. I see more and more women reaching out – either to ask for mentorship or to share their own knowledge and experiences.



Ad awards prioritise humanity

Suhana Gordhan 11 May 2017



There's a collective consciousness around speaking up, stepping forward and owning your space and voice as a woman. But I believe that we need to have more and more of these conversations and we need men to join in, too.

In South Africa, we have a more complex scenario in that our transformation story is also very much rooted in race dynamics.



Wave goodbye to stale industry events with WiM Africa

Leigh Andrews 16 Aug 2018



So a lot of the time, we face criticism if we focus on women representation. My response to this is: Why can't we do both? We are not truly transformed until our industry voices are more black *and* black female.

📌 **Definitely. Let's end with a discussion on mentors and their role in your own life...**

Before, I never had an official mentor myself, those things were just not available to us growing up in the industry. It was sink or swim. But now, I've found a collection of people that I go to when I need wisdom and guidance. These are some of my leaders at FCB and some family members. I've also invested in a life coach.



#Mandela100: The Madiba magic of mentoring

Leigh Andrews 5 Jul 2018



All these people know me well and have my best interests at heart. I find that the combined mentorship offers me multiple perspectives from a personal and professional point of view. It gets hairy out there – you need a crew that will have your back in an honest and inspiring way.

Well said. Keep your eyes peeled for our interview scoop with the new Loeries chairperson in our [Loeries special section](#), which will feature the latest updates and live coverage of the 40th annual Loerie Awards, taking place in Durban from 16 to 19 August 2018.

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

Leigh Andrews AKA the #MilkshakeQueen, is former Editor-in-Chief: Marketing & Media at Bizcommunity.com, with a passion for issues of diversity, inclusion and equality, and of course, gourmet food and drinks! She can be reached on Twitter at @Leigh_Andrews.

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