

Brand SA tells untold stories

 By [Angie White](#)

22 Aug 2019

One of the first Loeries Masterclasses for the day was hosted by Brand SA. Sithembile Ntombela, acting chief marketing officer of Brand SA, opened the floor for speakers stating that the session was about building the South African brand, and how all stakeholders can (and should) be involved.



Sithembile Ntombela

Ntombela pointed out that it takes more than one company to build the nation brand and that each speaker had a story to tell in their own unique way, while offering ideas that the industry can tap into.



#BrandManagerMonth: Sithembile Ntombela from Brand SA

Beverley Klein 10 Mar 2016



"Nobody's story is common. It's all about your personal journey and how it contributes to building an inspirational brand," was her closing sentiment as the first speaker took the stage.



Loyiso Bala

It's about time we change the narrative - Loyiso Bala, Channel Director at TBN Africa

Loyiso Bala opened with a comment that he was happy he wasn't asked to sing in the Masterclass for a change! Next he played a video of him singing when he was just seven years old. Bala went on to tell his story of growing up without much, and being moved around between family members a lot, due to the lack of resources.

When his father passed away, his cousin, Lwando Bantom, took him and his siblings in permanently. At the time, Bantom was the breadwinner at home at the age of 19, working as a petrol attendant.

“ Bala attributes much of his story to his cousin, explaining that when Bantom was voted the best petrol attendant in SA, he convinced his boss to assist Bala and his brothers with scholarships to attend the Drakensberg Boys' Choir – This is where he was first noticed, at the age of eight years old. ”

Bala relates his cousin's story as that of a struggle hero who has helped others realise their dreams, and he begs the question: “What are we doing right now?” According to Bala, we are not a country built on achievements, we are a country built on sacrifice, and that's what makes SA different.

“It's about time we change the narrative so that we can have more success stories,” he says, “And we need to tell better stories of sacrifices so that we can create more opportunities.”



Suhana Gordhan

Rejecting the script - Suhana Gordhan, Creative Director at FCB Global

Suhana Gordhan began by explaining how she rejected the script given to her as an Indian woman, while she was growing up and now. Next, she mentioned some of the actual things that have been said to her:

“So nice and fair” – One of the things she heard mainly from older family members growing up, commenting on her fair skin tone and not wanting her to spend too much time in the sun in order to maintain it.

“Please tick Indian” – Relating to checklists mostly associated with BEE procedures. Not identify as Indian (having been to India), Gordhan says she identifies as South African, so this poses an identity-type issue for her.

“I’ve got a *nice boy* for you” – This has also predominantly come from family members, especially aunts wanting to marry her off and constantly wanting to set her up with men. She mentions that her first time experiencing other races was when she went to University – She was confused because she thought it would be filled with racists and that white people hated her. She realised this was not the case and started dating outside the colour barrier.

“Say Namaste” – Once at an event, “Namaste” was the only word she spoke to an individual, but after the event they wanted her to meet their son!

Gordhan says that while she speaks the North Indian language she was raised to speak, her favourite language is Portuguese – This is mainly due to her passion for and training in Capoeira martial arts. She admits to loving both Indian and Portuguese music, though.

“I also eat curry” – Is an actual pick-up line that someone tried to use on her, and obvious tribute to Indian stereotypes which did not impress her.

“That’s not for us” – She recalls her mother telling her this when, during the apartheid era, Gordhan asked why she could not go to the clean pools and beaches to play and swim. She remembers an over-protective father picking her up out of the seawater every time a wave approached, and she attributes his over-protective nature to the roughness of the times and wanting to shelter his daughter. She says she lived her whole life not being able to experience the sea except for on her dad’s shoulders – although she has recently taken up the hobby of surfing!



According to Gordhan, being brown-skinned led her to develop 'a learnt inferiority'. She says she didn't realise it until someone at school asked her 'what it was like being brown', after which she wrote a letter that allowed her to address the following issues:

- Her lack of knowledge of other races as she was not exposed to other races growing up.
- Thinking all white people hated her and were racist.
- A feeling of inferiority that she did not understand.

Gordhan ended with the remark that she is dying for everyone to tell better stories about who they truly are as South Africans.



Shani Kay, Yaron Assabi and Suhana Gordhan

Brands are built by people - Shani Kay, managing director at Regency Global

Shani Kay opened her address with a poem – She says she only creates a story in verse for people she loves on special occasions, and this is one of those occasions.

Kay recalls how she vowed to never be involved in driving consumerism as a university student, but that she is happy to see changes taking place in the marketing industry to do better. As a social activist by nature, she has a strong drive to make a difference in the lives of South African youth.

When Kay began her journey in the corporate world, she says the thing that drove her mad was the notion of corporate social responsibility (CSI).

“ She could not understand how companies could be so contradictory in their CSI efforts, operating on both sides of the coin. This aggravation motivated her to look into ways for companies to integrate their CSI with their business values and goals, and resulted in her travelling all over the continent collecting human stories, working with the UNDP to look at how to

grow African business that delivered value to the continent. ”

Kay also now works with Brand SA to tell human stories in order to build South Africa's brand.

In closing, she stated: "People care about people. Brands are built by people so use authentic, real stories to build a brand that matters."



Sibusiso Sitole

Who protects the storyteller? - Sibusiso Sitole, chief creative officer and co-founder of The Odd Number

Sibusiso Sitole began by expressing his passion for uplifting others and appealing to everyone to tell better stories, advising that the stories are there but we need to do better to lift up the storyteller. He posed the question of "Who protects the storyteller?" asking if it should be organisations like *MarkLives*, *Business Insider*, or *Bizcommunity*.



#LoeriesRankings with... The Odd Number

leigh andrews 13 Jan 2017



Sitole described a previous Loeries ceremony he attended, and the feeling of despair he felt when his company was fired by a client while he was celebrating at the awards festivities with his team. He asked himself; had a boardroom silenced the storyteller?

He went on to say that it has become difficult to find writers because they have been disheartened by the industry.

“ We lose the most talented people because they are not protected. When you hear a great story, praise and protect the storyteller. ”

This is what he believes will encourage them to keep telling their story.

He concluded by emphasising the importance for marketers to understand the importance of this point, to trust that the

story is true, and finally know and believe that it will influence others.

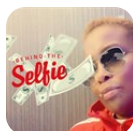


Mathe Okaba, Sithembile Ntombela and Suhana Gordhan

Thlabologo = Metamorphosis - Mathe Okaba, CEO at the ACA

Mathe Okaba began her presentation by presenting the Twana word “Thlabologo”, meaning Metamorphosis. She says this describes her journey.

Okaba grew up and lived in a township, and she was raised entirely by women.



#BehindtheSelfie with... Mathe Okaba

Leigh Andrews 17 Jul 2019



In 2015, Okaba lost her job. She describes this as the moment she woke up, and that although she was at the top of her game, she was unhappy, only staying in her position because she was comfortable. But: “Comfort should not make you comfortable, only inner comfort should make you comfortable,” says Okaba.

“ Later in 2015, Okaba was diagnosed with stage 3 breast cancer, leaving her with no job, sick and an 11-year-old child to take care of. She says she believes in a great God and that her faith and hope got her through it all. ”

Okaba shared personal videos that she recorded during her fight against cancer, saying she kept asking herself “What does this cancer bitch want from me?!”

In May 2017, the chemotherapy was completed and a double mastectomy done. This is when the doctors finally declared the cancer officially gone!

Her take-away comment: “Help yourself before you can help others. In helping yourself, be sure to infect and influence others in the process.”

Be a soldier in the field - Yaron Assabi, founder and director at Digital Solutions Group

Yaron Assabi is originally from the UK, but he has lived in SA for the last 30 years.

In 1990, when Mandela was released from prison, Assabi's father, who was a rabbi, invited him for dinner in order to address certain things Mandela was saying. This impacted Assabi's life at a later stage when he got involved with the 46664 campaign and concert.

Assabi started Digitalmall.com in 1998, which provided e-business in SA with built e-commerce infrastructure. One of the first clients the company was appointed by was Makro.

“ The first virtual wedding in SA, was that of Assabi and his nowwife. At the time, his grandmother could not travel from Israel to attend the wedding, so they decided to stream it live online. His friend, who worked for a big media house decided to publicise the event and it ended up being watch by 47,000 people. ”

Further to this, Assabi's company was also responsible for building the infrastructure for the first profitable online florist, made profitable within nine months, as well as the first African music digital export platform.

“You build a successful brand by getting companies closer to their customers,” he says.

Assabi went on to explain the role his company played in partnering with the Nando's programme to assist students with free education, by allowing them to work four hours a day, earn an income and receive free education, based on a demand-funded model. He says he is working on starting a cybersecurity program similar to this one to train cybersecurity players.

His closing comment: “Be a soldier in the field, rather than the critic in the stand.”



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