

In praise of integrity



By [Marie Yossava](#), issued by [Grapevine Communications](#)

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Times are tough. But does that mean we should accept every piece of business that comes our way?

Being high-minded about values is one thing; receiving a pay cheque quite another. In an ideal world, we wouldn't have to choose between the two - but this isn't an ideal world, and with marketing budgets under pressure, marketing practitioners increasingly find themselves scrambling for work.

But does this mean that we should lose sight of what is important? I recently read an article where a clinical psychologist weighed in on what happens when we work with clients whose values are directly opposed to our own. Sure, you might be able to record better billings, but you're also putting yourself at risk for suffering anxiety. What's more, chasing business, regardless of whether or not you buy into what the brand stands for, leaves you in line of career burnout. Ultimately, if you don't stand for something, you're easily replaceable. People, and businesses, that have a clear ethos leave a stronger impression – and who would you rather work with? An agency whose principles change when the wind blows, or one that stands firm, no matter what is happening around them?

As a communications professional, I have found myself in situations where it would be easier to accept the work and stifle the protests of my conscience. In these moments, I found myself remembering the (well deserved) fate of Bell Pottinger; their plummet from thriving firm to non-entity in just a few years. The failure of the business aside, what about the people who worked there? How did spinning their poison affect their psyches? I'm sure I'm not the only person to have considered working with a client who doesn't sit well, for whatever reason: maybe their operations are in an industry you find distasteful; maybe you have reason to doubt the integrity of their business practices. Maybe you just get a bad feeling. But if you accept the work, how will you feel? Are the sleepless nights worth it?

As evidence of the deep-seated corruption which has rotted so many South African industries emerges, I believe this is a question we should all be asking ourselves. The involvement of major blue chips has shown that even the private sector is not immune. And yet, as most entities are aligned to professional associations and organisations, it behoves us to conduct ourselves in a certain way. I believe that each of us in the industry needs to uphold the code of ethics and professional standards, as we pledged to do when we joined our associations; not only so that we can act in the best interests of our clients, but also so that we can continuously lift the industry.

In other words, instead of bemoaning the state of South Africa's economy and the spread of corruption, we need to ensure that we are operating with the greatest integrity. It might be a small thing, but it's one thing that we can take control of – and, by so doing, we are making our own contribution to economic wellbeing. At the same time, we are providing examples of credible role models that future industry players will look up to.

A while ago, I saw a lovely quote: "Your smile is your logo, your personality is your business card, how you leave others feeling after an experience with you is your trademark." At the end of the day, all we have is our integrity: it's how people remember us. And now, more than ever, it's what our country needs.

ABOUT MARIE YOSSAVA

Marie Yossava, founder and owner of Grapevine Communications, embarked on a PR/communications career more than two decades ago. In the past twenty years she has built a solid media relations consultancy, which focuses exclusively on media relations.

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