

Can advertising satisfy?

 By [Senzo Xulu](#)

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As I sat in front of my computer screen during the latter part of June, as has become my yearly custom, I attentively followed the action from the 2014 Cannes Festival of Creativity.

Though I was more than 13,000km away, while I 'watched' the events that unfolded on 19 June, I couldn't help but feel incredibly proud. Of course I was proud that a South African agency was receiving one of the highest accolades that this industry has to offer, that's a no-brainer. And to be honest, I was especially pleased that it went to a radio campaign that didn't employ the old 'this-is-Harold' monologue technique. That was equally refreshing. Yet the crown of my joy came from reading a blog post from the captivating Chris Gotz (CCO of Ogilvy & Mather South Africa) - his annual Mannes in Cannes posts are my preferred source of information during the festival.

He described the moment when he heard that the Lucozade work had won Grand Prix and remembers leaving Mariana O'Kelly (O&M Johannesburg Creative Director) in a 'sobbing, happy heap on her hotel floor'. Shamefully, in my short career, I don't recall having heard about Mariana O'Kelly but what she would do later that evening is likely to never make me forget her.

Industry pattern

David De Haas is an ex-Art Director. He worked for Canadian agency 'Rethink' and earlier this year made a very public decision to indefinitely turn his back on the ad industry. His alternative? Bus driving. I'm not aware how well his book is doing, but a blog post he published a few days after Cannes caught my attention. Cynicism aside, his argument that the industry didn't turn out the way he thought it would is difficult to digest. Mainly due to the fact that he makes himself out to be the victim and the industry the big, bad wolf that seduced him to deceive innocent people.

As much as I respectfully disagree with De Haas I find in him a typology of a recurring industry pattern. Thousands of years ago, our forefathers would've employed very similar tactics to that of De Haas and other disgruntled creatives. When discomfort or drought or any other form of difficulty arose that compromised the comfort or routine of living, the natural human inclination was, and still is, to go somewhere else.

I've observed and read of enough examples to deduce that the industry is at a definitive point. If not for the first time, but definitely in the most evident way, the things that people treasure and accrue outside of the agency walls are starting to outweigh the shiny statues that they slog for while within them. And for the David De Haas' that exist all over the world, it's becoming clear that a compromise on this premise isn't worth the sacrifice.

What really matters

In the moment when the Palais was on its feet to congratulate O&M Johannesburg for their Radio Grand Prix, I posit that there was an even greater reason to applaud. Mariana O'Kelly had brought her husband and 6-year-old twins to the festival and as the lion statue was presented to the team, it was the twins that got to hold it aloft in triumph. Consider the grandeur of the moment, the pomp and prestige of the advertising audience seated - though at this point standing - as they witnessed this anomaly.

Who does that kind of thing you may ask? A person who knows what is really important I would answer. Reaching the pinnacle of your game in the ad industry almost always comes at the cost of losing time spent with the closest people in your life. And so seeing the fruit of Mariana's hard work being held by the reason that Mariana works so hard, was befitting to say the least.

So can advertising satisfy? Of course it can't. A system or industry cannot give intrinsic value to a human being, even though we try and make it do so. We acknowledge and honour one another, which is good. We create work environments that strip away as much of the corporate within the corporate, which is also necessary. But when we attempt to attach our value as people, mothers, fathers, daughters and sons to the work that we create, I believe we begin to tread on dangerous ground. Of course great work will always make us feel good, but may we never only feel good because of great work.

ABOUT SENZO XULU

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