

Fostering diversity of thought

 By [Louise Hefer](#)

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Do you know what I love most about South Africa other than our resilience? Our diversity. I love how we can have a conversation around bananas and hear five different ways of what to eat it with from five different people. I love how cultural traditions come through when talking about raising kids and how we can literally learn something new from someone each day.



Image source: Gallo/Getty Images.

This got me thinking, not only does our power lie in our diversity but more importantly, our diversity of thought. Let's face it, we naturally gravitate to people who look, think or are from similar backgrounds to us.

Naturally, when wanting to bounce ideas off people, set up brainstorming sessions or think of innovative solutions – we go to people that think and act the same way we do. Now, don't get me wrong, without realising it I do the same, acting on autopilot. So how do I expect to have creative or innovative ideas when I might as well talk to myself in the mirror and give myself a high five when I think of the best idea ever? How am I pushing boundaries this way?

Diversity enhances creativity

Studies have shown that diversity actually enhances creativity. It encourages the search for different perspectives and insights that lead to better decision making and problem-solving. It eliminates the ever dangerous and 'silent killer' groupthink. And best of all, it gives a competitive edge that is extremely difficult for any competitor to copy.

This being said, fostering diversity of thought doesn't come easy. The reason why we gravitate to people that are similar to us is that we feel comfortable. You don't have to explain your thought process or the 'why' behind your idea, they just get it. Conversely, we take people out of their comfort zone which automatically makes them pull back into their shell.

If brands want to drive creativity and innovation, it's going to take a lot of work and patience. Marketers will have to create an environment where people feel comfortable enough to share and are patient enough to listen and wait for those nuggets of gold that would've most likely be missed.

Drive diversity of thought

A Deloitte 2013 report called Diversity's New Frontier states, "Diversity of thought goes beyond the affirmation of equality... Diversity of thought can bring an organisation three key benefits: 1. Diverse thinkers help guard against groupthink and expert overconfidence, 2. Diverse thinkers help increase the scale of new insights, and 3. Diverse thinkers help organisations identify individuals who can best tackle their most pressing problems."

So my challenge to you, to brands (and myself) is to drive diversity of thought. To not operate on autopilot and put some effort into approaching different people with different backgrounds and gain insights you might've never had before. It's going to require effort and patience, but everyone will be better off for it.. promise.

In closing, a quote that sums it up perfectly. Please feel free to replace the word 'society' with 'company'.

“Diversity may be the hardest thing for a society to live with, and perhaps the most dangerous thing for a society to be without.” William Sloane Coffin ”

ABOUT LOUISE HEFER

Louise Hefer has over a decade of media industry experience - currently Media Strategist and CCM (Chief Coffee Maker) at The MediaShop. She is a custodian of knowledge management, laughing, having fun and seeing the glass half full. Trying to change the world one step at the time.

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