

# Women in advertising: Talking inspiration at the women's table of leadership

By [Mpho Neshunzhi](#), issued by [Ebony+Ivory](#)

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*"Each time a woman stands up for herself, without knowing it possibly, without claiming it, she stands up for all other women" - Maya Angelou*

**We are superheroes in our own right, trailblazers, shape shifters, home and business makers. When we think of powerful women from all walks of life it is clear that we, as women, know no bounds. We break barriers and achieve the unimaginable when we come together.**

When I pictured myself as a woman in advertising, I always strived towards being a black woman who maintains her warm nature, one with confidence and a person deeply rooted in social issues and human connections. I would one day cross paths with a woman who is a beautiful reflection of these attributes.

Upon our first encounter I was not sure what to expect from such an extraordinary woman but to my surprise, I was greeted with a warm hug. Confidence exudes from her aura, yet she maintained a sense of warmth with each encounter around the agency. Nombini Mehlomakulu certainly exceeds all expectations and more.



From the left to right: Lee Zama, Faith Khanyile, Nombini Mehlomakulu, Mary-Jane Morifi, Busi Silwanyana

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## Meeting point of wisdom and warmth

As we take a look into her career, we unpack what it is to be a woman of essence and substance. We take a journey back to discover what makes her unique, unapologetic, captivating and a soulfully grounded woman in power.

Born and raised in Sterkspruit, Eastern Cape, in the village of Phelandaba. Nombini started her career in the advertising industry after attending the University of Natal (now UKZN). She began her career in advertising working on blue chip clients in some of the country's best agencies, after which she moved into the corporate world of financial services and mining. As she navigated through these sectors, her natural leadership stood out and she was awarded a scholarship to study at Harvard Business School.

Nombini's foundation has always been one layered with the importance of dreaming big, working hard and the importance of being a well learned individual. These are teachings she takes from her parents; her Tata, a man whom she describes as a "Gentle Giant" who was a visionary, had a commanding presence, charisma and charm, and her quietly spoken highly intelligent mother (mamGcina). As a child, she along with her siblings, worked in the family business during school holidays.

## Being learned and open to life learning

She reminds me that success comes with life's ups and downs and openly shares some of her highs and lows, both of which are inspirational. For a start, this month marks the first anniversary of her venture capital firm, Lwazi Capital being a partner to integrated media agency Ebony+Ivory. She sighs with relief that so far, this has been a worthwhile partnership

underpinned by the marrying of principles, visions and various cultures.

I can't help but take motivation from her quote: "Working in the advertising industry is electrifying and one is forced to become knowledgeable, not just about the industry or the business but with people and the issues with which they are faced, ranging from globally under pressure economies due to Covid-19, the emergence to the forefront of polarised politics, to the impact of climate change, and clients which are put under pressure to deliver a quality product with highly reduced budgets".

You have a winning formula when you bring together professionals who have a wealth of experience and young stars who bring a dynamic current perspective, she notes. In her words: "with a 50 year heritage, Ebony+Ivory has a diverse client base which keeps the team engaged and the intellectual capital and creativity that resides within the team is second to none". E+I boasts an impressive Client list including; Brand South Africa, SASRIA, Wits University, IDC and JSE just to name a few.

## Ode to being an unapologetic women

I asked Nombini how she felt about being a black woman and whether she wasn't afraid of how being unapologetically black would come across, she answered with resolution. "I am proud to be a black woman. As African women, we should learn to own our space, stand up for ourselves, say what needs to be said to get our message across and always remain humble."

This has been the mantra she has carried in all walks of her life and it reminded me of Miss Universe, Zozibini Tunzi's speech to young women, where she emphasised the importance of "taking up space in society and cementing yourself". Nombini added to this with conviction: "If they don't want to give me a seat at the table, I will create my own table".

Some of the challenges in her career were uncontrollable aspects such as market conditions and business environments, however she expresses how "it was all worth it". This statement hits a chord for us both as she scrolls through her playlist of powerhouse women to find the artist's name for me. After this inspiring talk at the table of women leadership, I will be sure to add the Yolanda Adams song 'It wasn't easy but it was worth it' to my favourites.

To close off on this insightful look at Nombini's professional and unique business journey, we hope it ignited the spark within women from all walks of life. Seeing more women achieve success is what will fuel and feed our passion in order to make our dreams and goals seem that much more attainable.

WISE WORDS FOR YOUNG WOMEN FROM **NOMBINI MEHLOMAKULU**

### **TEAMWORK IS NEVER CLICHÉ**

Stay humble and close to people as you need each other to succeed.

### **DON'T UNDERESTIMATE THE STRENGTH OF NETWORKING**

Make meaningful connections, follow up and try to stay engaged in order to leave a lasting impression.

### **RESPECT THE POWER OF DIVERSITY**

Learn to recognise and appreciate the different and divergent capabilities that come with each individual as well as the strength that lies in each team member.

### **ALWAYS OVER PREPARE FOR ENGAGEMENTS**

One should ensure that they have extensive research for every meeting and engagement in order to ensure that you are knowledgeable, and that you are able to back up your decisions in a rational manner while making informed decisions.





Nombini Mehlomakulu

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mpho Neshunzhi is the social media manager at Ebony+Ivory.

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