

Sibonginkosi Zuma, VMLY&R head People Operations

 By [Danette Breitenbach](#)

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Recently appointed head of People Operations at VMLY&R, Sibonginkosi Zuma joined the company last year as talent engagement manager. She brings nine years' experience across a range of industries as well as a love of the industry.



Supplied. Sibonginkosi Zuma was recently appointed head of People Operations at VMLY&R

Excited about her new role, she says, “Media is in my DNA and my happy place – so to have the opportunity to grow in an industry that I love is very exciting for me.”

■ ***Your role as head People Operations head means you will oversee developing people strategy and updating the company's HR systems. Tell us more about how you will go about achieving this?***

I've started working on strategies to attract and retain the right talent that will fit into our culture. Currently, I'm investigating partnerships with the best training service providers to assist in upskilling our talent.

I will also be updating HR systems to ensure that employees get the best employee lifecycle experience when onboarding and offboarding VMLY&R.

■ ***Your new role is also about helping the business achieve its wider goals, which includes driving transformation at all levels. What does this entail?***

I am in charge of setting employment equity targets and holding ourselves accountable for reaching those targets.

I will also be using my new influence to help create a diverse and inclusive environment for all, while actively encouraging skills transfer in positions where people of colour have scarce skills – for example, it is very difficult to find people of colour for senior creative positions.

■ ***You said, “The advertising industry is transforming and it's important to me to be a role model to young African females in South Africa – especially within the advertising industry – showing that hard work does pay off and diversity and inclusion does not just end on paper.” Take us through your journey.***

When I was in my third year at the University of Johannesburg (UJ) I started attending career fairs, but I never came across any advertising agencies, nor did I know that they existed.

The little knowledge of advertising that I had came from watching the soapie *Generations* SABC 1 – New Horizons Ad Agency.

As a graduate, I was in pursuit of finding employment that would upskill me. When I joined the advertising industry in 2013, most of the mid to senior positions were occupied predominantly by white people.

Since then I have witnessed transformation happening, and now we have people of colour in executive positions. Black females now have a seat at the table; a huge achievement for all those who occupy these seats.

■ ***Why is it important that the industry has young African females, such as yourself, in leadership positions?***

It is important to have representation and feel like the person who is making the decisions has walked in your shoes – this is how I want young African females to feel when they look up to me.

Seeing people like myself in leadership positions reassures the young African female that success is attainable when you put in the work.

By occupying these positions, we are better able to encourage diversity and inclusion initiatives across the industry. We can groom the next generation of leaders by developing mentor and mentee programmes and attract talent from third-year tertiary level to the advertising industry.

■ ***Do you have any mentors? Why are they your mentors?***

I took a decision in my career to find a developmental and career mentor that can help me shape my career in the direction I had envisioned. Finding a mentor is like finding a partner – you need to have chemistry.

My mentor is the former Viacom International Media Networks Africa (now known as Paramount) HR director Londeka Nxumalo.

I selected her as my mentor because she had relevant experience in vast industries, and she too has an HR generalist background – therefore it was easy to transition to a mentor/mentee relationship.

ABOUT DANETTE BREITENBACH

Danette Breitenbach is a marketing & media editor at Bizcommunity.com. Previously she freelanced in the marketing and media sector, including for Bizcommunity. She was editor and publisher of AdVantage, the publication that served the marketing, media and advertising industry in southern Africa. She has worked extensively in print media, mainly B2B. She has a Masters in Financial Journalism from Wits.

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