

Brave Decisions by Brave Women: Vanessa Pearson, Executive Creative Director Partner, The Brave Group

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To commemorate Women's Month, The Brave Group embarks on a series we like to call "Brave Decisions by Brave Women". In this series, we draw inspiration from stories of some of the most powerful leaders in our industry. Today, Vanessa Pearson, Executive Creative Director Partner at The Brave Group, shares with us the Brave decisions she has taken to get where she is today, as well as the unexpected things she does each day to become truly unforgettable.



What does 'being brave' mean to you?

For me it's about absolute authenticity.

When the way in which you are wired, is aligned with what you believe in, and in turn, is expressed by what you do, and the way in which you do it, then I believe you can live a truly brave life. I believe there has to be congruency in order to be brave otherwise you're pretending.

Vanessa's view: *Once you are congruent, it's pretty easy to spot the antithesis.*

What is the first brave thing you remember ever doing?

I studied performing arts at a young age and after winning Gold and Silver Awards at the Grahamstown Eisteddfod for the role of Olivia in Shakespeare's 'Twelfth Night', I was a tad overconfident (always a bad thing) about my upcoming role in a fair-sized theatre production called 'The Grey Angel', where I was playing the part of a young prostitute in Bedlam. Everything was going really well with performances onstage... until the last scene, where I had to eat an apple and, at the same time, answer a question that a brutal prison warden was asking me... I'd practised really hard (a Cockney accent to boot) so had it down pat... but on play night, I choked on the apple, and at the same time as I was coughing and wheezing and having a near mental meltdown, I learnt the art of 'live' split-second improvisation... In a nanosecond I made it appear as if it was all part of the script, as did the warden, who, after I'd fallen to the floor and coughed the apple out of its lodging in my oesophagus, gave me a resounding kick in the rear, as if it was all part of the play too. The audience was none the wiser of course, but I'd learnt a really good, albeit painful 'Art of Presentation' lesson.

Vanessa's view: *You can be sure that things won't always go the way you planned. Just continue on the journey and improvise (I think it's called hustle now), even if it hurts a little, or a lot. And accept that every now and then, you'll be kicked in the rear.*

What is the bravest career decision you ever made?

Four years before we started House of Brave, I knew that I knew that I knew that I would start my own business. So much so, that when I joined McCann, which would be my last foray into the big global networks, I specifically asked for a four-year contract only; with a three-month notice period. And three months to the day, 1 October 2011, before my four-year contract expired end December 2011, Andrew Shuttleworth walked into my office and said, "Resign".

House of Brave was born, January 2012.

Vanessa's view: *Your intuition is your most powerful voice. Be intentionally still enough to listen to it a few times a day.*

What are you doing to empower the next women who will be in your position one day?

I think that when someone's purpose (your passion), talents (what you are good at or becoming good at) and joy or happiness collide, they don't really need anyone else to empower them; the power and fire come from within. The women who discover this about themselves are the ones who are successful. And I don't mean success just for the thing itself, but in order to serve others. So empowering people is really about the discovery, the uncovering, and the unveiling or revealing, so that it manifests and becomes meaningful.

Vanessa's view: *Empowerment is not about me. It's about you.*

How do you intend on leaving your mark and becoming truly unforgettable?

I think when we read or hear words like "Unforgettable" and "Leave your mark" we think of big things, high-fives, high visibility and glory and praise.

The swagness of swag and the brittleness of fame and adulation, basically.

For me it's the complete opposite.

Real power is about touching people's lives in meaningful, and often small ways, that make a big difference. Showing kindness when it's not expected and being generous when it won't be returned. When people remember you, not for the title you had, or just the work that you did, but for who you are as a human being, then I think you're on your way to leaving your mark in a lasting way.

Vanessa's view: *Sometimes it's not about the seen. Sometimes it's about the unseen.*

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