

#BehindtheMask with... Unati Moalusi, chief people officer at Wunderman Thompson SA

 By [Jessica Tennant](#)

12 Aug 2020

This week, we go behind the mask with Unati Moalusi, chief people officer at Wunderman Thompson South Africa.

As this forms part of our Women's Month content feature, we asked Moalusi to share her thoughts on the current state of women's rights in South Africa:

“ I applaud the women in business within our country. We have come a long way and made a significant contribution to the shape of the market. The women of Mzansi have birthed some of the most stellar work, both in our industry and corporates at large. We are also seeing more representation of women across the sectors which is testament to our currency. Remaining authentic and true to oneself is key. Each woman's success should be an inspiration to another. We are certainly strongest when we cheer each other on. ”

1. So tell us, what's really behind your mask (literally and/or figuratively speaking).

A big, courageous smile. I am a raging optimist, and I believe that the energy I carry within as well as that which I give out comes back to me. I try by all means to remain in a state of 'flow' (spoken like a true consciousness coach). This pandemic has thrown many a curveball, but there is still much to be grateful for.



Unati Mbalusi, chief people officer at Wunderman Thompson South Africa.

2. Where are you locked down?

In Jozi, in my home, with my family.

3. How are you finding working from home or physical distancing at the office / how has your way of working changed?

Working from home has worked in so far as my infrastructure. I've been fortunate to have a home that allows me to be productive and stay connected. Still, I have certainly missed the physical connectedness to the staff at the office. One of my rituals, when we were in the office, was walking the three floors of our business on Fridays, wishing everyone a Happy Friday and doing impromptu check-ins with staff. This gave me a chance to be visible to our people, but also to do mini check-ins to ensure our people are taken care of. Many conversations came out of this ritual, and I think it was an important part of staying close to the people on the ground.

As an executive, one can easily be viewed as being out of reach, so physical presence is important. Remote working has meant making a conscious effort to drop a chat here and there, set time to attend team initiatives and virtual socials as a means of staying connected and keeping communication lines open.

We have continued with many of our staff engagements (such as our monthly staff meetings which we call: WTF! (Wunderman Thompson Fridays). These take place on the last Friday of every month. We share business updates, creative work, employee achievements and rewards and recognition. This has aided tremendously in our people staying in the know.

Remote working has also meant integrating my family into my new ways of work, as we are all under one roof.

“ My four-year-old daughter has often come to say hello to my colleagues whilst I am on a Teams call, and I have embraced this without feeling awkward or embarrassed. I think this helps her have a more holistic understanding of who she knows her mother to be. In the same light, I think this has also allowed for colleagues to interact with the family part of my life, which reiterates that we are humans before anything else. ”

4. Describe a typical workday, if such a thing exists.

My workday begins with quality time with my family, particularly my daughter, to ensure that her needs are met before I enter the workspace. I'm sure many parents can attest to the balance we have navigated since working from home. Once she has received my tender loving care, I'm in a better position to step into the day.

I have created a little sanctuary on the window sill of my home office.

So, I kick off my day by lighting candles and playing meditation and other music as I log on. This does wonders for my energy.

Microsoft Teams is the most utilised platform in my day; I live on the screen. From exco meetings to people team meetings, right down to one-on-ones, and ending off the days with more exciting bits such as divisional socials or fun staff activations.

I also make an effort to go outside in the afternoon to absorb some vitamin D. Jozi winters are a pleasure in that way.

5. How do you maintain a good rapport with your teammates/clients? Keeping the communication lines open.

I have virtual check-ins with my People Team every Monday/Wednesday/Friday. We kick-off the meeting with Happiness Levels (state your happiness level from a scale of 1-10). This is an excellent barometer to ensure the team is supported where necessary. Having the video on at the beginning of the meeting is the only way to see people, so I encourage it. I also do random check-ins with colleagues and staff on the Teams Chat, which allows for a more informal conversation.

6. How do you socialise these days?

Social what? Hahaha, no, I'm kidding. Look, on a scale of 1-10, my socialising has certainly reduced to about a five since the lockdown. The video calls with my family and friends have been great during this time. I do miss the lunch dates and sundowners, but we've found ways to stay connected. I've learnt to appreciate my garden and patio a lot more over this time too. I spend my weekends soaking up the sun outside. We're a family that's big on music, so our Harman Kardon Bluetooth speaker is the most utilised device in our home. My husband is like my resident DJ, so the playlists are endless. There's never a dull moment.

7. What do you do to keep fit/healthy and/or sane (physically/mentally)?

Getting outdoors during the weekend is the answer. Whether I'm exercising, playing with my daughter, or lazing in the sun. I kicked off the lockdown with morning runs, but as I've been growing and glowing I have reduced the fast pace, and instead do 10km walks every weekend with Tebogo, my husband. Meditation has contributed positively to my well-being; it centres me and clears my head. I love the kitchen, my meals are quick and nutritious, and I certainly maintain my health in this way too.

8. What new apps would we find if we scrolled through your phone?

- Baby to Body – an app that covers the milestones of both baby and mother, delicious healthy recipes, exercises,

mediation and journaling.

- Oprah & Deepak – an awesome meditation experience app by Oprah Winfrey and Deepak Chopra.
- House Party – video calls with friends.
- One Cart – online shopping for groceries and other essentials.
- Teams and Zoom – for work purposes. Having Teams on my phone allows me to be mobile around the house whilst in a meeting.
- Although not a new app, Instagram is undoubtedly oversubscribed, I guess it's my way of plugging into the world.

9. What is the first thing you plan to do when the lockdown lifts?

Find a safe way to see my parents, who are based in the Eastern Cape. I need a private jet to bring them over to Jozi. Any takers on this one?

10. Describe your career and if/how the pandemic/lockdown has affected its course.

The people-centric approach to my role has been impacted. I don't get to see the 500-plus faces in my company in the manner that I did before. However, I make a conscious effort to remain connected and deliver an employee proposition that still gives our people a sense of belonging. From a long-term career perspective, I do not think the pandemic has affected my role in a negative way. People and culture will always play a role in business. As a qualified psychologist and also a consciousness coach, I have wondered about the mental wellness of our country (and the world over) coming out of this pandemic, plus whether or not this will give rise to a demand in psychotherapy and overall mental wellbeing services. Perhaps my role within my company may require me to draw more from the psychology and coaching elements of my skillset in helping staff make new meaning of life as we now know it to be? Just a thought.

11. Any companies/brands that you feel have responded particularly well to the crisis and/or Covid-19-related campaigns that stand out to you, and why?

In general, I am in awe of companies that have had to gear up fast and become digitally-savvy. As Wunderman Thompson SA, we're lucky that we were prepared and had the right infrastructure to enable work to continue for our clients. We have kept it moving whilst managing the curveballs.

Externally, I think the sudden demand we saw with online services really put digital platforms to the test. I have been in awe of the improvements and adaptability of many services as a result. Businesses have had to pivot in a heartbeat. Whilst I cannot promote and mention brands (I'm sworn to secrecy), I do commend the retailers and chain stores who have upped their game in serving and delivering to their customers.

12. What are you working on right now?

My main strategic focus is enhancing the internal brand experience, particularly through diversity and inclusion, as this remains a business and social imperative. When you take care of the people, and they have a genuine sense of connectedness to the company, the brand comes to life. So, a lot of energy has been placed on finding new and meaningful ways to retain our staff, whilst attracting new talent and ensuring our employee engagement levels remain high during this time.

13. What does the 'new normal' look like to you?

Being more agile than ever before. What we know today could be different tomorrow. Embracing this outlook has meant not holding on too tightly to opinions and views, but instead being open to change at any given time. The new normal has also meant having deeper gratitude for the little things in life. Lastly, the new normal is appreciating motherhood and the gift of growing a new life, even in these uncertain times.

14. What are some of the buzzwords floating around at the moment, and some of the

catchphrases you utter yourself?

My leader in my previous life introduced me to Robin Sharma, and I've never looked back since. One of his famous quotes, "Change is hard at first, messy in the middle and gorgeous at the end," remains relevant in these times. I have no doubt so much goodness and life's lessons will come out of this chapter in our lives. So, I utter this quote to myself often. On a lighter note, however, the biggest buzzword at a business level has certainly been, "You're on mute" – it is hilarious how our vocab took a turn within one week of being in lockdown.

15. What advice would you give to other industry folk during this time?

Use this pandemic as an opportunity to pivot – in your thinking, your ways of work and in your business. Discomfort is the best opportunity to develop new ideas.

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*Interviewed by [Jessica Tennant](#).

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