

Gearing up our people for the future

By [Wayne Naidoo](#)

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We can all ponder and debate the trends for 2020 - everyone has his or her own perception as to what will influence our industry most. But looking back on a fairly tumultuous past twelve months, the only thing we can truly be assured of is that, try as we might, it is fairly impossible to accurately predict what exactly will be heading our way in the next twelve.



Wayne Naidoo, CEO of Duke.

What we can be assured of, however, is that things *will* change, there will be flux and most likely some instability, and the only way any of us will be able to safely navigate the industry changes and disruptions will be by equipping ourselves and our staff to be resilient.

Resilience is by definition:

“ *The capacity to recover from difficulties; toughness; the ability of a substance to spring back.* ”

Low performers seek to be comfortable, for their lives to be easy. High performers seek the discomfort and condition themselves within it. They become comfortable within the discomfort, let's call it “discomfortable.”



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We all know that there are those that can be faced with adversity and who will put their head down, fight the good fight and come out stronger. And there are also those who will fall in a heap, unable to cope at the teeniest challenge. I want the former Tyson on my team.

How then do we ensure that our best assets, our people, are sufficiently resilient to be able to weather the storm that a volatile South African communications sector will bring?



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Our strategy has been first and foremost to hire the most experienced senior talent we can afford. These are people who have been around and made their mark, who have faced some challenges and have the capacity to deal with some tough situations and come out on the other side.

“ Experience does not necessarily equate to years of service, however – we are talking about people who have life experience, some grit and tenacity and a great outlook on life. Very often they’ve done a great deal more than just work in advertising, and have the scars to prove it. ”

By hiring the A-team, we’re equipping ourselves to take on the baddies – be it clients, suppliers, other agencies or shrinking budgets.



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Once you have your SWAT team, the next step is keeping them committed and match-fit. You might have the best in the business, but you’re going to need to give them the skills and weapons to go to war.

When we take an individual into our business, we are not just taking on their advertising talent, we’re taking on their all – their family, their health, their bad habits and their psychological state. So it goes without saying that we need to nurture the entire individual and not just advance their advertising skills.

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Sure, we need to encourage and foster learning and growth in our field, but more importantly, we need to foster the growth and happiness of the individual as a whole. That means providing some empathy and flexibility and support for their life outside your office walls.

Flexible working hours and mobile office space are a no-brainer in this age of hyper-connectivity.



Out with hot desking, in with flexible workspaces

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Positive work relationships and mentoring is a non-negotiable – people need to feel supported and encouraged for the work they do and the sacrifices they make. Get close to your people, not just those that report directly to you.

Everyone should be mentoring someone else in your business, and everyone should have someone who always has their back. People need to feel connected and these relationships need to be fostered, that means taking time away from tending to clients and briefs to recharge and regenerate – something we don't often do when we're all under the whip to deliver bigger and better results than ever before.



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But a happy, enthusiastic, secure staff member will willingly commit to the job at hand and is more likely to deliver the goods than a burnt out, anxious and unhappy team member.

Key to supporting our staff is protecting them and defending them. We all need back-up or someone in our corner. That means someone to believe in you and defend you first and foremost, and only ask questions later – a guardian angel, but one with Ninja moves. All too often, we are quick to call into question our staff in order to protect a client relationship or a lucrative contract.



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Giving your staff your full support allows them to feel valued and it's that sense of worth that gives them the confidence to make difficult decisions and take on greater challenges knowing that they have someone backing them up.

What we can be assured of in 2020 is that the pace and stress will increase and this is going to impact our people. There has never been a greater need for people to step up. The industry will change and we will face new trials and opportunities, but the only constant in 2020 (and in the years to follow) will be our people.



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How we manage and equip them to become the SEALS of the industry will be key to how we survive and conquer whatever is thrown our way.

ABOUT WAYNE NAIDOO

Wayne Naidoo founded DUKE after leaving his CMO position at AFB (now JUMO), one of Africa's fastest growing consumer finance groups. Currently chairman of the ACA (Association of Communication and Advertising SA) and voted as 2019's runner up for 'Most Respected Agency Leader in Cape Town' by MarkLives. Former CEO of Lowe & Partners SA, former chairman of YPO (Young Presidents Organisation), previous chairman of the ACA and former director of the AAA School of Advertising.

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