

Lethogonolo "Tlhogi" Ngwato, PR lead at Grey Africa

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As part of our [#YouthMatters](#) feature, we chat to Lethogonolo "Tlhogi" Ngwato, PR lead at Grey Africa.



▣ *Can you tell us what your role as PR lead at Grey entails?*

My role entails a great deal of strategic planning and stakeholder management. I ensure that all the relationships governing the workings of each account are effectively managed to ensure clear communications. This enables:

- Strategic input that meets client and communication objectives.
- Relationship management in the interest of the agency as well as the client to the public.
- Risk management to build capability and resilience for the management and mitigation of enterprise reputation risk through effective crisis communication.
- Leading and collaborating with the other arms of campaign and account management.

▣ *What sparked your interest in getting into public relations?*

I have always had a keen interest in public policy and government communication. Prior to starting her own firm, my mother was the principal legal counsel at the office of the Ombudsman in South African and Botswana (now the Public Protector in South Africa). The office of the Ombudsman served as a check to the actions and decisions of public

authorities. A place of refuge for everyone, regardless of the language they are proficient in.

“ I saw first-hand through my mother's work how communications and language was used in awareness and for the direction of discourse. ”

The Ombudsman used media to disseminate communications and effectively crystallise its mandate. Having witnessed first-hand the power of language and communications as an enabler for impact, I knew then that if I could, I would be someone who helped foster that.

▀ **How did you get into the industry?**

Like many high school-leavers I wasn't really sure what I wanted to do. I was heavily influenced by my mother's career and the powerful and opinionated women I saw on TV at the time. On vacation, I took up an internship role at a small mine as the community communications liaison. It's there I began to understand the power of personality and how by connecting and understanding the community, one had the power to shape and influence perceptions for better understanding. With very little experience in corporate communications, it would be a while before my next role in communications.

I persisted, and I landed a role for myself in stakeholder relations at EY. Knowing I wanted to be in communications and effecting policy work I aligned with teams in advisory and wrote pieces for the communications department to get noticed. Those initiatives would ultimately lead to my role as the co-lead for change management and communications at UIF alongside Zanele Luhabe and an amazing team doing passion work that involved enabling South Africans through tech focused service delivery.

With that work I'd like to think fate was set in motion to work on amazing projects and with amazing teams such as On Point PR, leading communications for brands such as Global Citizen, Amnesty International, DSTV and MultiChoice Africa. Work that has connected me to the mass market and made it all the more important to represent and engage communities honestly.

▀ **What excites you the most about the PR industry?**

The most immediate example I have to show this is the inclusion of a digital entrepreneur in the *Forbes Africa* 30 under 30 selection. Mhlali's inclusion goes above and beyond any financial records the criteria requires. Her inclusion clearly shows that self-impression influences the perception of others to build a notable brand.

With this issue, *Forbes* shows that wealth isn't just measured in funds any more, but in impact too!

“ I'm excited for the new ways in which we can build reputations online and really show that PR and marketing are not

mutually exclusive concepts and that PR isn't a nice to have but is essential for every business. ”

■ **What approach should brands take when it comes to storytelling?**

- The choice in people selected - Popular doesn't always imply resonance.
- The language, its nuances and what it means to different people
- Bring other cultures in – to share knowledge and intrigue.

■ **Besides copywriting, what other talents do you have?**

I am a high impact editor; a persuasive negotiator and the best sister in the whole wide world! (my sister may have other comments)

■ **What is the one project you have worked on that you are incredibly proud of?**

The 2018 FIFA World Cup: Bafana Bafana did not make it to the tournament in Russia, so we had a massive job to get South Africans excited about the tournament and actually tune in to DStv. As part of the PR strategy, we focused on driving pride and honing in on local African soccer culture, which really makes the beautiful game. For the 8+ weeks of the campaign, we focused on driving the nostalgic pride of The 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa and using that to drive social cohesion through soccer with the diaspora. We aligned with African and Russian embassies to showcase this.

Global Citizen: Mandela 100. Of all the amazing work that was done in terms of HIV counselling and blood donations, my proudest is our work in the environmental clean-ups. Global citizens cleaned up a dumping site in Alex and turned that into a playground. My heart is warmed to know that with a collective cause in mind, we have the ability without incentive to change things and make our communities better.

■ **What are the victories that you've had since starting out? Have you won any awards?**

We won an award for the DStv World Cup campaign. The park in Alex wasn't an award, but it certainly is a highlight and a monument of the work done that children and adults alike can enjoy

■ **If you could have dinner with any 3 people (alive or dead), who would they be and why?**

Jay-Z, for enjoying your success, owing your power and longevity. Michelle & Barack Obama to discuss the ideals that governs good ethical people. Zodwa Wabantu for the realism and authenticity.

■ **As we celebrate Youth Month, do you have any words of encouragement for the youth?**

I am... is what you become. Be very intentional about what you say you are!

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