

# Prioritise client and team relationships, and other valuable lessons from a media director

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Melissa Humphry is a media director at [The Digital Media Collective \(TDMC\)](#), one of South Africa's most successful digital agencies, where she heads up a team of more than 20, with a focus on strategy and media buying in the social media space.



After graduating with a BCom in marketing management, Melissa tried out various roles – as a marketing rep, merchandiser and marketing assistant for a range of companies. She quickly learnt what she did and didn't like, and was grateful when she was introduced to Cheryl Ingram, who had recently founded TDMC.

That meeting with Cheryl resulted in a job offer for Melissa who then found herself thrown into the deep end of an ever-changing industry. Add to that, a role within a fast-growing agency, and it's safe to say that Melissa soon realised it was sink or swim. Here Melissa, who stepped into her current position in 2021, shares the lessons she's learnt as she's grown in her career.

## **Inclusion aids growth**

TDMC prides itself on putting a strong emphasis on mentorship, ensuring that everyone, regardless of their position in the company, can learn from each other. "I learnt so much under Cheryl's wing by being invited to sit in on meetings, listening to discussions and seeing how problems were resolved and solutions reached," says Melissa. "By being privy to these conversations from the get-go, I didn't just gain knowledge, I gained confidence."

She says this culture of learning is ongoing at TDMC – "we are all learning from each other all the time, across clients, roles, channels and disciplines".

Encouraging curiosity is key – and new hires and young graduates are assured that no question is a stupid question. "This is how people learn in the business. Every member of the team is always ready to lend a hand, provide a solution, or assist

with a problem.”

### **Turn clients into partners**

Melissa has been working with many of her clients for more than five years and says the value of building personal relationships with the people at the other end of a call or email can't be overemphasised.

“Being able to be honest, open and frank with clients – rather than sugar-coating things – goes a long way in building trust in both directions,” says Melissa. “We are all human, and we all have goals and targets we need to meet. I've learnt that it isn't always going to be gold stars, but by building genuine partnerships with the brands that we work with we are able to talk through challenges and find solutions together”

Melissa says she is very mindful of using the word “we” when communicating with clients, as it shows that they are on the same team, working together for success.

“Building solid relationships helps with client retention too – they are less likely to leave if you have put time, effort and energy into working together. And they are more likely to refer you to other businesses,” she says. “TDMC's growth and success has largely been off the back of client referrals. This is a huge testament not only to the work that we do, but to the partnerships we have built over the years.”

### **A positive company culture matters**

A positive and happy company culture makes it easier for success to flourish. “We proactively encourage team members to get to know each other, which means that for many of us, we aren't just colleagues, we have become firm friends,” says Melissa.

All TDMC staffers take the Gallup **CliftonStrengths**® Assessment test to help identify the unique personality characteristics that underpin the way they might deal with issues or behave in different situations. These results are shared with team members to help give them insights on how their colleagues' strengths can best be leveraged to improve performance and build relationships.

“Being able to work well together is an integral part of our business and the industry at large. Some clients can have up to 9 TDMC employees working together on their brand, so it is important that the team culture is a positive and collaborative one.”

Melissa says the value of a positive company culture that is underpinned by support has been particularly evident since she became a mother last year. “This has been a huge transition for me. With added home responsibilities, I no longer have the luxury of being able to work late without being cognisant of the time. There are also unexpected events, doctor's appointments, and sometimes my childminder is sick. I am so grateful to be at a company that supports me in these circumstances. It means that although the mental and emotional load has widened, I am still able to rise to – and enjoy – the challenge, albeit within the space that works for me on the day”.

### **Continual learning is essential for agility**

“The digital industry is continuously evolving and changing, and to serve your clients best you need to make sure you are learning and growing too so that you can quickly adapt to and implement changes,” says Melissa.

She says it is important to follow social media pages, influential people and thought leaders in the industry to stay on top of the changes, tests, and results, and for team members to share their learnings so that they can all grow.

All TDMC employees also need to keep up with their Meta and Google certifications. “We are required to retake our exams each year because all of the platforms change so much. And learning is not just for the newer team members either. This year, the leadership team have all been enrolled for Red & Yellow extension courses, ensuring we too grow and update our skills.”

Melissa says being a part of TDMC's growth and building a successful career in digital marketing has been incredibly fulfilling. "I love working with the brands in our portfolio in this very dynamic space, alongside incredible people – both clients and colleagues. It is great to implement strategies that yield tangible results and contribute to business growth, and to engage with clients and celebrate shared achievements."

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