

11 valuable lessons from 11 wonder women in digital

 By [Carmen Murray](#)

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When the *Wonder Woman* movie was released, I didn't expect much of it, but I was delightfully surprised by the portrayal of this superhero. It gave me a valuable perspective on the importance of inner strength. There were also some valuable leadership lessons we could all take to heart.



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When we think of women in digital, we look up to powerful women like Arianna Huffington, Marissa Mayer and Sheryl Sandberg – the voice of the working woman. All of these female leaders have some sound advice that both men and women can take to heart:

1. Find an inspirational mentor
2. Sit at the table
3. Don't give up
4. Use your diversity
5. Be unashamedly confident
6. Never stop learning
7. Be defined by how you survive

With the IAB SA Digital Summit around the corner, we wanted to shine a light on some of the female trailblazers bucking the trend in South Africa. Below are 11 lessons from 11 of SA's digital leaders to inspire both women and men.



IAB SA Digital Summit speaker lineup announced

31 Jan 2018



Qhakazambalikayise Thato Mthembu

Head of strategy, Digify Africa and speaker at the IAB Digital Summit.

What is your mantra?

Innovate or die.

What is the most valuable lesson you've learned?

My most valuable lesson is that the learning never ends. Digital is all about innovation and imagining new ways of doing things. This means you constantly need to have your ear to the ground. Find information sources that will keep you sharp and in the know.

Why do you love what you do?

I love the work I do at Digify Africa because it is all about re-imagining education. It's turning the traditional ways of doing things on its head. I love it because days are unpredictable, new technological advancements force us to innovate and think of ways we can use them to better our offering. Lastly, there is nothing more rewarding than seeing how learning new skills has changed so many of our students and participants' lives. I've seen students who were depressed and feeling like they had no career options graduate and go on to manage massive accounts and become incredibly valuable additions to an agency's creative team.

What superpower do you bring to the industry?

I have an insatiable curiosity and an incredibly strategic mind...I wish my superpower was something fun like mind-reading or teleportation though.



Chakazambalikayise Thato Mthenbu,
head of strategy, Digify Africa.

Amanda Louw Bester

Founder of Pragmatic Consulting and speaker at the IAB Digital Summit.



Amanda Louw Bester, founder of
Pragmatic Consulting.

What is your mantra?

"Always be learning, be your own educator."

What is the most valuable lesson you've learned?

To treat yourself as a brand and a business, even if you are an employee. That slight change in mindset makes all of the difference in career growth and maintaining relevance in a rapidly evolving industry.

Why do you love what you do?

I get to specialise in my chosen areas while being involved in many other areas that further enhance my specialities and skill set. This creates a "snowball effect" where I get better and grow faster. I am able to share my skills and knowledge to amplify and help others. It's very motivating and rewarding no matter how great the challenges are, it keeps me driven.

What superpower do you bring to the industry?

I'm an autodidact (self-taught person). Everything I teach myself and learn is current and up to date, always keeping me relevant and in demand. I'm a practical learner, after practising something new, no more than three times, I've got it and never lose it.

Riana Smit

Head of digital, Old Mutual iWyze.

What is your mantra?

Predicting the rain doesn't count; building arks does (Warren Buffet).

What is the most valuable lesson you've learned?

Always stay on top of technology and understand the technology - but always remember not everything is a fit for your business. Just because you can doesn't mean you should.

Why do you love what you do?

The flexibility to change quickly and the accuracy of which everything can be measured - from digital marketing (entire sales funnel) to website performance and human behaviour. It's every control freak's dream - you can change it with a click of a button.

What superpower do you bring to the industry?

A digital vision driven by a constant desire to do more, change more and make the world easier for consumers through all digital channels.



Riana Smit, head of digital, Old Mutual iWyze.

Jessy Severins

Ad operations and yield manager Gumtree, South Africa and panel moderator at the IAB Digital Summit.



Jessy Severins, ad operations and yield manager Gumtree, South Africa.

What is your mantra?

I am open to embracing the unknown.

What is the most valuable lesson you've learned?

Do not underestimate the power of Operations. Ever. When I started in advertising, I was surprised with how much actually happens before a banner serves on a website. I considered that a rookie conclusion, but notice that sometimes people higher up in organisations do not realise this.

Why do you love what you do?

No day is ever the same in Advertising Operations. Whether it's exploring a new partnership with a company that has a lot of usable data, rethinking our yield strategy based on a test we ran or improving our measurement methodologies. I love the variety of it.

What superpower do you bring to the industry?

I know a little bit of everything while focusing on advertising operations. I like to understand where various parts of the business connect and the background of their (sometimes conflicting) requests and KPIs.

Sturrae Hickley

Ad operations manager at Mark1 and panellist at the IAB Digital Summit.

What is your mantra?

To be the best person I can be, for myself and for the people around me.

What is the most valuable lesson you've learned?

There are so many lessons I've learned, but think the one that always sticks is that regardless of where I find myself, as a woman, I will always need to prove my value and my worth. I always live by this, if it's important to me, it's worth fighting for.

Why do you love what you do?

The constant challenges hands down! I love that our industry is ever-evolving and that I'm always learning. This keeps me grounded and keeps me growing.

What superpower do you bring to the industry?

Believe in people, regardless of who they are and where they come from. Mentorship is the



Sturrae Hickley, ad operations manager at Mark1.

key to developing successful people.

Ashleigh Footit

Head of programmatic and audience at Spark Media and panellist at the IAB Digital Summit.



Ashleigh Footit, head of programmatic and audience at Spark Media.

What is your mantra?

Being self-taught is the most empowering gift you can give yourself: "If you don't know it, research it!". I never take "but I don't know how" as a legitimate excuse for anything.

What is the most valuable lesson you've learned?

The only thing that's constant in the digital landscape is change. What you know one day may be different the next. In order to make the cut in this industry, you need to be humble enough to accept that you will not always have all the answers right away.

Why do you love what you do?

In a quickly (and constantly) evolving industry, every day is a new challenge and there is always something new to learn. I love that I get to exercise my brain's biceps every day!

What superpower do you bring to the industry?

My ever-inquiring mind. As the saying goes: I "dig in, figure it out and fix it".

Josephine Buys

CEO of IAB SA, and speaker at the IAB Digital Summit.

What is your mantra?

As I have said to my teenage goddaughter, whether in your career or your life decisions, always "lean in and speak out".

What is the most valuable lesson you learned?

"I never lose. I either win or learn," - Nelson Mandela.

Why do you love what you do?

I'm passionate about keeping my finger on the pulse and my role in establishing the first IAB on the African continent keeps me at the forefront of digital while giving me access to some of the brightest minds in our industry through our board and councils.



Josephine Buys, CEO of IAB SA.

What superpower do you bring to the industry?

I have a creative solutions approach to problem-solving and what have been called "sometimes impossibly high standards".

May Laloo

Head of digital, Nestle.

What is your mantra?

Eat. Pray. Love

What is the most valuable lesson you've learned?

To never stop learning and be agile. If you stop learning, you become complacent and if you are not agile and still doing things like you have always done them – you might as well stop breathing.



May Laloo, head of digital, Nestle.

Why do you love what you do?

I get to work with brilliant minds that I learn from daily. I love technology and the ability to bring a brand's story to life using digital technology is magic for me.

What superpower do you bring to the industry?

Courage and a strong sense of perseverance. Never give up, even when no-one has your back!

Elizabeth De Stadler

CEO of Novcon and speaker at the IAB Digital Summit.

What is your mantra?

Anything worth doing is worth doing well.

What is the most valuable lesson you learned?

I think attacking life with curiosity and being like a sponge is probably right up there. That, and having empathy with my clients and understanding why they do something before I even think of giving them advice on how to change it.

Why do you love what you do?

Law has such a bad reputation for being impractical, disruptive to business and inaccessible. I love finding ways to shock those expectations by finding innovative ways to make law and compliance work for businesses rather than against them.



Elizabeth De Stadler, CEO of Novcon.

What superpower do you bring to the industry?

Cutting through the crap.

Candice Goodman

MD of Mobitainment.



Candice Goodman, MD of Mobitainment.

What is your mantra?

To listen to and learn from everyone around me.

What is the most valuable lesson you learned?

Collaboration is a great skill that us women share. I have learned to harness it and nurture relationships to cultivate it.

Why do you love what you do?

I have always wanted to use technology to make the world a better place – I love finding technical solutions to make a difference.

What superpower do you bring to the industry?

The power of deconstruction: Breaking down complex issues into logical steps that people

can understand.

Sudasha Vandiar

Business unit director, Sprout Performance.

What is your mantra?

What is the most valuable lesson you learned?

Always trust your instincts. As women, we have this innate ability to read a situation and understand it instinctively. If it feels wrong, don't do it. If it feels right, conquer.

Be prepared. Know your audience and absolutely know your content. We're not saving lives, but we do have a huge responsibility as marketers in how the role we play impacts lives.

Why do you love what you do?

Working with some of the smartest people in the world, driving business goals for a selection of the greatest clients and being able to achieve all that together with a wonderful team. Digital is not for the faint-hearted. The pace at which the industry is growing, how the status quo is constantly changing and improving keeps us on our toes and strongly drives the need for all marketers to think big and be agile. This lends itself perfectly to our solutionist thinking approach. What's not to love?



Sudasha Vandiar, business unit director, Sprout.

What superpower do you bring to the industry?

I pride myself on my ability to unpack a problem, extract the lesson and move forward with a solution without getting lost or dwelling in the stress or discomfort of it all.

We want to thank all the Wonder Women for their contribution to this piece, and all the Wonder Women leaning in and impacting our amazing industry.



Tickets on sale for the IAB Digital Summit, Bookmark Awards

11 Jan 2018



ABOUT CARMEN MURRAY

Carmen Murray is one of the most influential modern marketers in South Africa. Her strong background in content, digital, mobile, innovation, and data analytics allows her to identify emerging trends and conceptualise disruptive communication strategies deployed with precision. The customer and their needs are always at the heart of her approach.

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