

These are tumultuous times. These are tremendous times

 By [Mike Beukes](#)

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In psychology, there's a term known as post-traumatic growth. If you haven't already worked it out, it talks to the idea of rising from the ashes. Or, to use a phrase coined by Nassim Taleb, being '[antifragile](#)'. What didn't kill us, made us stronger.



Mike Beukes, ECD at Duke Advertising.

2018 was a doozy. Our industry is (very rightly) turning itself inside out with transformation. Some household creative agency names are faltering or folding into technology brands. The media landscape continues to shift, with new rules and behaviours coming into play rapidly. Our next elections are just around the corner ('nuff said).

And all this happens as our economy limps along, whilst inflation and unemployment sprint past it.

But it's in these times that the most exciting things happen. Revolutions are born out of adversity. Whilst I don't see a revolution coming, I do see an optimistic, powerful industry driving forward with more confidence than ever before.

In all this adversity we have the best tools we've ever had, we're more woke and we're potent in our expertise and creativity.

Fostering a culture of creative entrepreneurship

Mike Beukes 15 Nov 2018





Returning to our metaphor, researchers have identified five areas of development, which are the hallmarks of post-traumatic growth – new possibilities for one’s life; growth in personal strength; finding or increasing spirituality; better personal relationships; and more *joie de vivre*.

So, here are my predictions for 2019, through the lens of post-traumatic growth and unwavering optimism.

1. New possibilities for one’s life: The age of independents

Besides the obvious economic empowerment benefits, the transformation sea change has birthed a positive movement in our industry.

It has bred a groundswell of exceptional new independent agencies. Ones which are untethered by overseers, who can move swiftly, are locally focused and who probably crap themselves every day trying to make bootstrapped cash flow work.

It’s time for more powerful, confidently homegrown agencies and groups to rise, built with the right cultural mix from the get-go.

2. Growth in personal strength: The work is going to get even better

Our naval gazing at what makes us South Africans has led to some ground-breaking work over the last few years. Work which is incredibly plugged-in to our cultures, and with its greatest influence coming from our continent.

We’ve barely scratched the surface; and the work to come will not only blend culture, but data and technology more, too. There will be deeper authenticity and excellence, which comes with confidence.

3. Increased spirituality: Brands will make more of a genuine stand

There was some big work in the last year, which saw some brands taking a clear stand on justices, both locally and abroad.

I don’t see this trend stopping any time soon. But what I hope is that it has genuine intention, rather than being driven by a cynical, earned media KPI. 2019 will see many brands unable to remain on the fence – they will need to drive a positive agenda.

4. Better interpersonal relationships: The age of the freelancer

With agencies becoming leaner, more clients building in-house capability and job-shedding, it’s becoming a buyers’ market for freelancers.

Freelancing has come of age in South Africa, with world-class talent mixed with high professionalism and the ability to build units of freelancers around themselves. (Although, we need more of these brilliant minds to found more independent agencies.)

5. More *joie de vivre*: We’ll go further into technology, whilst backlashing against it

Apparently, the average American spends 11 hours a day connected to media. I don’t know the local stats, but it’s probably in the same region. Whilst this is happening, we’re also backlashing back into the real world – especially after the privacy debacles.

2019 will build the momentum to shift us from being slaves to our technology to making technology our slave, again. As an industry, we need to find ways to remain a welcome part of people's lives.

6. And, finally, a focus on growth: The decline of procurement-led profitability

After round-after-round of cost-cutting and procurement kings chasing ever-diminishing returns, along comes a possibly heretical thought: maybe we can grow to greatness rather than shrink to glory.

Once we imbibe the magical elixir of growth, new business shoots appear driven by creativity. More optimistic staff woo ever-happier customers, more appropriate brand budgets deliver increasing returns and more rewarding creative work sees daylight.

The virtuous cycle overtakes the vicious, driven not by a reaction to "market forces" but by a conscious and brave act of will to change our world. The nimbler, challenger clients are getting there already and 2019 will see them eat the lunch of sleeping corporate monoliths.

So, yes, 2019 will be a rollercoaster, possibly without safety harnesses. It's going to be scary, tumultuous. But as we hold our hands into the air whilst whipping through the loop, it'll be tremendous, too.

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Since 2000, Mike's career has seen him working with agencies in London, Los Angeles, Cape Town, Johannesburg and Dublin...
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