

Generations lied but we can still play New Horizons to ensure others live the dream

By [Atiyya Karodia](#)

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It has been three decades since SABC 1's local soap opera *Generations* took to the airwaves - incidentally inspiring a cohort of young South Africans to pursue careers in advertising.



Image supplied. Strategy director, Atiyya Karodia says the *Generations* generation has come of age and has found the industry wanting

When I was little, my cousins and I would play pretend, but instead of 'shop-shop' we'd play 'New Horizons', the fictional ad agency in our favourite soapie, *Generations*.

There we were in the dining room of my uncle's house, acting out scenes and creating our own drama, making campaigns, talking money and living the successes and failures the way only children can.

“ *Generations made the possibility of a career in advertising visible, attainable and worth dreaming about for children of colour in a way that the real-life industry still largely fails to do.* ”

Fictional representation is better than nothing

Looking back from the inside, I realise now that's the power of what we have in our hands as marketers, creatives, media and film.

When real life fails to inspire, we provide that inspiration through the narratives we create. We can dream up role models and tell stories that dreams are built on, and influence lives in the process.

And so, thanks to *Generations*, instead of accounting or medicine, this little Indian girl chose the crazy world of advertising. I get to play New Horizons every day.

“ If you ask what’s different from the dream that *Generations* sold me and the reality of the industry, the answer is representation, diversity, equity and inclusion ”

Never meet your heroes

Some time ago I posted on Facebook, “*Generations* lied to me. This is nothing like New Horizons ”.

It was (mostly) a joke – because in my career, I have yet to get the opportunity to walk into a room and fire everyone or stage a coup.

Some days the gossip is average at best and the true drama only happens once a year at the Loeries where all the secrets come out and all the wedding rings come off.

But, as the saying goes, many a truth is said in jest.

My Facebook post was not only a joke because the real lie was the kind of rooms I would find myself walking into.

If you ask what’s different from the dream that *Generations* sold me and the reality of the industry, the answer is representation, diversity, equity and inclusion.



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Generations showed me a world where the real-life drama that unfolds in advertising (controversial exits, mergers, takeovers, shake-ups, accounts being won, accounts being lost, legacy agencies dying and new-age ones being birthed) happens through the lens of Black talent and Black excellence.

That image was shattered early on in my career.

Creating advertising’s New Horizon

Here’s the thing though, I am not New Horizons – at least not what it represents at its richest.

I may have faced my share of challenges along the journey, from being called an equity hire to being pulled into a room to

add a bit of melanin, but as an Indian woman, it's important to acknowledge that my challenges pale in comparison to those of my Black colleagues.

“ To revive the industry and build brands that are truly connected to the hearts and minds of our country and continent, we have to invest, grow, sponsor and appoint Black leadership ”

In many instances, I have been 'white enough' to progress, be respected and have a voice.

That has given me and those like me a degree of privilege – and with it, a mandate. It's our responsibility, as anyone with a level of privilege, to drive change.

We do this by listening more, making space and giving up space if what we want to build is an industry that reflects our country and continent and creates culturally sound work – progressive advertising that can fuel the flames of culture and do justice to the lived experiences of the people we speak to.

To prove to the next generation of talent that their dreams are possible, we must stand for more than the minimum of a Level 1 BBEE card.



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To revive the industry and build brands that are truly connected to the hearts and minds of our country and continent, we have to invest, grow, sponsor and appoint Black leadership.

If this is the era of shake-ups, the collective ambition we need to rally around is a meaningful transformation agenda – no more 'quota players' or casting the room.

Our client boardrooms are changing faster than we are as agencies and the impact on the growth of agencies is being felt and will continue to be felt until something changes.

It's time to defeat the myth of meritocracy that has ignored the reality of a severe lack of access, diminishes Black talent, and trivialises the topic of transformation – or worse, continues to treat Black talent as a risk.

Generations sold me the dream and inspired me to get into this crazy game we call advertising.

That game isn't everything *Generations* promised it would be, but I'm still grateful for every frenetic day I experience in this industry.

The show that inspired me has left a legacy in our country.

As I step forward, I'm inspired to leave a legacy that proves possibility so that someone else can play New Horizons and live the dream.