

The six-point plan to inject diversity into your agency

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If you want diversity in your campaigns, you need diversity in your agencies, argues Gemma Hunter. Here's how to redress the balance.

I'm going to start with two irrefutable facts and one educated guesstimate:

1. According to the last Australian census, 47% of people living in Australia were either born overseas or their parents were.
2. In the [AdNews Creativity List](#) of 23, there were two women. I'm one. Two Bens, I'm neither.
3. My educated guesstimate is that in 90% of Australian agencies, less than 10% of

creatives are not white, not middle class, not wearing black-rimmed glasses and not men.

In a country that is arguably one of the biggest cultural melting pots on the planet, why do most campaigns single out white, middle-class customers and how can we fix this?

The answer is simple – if you want diversity in your campaigns, you need diversity in your agencies.

In the lead up to the 3% conference, I've spent quite a bit of time talking to the industry, men and women at 15 agencies, at all levels of creative expertise and experience.

Some pretty obvious themes have come out along with some definitive actions we all need to take if we want to ensure that we are doing right by our current and future staff, our clients and their customers.

It's a fact that people feel most comfortable recruiting in their own image, we feel most comfortable with people we deem to be 'like us'.

But like us does not necessarily mean what you think it means. One young creative I talked to on this journey told me, "At uni, I was surrounded by people like me, then I started work, there was no-one like me and it was pretty overwhelming."

Someone once described my team as 'where the misfits fit'. I asked what they meant by that: "On first glance, it makes no sense, none of you are alike in any way." After giving it serious thought I countered that what we share are our values.

We are all passionate beyond reason about what we do. Curious, brave, team players that support each other at all times. I realised at that moment that subconsciously that is what I look for when hiring. Shared purpose, values, energy. Where you come from, your background, sex, or any other factor that might define you sociodemographically, has no bearing on how we see your potential and it never will.

So here's an action plan I've put together to ensure the people in your agencies better

reflect Australia's society today.

1. Define your team values, purpose and culture

Hire for those values even and especially when it makes you uncomfortable because the person looking back at you doesn't need to 'look' like you.

As creative leaders we spend a huge amount of time crafting creative skills, too much I believe.

Of course the wisdom we can impart from a creative direction POV is invaluable but if we forget to provide development in other areas it's frankly worthless. What good is a creative without resilience? We all know how hard feedback can be.

What use is a CD that does not have the skills of giving and receiving feedback? How will that CD build their team's confidence?

2. Provide training

Train in the skills that will set your team up for success – resilience, negotiation, the art of feedback.

Honesty and vulnerability, are, I believe, absolutely and vitally important to becoming a great leader.

So now you are hunting for talent outside the usual spots you will need to sell not the dream but the reality.

Tell them how tough it will be, that they need a pioneering spirit and what you will do to support them.

While we are talking leadership let's face the fact that being a highly awarded creative

doesn't necessarily make you a great leader of people.

3. Build leaders of people

History shows us great leaders have teams who will fight with them at all costs because they believe and feel valued and supported. That doesn't happen by accident, it happens by design, those leaders have learned and worked hard on their leadership skills.

I believe wholeheartedly in coaching and mentoring. It's something I put a large amount of constant focus on.

Coaching and mentoring cross-industry is our job as much as honing great creative. One Senior female creative I talked to told me: "I want to learn from other women how to juggle life and work, how to balance my ambition with my family, how to be it all."

4. Woman up for success

To the women who say "why should I help you when I had to struggle", imagine someone saying something like that to your child, sister, best mate?

5. Be flexible

Agency leadership teams need to seriously address flexibility.

One CD I talked to told me, "My sense of what is most important has changed since having kids, I want to work where my values are reflected and flexibility is given. I spent so long wondering can I have kids and come back or will I have to change what I do."

This is not just about mothers, fathers too should be given the flexibility to balance family and work needs.

As an industry, we must get better at this.

6. Call it as you see it

So many women I talked to had horror stories of sexism but most had felt unable to do anything about it for fear of labelling as 'difficult'.

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OPINION