

# #BehindtheMask with... Renay Tandy, public relations director and co-founder at Ngage

 By [Jessica Tennant](#)

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This week, we go behind the mask with Renay Tandy, public relations director and co-founder at Ngage - The Agency for Industry.

As this forms part of our Women's Month content feature, we asked Tandy to share her key message to fellow women in business:

*“ I would love to see women in business be kinder to themselves and each other. For some reason, as women, I think that we tend to be too hard on ourselves; and expect ourselves to be, in my case, boss to my team, account director to my clients, wife and mom. I recently learnt that you can't pour from an empty cup, and it's ok to sometimes put yourself first. ”*

## 1. So, tell us, what's really behind your mask (literally and/or figuratively speaking).

Many people don't see this side of me, but I am actually quite shy and I get extremely anxious speaking to new people in social or networking situations. At work, I have no problem cold-calling potential new clients, presenting to a room of 50 people or pitching a story idea to a journalist, but socially I am very different and it takes a lot of effort.

## 2. Where are you locked down?

At my house in the Meyersdal Nature Estate in Meyersdal, Alberton, in the chaos of home-schooling my two girls (4 and 7), with my two dogs and my cat.

## 3. How are you finding working from home or physical distancing at the office / how has your way of working changed?

Strangely enough, without all of the usual interruptions that I get at the office, I am getting much more done in a day at

home, even with home schooling two kids! I usually have to leave the office at 2pm to fetch the kids from school and to and from extramural activities. Without those activities, my day is much more relaxed and less rushed.



#### **4. Describe a typical workday, if such a thing exists.**

My new normal day runs something like this ... We try to start the day with some exercise, either an online exercise call, walking the dogs or doing some PT at home, and then school starts at 8:30pm after eating breakfast together around the table (something we couldn't do before lockdown). My eldest usually then has a Zoom call with her class to run through the day's work, while I attend to emails on my phone (as she uses my computer), while her little sister practices her letters, writing or colouring in. We then take turns between her and my work (and her and my Zoom calls) until lunchtime, when we all sit down together for lunch (unless I have a meeting at that time), and then the kids usually go outside to play for a few hours or do their online classes, such as ballet or singing sensations, while I finish up with work.

#### **5. How do you maintain a good rapport with your teammates/clients?**

My team has been incredible during lockdown. We actually closed the office about a week-and-a-half before lockdown to keep our team safe, and they have all adjusted now to our 'new normal' so easily. Most of our staff work flexi hours, so they were already set up at home and used to managing their own time outside of the office. The rest of the team were quickly set up with internet access and made sure to take their necessities from the office, such as stationery, computer screens and – most importantly – their office chairs, so that they could make their home offices as comfortable as possible. I have weekly catch-up meetings with my team, and the rest of the departments have their own weekly meetings to stay connected. We've all had our good and bad days, but we know that we have a team supporting us on the bad days, which really helps.

#### **6. How do you socialise these days?**

My husband and I have a very close circle of friends, and during lockdown we had weekly Zoom socials, which I really looked forward to. A laugh and a glass of wine with our friends, even over the computer, made me feel so much less stressed, and brought back some normality to our life.

#### **7. What do you do to keep fit/healthy and/or sane (physically/mentally)?**

Lockdown hasn't been kind on my waistline! And I only have myself to blame – I think I need a lock for my fridge! But I am enjoying doing Zoom exercise classes, and we go for daily walks with the dogs as a family now that we can, which really

helps to lift my mood and keep me sane. After the hard lockdown, we were allowed to horse-ride again, which was amazing. The stables is my happy place, and where I go for my 'me time' and to reflect – it's better than any therapist's chair.

## 8. What new apps would we find if we scrolled through your phone?

My new obsession is TikTok, which I think most 30-somethings only discovered during lockdown.

## 9. Share your favourite Covid-19/lockdown-related meme/gif with us.

This was one of my favourite, although there are many.

“ One of the many things that I love about South Africans is our ability to find humour even in very serious situations. ”



## 10. What is the first thing you plan to do when the lockdown lifts?

I can't wait to go to the beach!! My toes are longing to feel some beach sand.

## 11. Describe your career and if/how the pandemic/lockdown has affected its course.

My career is all about communicating. I think that (good) PR professionals are often underrated. The pandemic shone a light on the importance of effective communication, and I think that the good PR professionals were really valued during this time. With staff working remotely and offices closed, clear and consistent communications with staff and stakeholders was vital. When we realised the challenges that our clients were facing with communicating quickly after the lockdown was announced, we wanted to do something to give back, and created a free Covid-19 communications pack, which we offered to companies who needed help with communicating, but didn't have the luxury of an agency. The pack was downloaded by more than 300 companies who gave us wonderful feedback about how it helped them through this very difficult time.

One of the other changes that has come from this pandemic is the launch of our online events division, which was born from our clients needing to still host events during lockdown.

## 12. Any companies/brands that you feel have responded particularly well to the crisis and/or Covid-19-related campaigns that stand out to you, and why?

I think that Spar stood head and shoulders above its competitors during this time. They quickly assessed the needs of what was required to keep, firstly, their staff and secondly, their customers safe, and they were the first to implement shields for their tellers, among many other precautions. They also had stock when others had bare shelves, and I think that they handled everything very well.

### **13. What are you working on right now?**

We have just completed our first online masterclass for my architecture client Paragon Group, which was filmed and produced by our newly-launched online events division.

The Covid-19 pandemic has shone a spotlight on the health of our built environment, with increased attention and concern at preventing the spreading of pathogens. Predictions are that we will definitely see more large-scale outbreaks of epidemics in future. This is, therefore, something well worth paying careful attention to. A recent study indicated that people typically spend 90% of their time indoors. The built environment, therefore, has the potential to have a major impact on our health – both good and bad. Another study found that the risk of infection indoors is almost 19 times higher than outdoors.

In order to highlight the important role that the built environment plays in occupant health, the Paragon Group hosted an online masterclass entitled ‘Designing Towards a Healthy Built Environment’.

The masterclass was an overwhelming success, with close to 500 attendees.

### **14. What does the ‘new normal’ look like to you?**

*“ The lockdown has forced me to slowdown and appreciate the small things in life. I love spending days at home with my children and watching them learn newthings, telling them stories of when I was younger, spending family afternoons around a board game, cooking and just being together. My newnormal is going to be a lot less rushed, and I have promised myself that I will not go back to my old normal, no matter what. ”*

We don’t need to drive two hours to have a 20-minute meeting, and I love that lockdown has taught people the power of online meetings and spending less time in traffic.

### **15. What are some of the buzzwords floating around at the moment, and some of the catchphrases you utter yourself?**

Haha, I constantly hear: ‘You are on mute’, or ‘Can you hear me ok?’ and ‘I am so sorry, I was kicked out, what did I miss?’ Or having our kids or partner interrupt a meeting, but that seems to be our life right now, and I really don’t mind any of it.

### **16. What advice would you give to other industry folk during this time?**

If you don't have a team that you can trust to work independently, then you are unfortunately doing something wrong. Our office is still closed and my team is just as – if not more – productive at home. They have made me so proud, and it has been very easy to put them first during this time.

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\*Interviewed by [Jessica Tennant](#).

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