

'See It Be It': Overcoming gender barriers in the creative space

 By [Danette Breitenbach](#)

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"Eighty-eight percent of young women feel they don't have a female role model or a business mentor to look up to. Which isn't surprising as less than one percent of ad agencies are founded by women."



Image supplied. Lauren Mitchell, creative group lead at Accenture Song will represent Africa at this year's Cannes See It Be It programme, an accelerator programme for women who have just stepped into a leadership role within their agency

You will find these words on the [Cannes 'See It Be It' programme page](#).

"'See It Be It' is an accelerator programme by Cannes for women who have just stepped into a leadership role within their agency," explains Lauren Mitchell, creative group lead at King James - part of Accenture Song.

[Mitchell](#) has been selected as one of only 16 women (out of 700 applicants) to attend the programme this year. She is also the only woman from Africa on the programme.

Representing the continent

She believes this is not because of a lack of female creative talent on the continent, but a lack of awareness of the programme.

She adds that she only found out about the programme after Nkanyezi Masango, group executive creative director at Accenture Song/ founder at Blackboard interacted with the programme at Cannes last year.



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“When he got back, he told me about it saying that it was a very interesting interaction as it was more collaborative. But what struck him was that there was not one single representative from Africa,” she explains.

She decided to change this and entered, going through a rigorous interview process, and to her delight she was accepted. She calls it a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

“Apart from the fact that it is expensive to attend Cannes, and this is a fully paid trip, it will put me in contact with women I admire.”

Barriers to overcome in the industry

While she has great mentors within the agency, she says none of them are women.

“As a woman in advertising there are many barriers to overcome, and it can be difficult to explain these from my point of view to people who have never had that experience,” she explains.

She adds that this could be a positive experience or a negative one, it could be a moment of growing or learning.

“I am looking forward to meeting the people who will be mentoring us to figure out how they got to where they are and how they overcame barriers, from social to political. “And I have never really had the opportunity to have that with someone. And now I will have that with multiple women whom I admire.”



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The gender pay gap barrier

One of the barriers she speaks about is the gender pay gap. “Women and men might have the same experience, but their pay does not always align, with women generally paid less than their male counterparts. When you are being paid a lot less

the assumption is that you are not as valuable, even if that is not the case," she says.

The unfortunate part of advertising and the creative world - in fact, all business she says is that it is a numbers thing. "It's a value exchange and because we are coming in lower constantly that's looked at when we are promoted or given a raise."

For that reason, women tend to move around quite a bit because it is the only way to get salary jump. "But when you move around a lot then the opportunity to grow within an agency becomes difficult as it takes time to get going, to familiarise yourself with clients and build relationships with people internally."

The 'I do not see myself' barrier

Another barrier she talks about is that of not seeing yourself, your ideas, and point of view in any of her leaders. "It's difficult when you have nothing to look up to and hopefully fulfil one day."

While she expresses real admiration for her mentors and bosses and the people she gets to work with, she says it would be really nice bounce ideas off someone who has a similar experience and similar point of view.

"That's one of the biggest barriers. Little kids see astronauts on TV, and they see that it is always a man. If you cannot see yourself doing it, it's difficult to chase it."



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The small things that count

The barriers also exist in a myriad of small everyday things. "I have walked into meetings with clients where I am leading the meeting and they will greet everyone but greet me a bit differently. And then when I start presenting then they change their tune."

She says it can just be what she is wearing which means she gets treated differently. "It is not necessarily a barrier internally it's just little things that you notice on the way that led you to realise that you must fight that little bit harder to be recognised or talk louder or really pick your moment."

She adds: "And while all of learnings have been very helpful, I wish I just had someone to tell me those things."

This is something she has experienced her entire career. "So, the opportunity to attend 'See It, Be It' will give me the opportunity to understand what it takes to get to the level of the people who will be leading the programme."

Mitchell also wants to bring her 'See It Be It' experience back with her to help other up-and-coming women who are making a name for themselves. "And hopefully leave the industry better than the way that I found it."

About 'See It Be It'

The 'See It Be It' talent programme was founded in 2014 by Cannes Lions with the mission to achieve equal gender representation of creative directors and leaders across the global industry. Over the past nine years, it has elevated a worldwide community of 100+ creatives - positively impacting the gender representation we set out to equalise.

The programme aims to support creative female talent from across the global industry to accelerate them into senior creative roles. Over 100 women have taken part so far and many of their dreams have materialised – from moving into

leadership positions, to winning Lions, and becoming Cannes Lions jurors.

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Danette Breitenbach is a marketing & media editor at Bizcommunity.com. Previously she freelanced in the marketing and media sector, including for Bizcommunity. She was editor and publisher of AdVantage, the publication that served the marketing, media and advertising industry in southern Africa. She has worked extensively in print media, mainly B2B. She has a Masters in Financial Journalism from Wits.

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