

FCB Joburg's Suhana Gordhan on her promotion and thoughts around the coronavirus

By [Juanita Pienaar](#)

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In September last year, FCB Joburg promoted Suhana Gordhan to executive creative director, in line with a string of other promotions that happened within the agency. This move sees her joining the team of Neo Segola, who became an ECD in 2018, and newly promoted Tian van den Heever.



Suhana Gordhan.

Gordhan entered the advertising industry in 2001 and has worked on some of the country's much-loved brands at agencies like Ogilvy, Black River FC and Net#work BBDO. She joined FCB Africa in 2015 where she was the creative director before her promotion to executive creative director in September 2019 and is the creative lead on Coca-Cola South Africa.

I recently caught up with her to find out more about the new role and asked her to share some of her career highlights and why these stood out.

■ **Congrats on your appointment. How do you feel about it?**

At first, I was resisting it because it means more responsibility. Then I was fearful because I thought it would mean moving further and further away from the actual work. And then like most things, I realised it's the next step that will be my teacher, and so, a good thing.

■ **What excites you most about the agency and where it's going?**

“ Right now, everything is washed with a coronavirus hue, so what has started to excite me is how much more connected we have become as an agency and how we're starting to value simple human interactions a little more. But mostly, what excites me is that in a time of crisis, creativity is what the world turns to. And as agencies, we'll be forced to find

newground to rethink, redo and adjust all our settings. ”



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What do you love most about your career in advertising?

I love that it brings me the most unusual and memorable experiences like being a few metres away from Kevin Costner, learning to surf in Nicaragua, dressing like a ninja for some late-night graffiti, writing words for Madiba and nurturing young creatives.

I love that it opens up knowledge on such a vast range of subjects from chicken and soda to women empowerment and healthcare. And most of all, I love that creative thinking leads to making and making is where your creativity gets to live in the real world.



#Loeries2018: Suhana Gordhan's advertising journey (Part 1)

Jessica Tennant 13 Jun 2018



#Loeries2018: Suhana Gordhan's advertising journey (Part 2)

Jessica Tennant 14 Jun 2018



Any career highlights you're particularly proud of?

I'm really proud of the work our team did for Coca-Cola last year. It was called "The Coke Phonetic Can" and it was about teaching South Africans to pronounce each other's names. It was such a joyful, meaningful process, considering that even after 25 years of democracy, many of us still don't even attempt to get name pronunciations right. It also gave us the chance to produce a true, fully integrated campaign.

Getting the opportunity to judge at the Cannes Lions Festival of Creativity in 2016 was also unforgettable – a dream come true and such a massive learning experience.



FCB Joburg and Coca-Cola's Phonetic Can major winner at 2019 Creative Circle Awards

Nahana Communications Group 25 Feb 2020



Tell us a bit about your experience and how this has equipped you for your new position.

I think that this industry is so dynamic and you're constantly learning. So when you get into a role like this, it's not that you just apply everything and sit back and chill. I think that you find new gaps where learning is needed and I think you reach out even more to mentors for knowledge sharpening and guidance.

I spent 10 years being a creative director and the learning never stopped there either, but I do think that all those years of experience made the transition into this role a little more natural.

Being the 'Chair Auntie' of the Loeries also really played its part. It helped grow me in totally different ways and it showed me the power and potential a platform has to create meaning and change.



#LadiesofLoeries: Chair auntie Suhana Gordhan on the mayhem and magic

Leigh Andrews 25 Aug 2017



What are you most looking forward to/enjoying so far?

We've been working on a project for USAID which is about helping 800,000 men living with HIV to stay on their medication. This is the most intriguing and profound problem I've ever had to solve using creativity. It has been one of the most challenging and meaningful projects I've ever worked on.

Nothing about it is 'the usual' and more than just factual knowledge, I'm learning about something I knew very little about – the lived experience of HIV positive men in this country, the intricacies of the healthcare system and the devastating effects of stigma.

What's at the top of your to-do list?

“ Right now, it's clear that all of us in advertising have a single, focused objective, and that is to help our clients get through the current lockdown and how to steer our brands through the extended crisis of the coronavirus without being opportunistic and inauthentic. ”



#Loeries2018: "Step into your power, find your voice" - Suhana Gordhan

Leigh Andrews 16 Aug 2018



What are you currently reading/watching/listening to for work?

Reading: *Indistractable* by Nir Eyal – a book on how to manage distractions (not currently easy during Lockdown). I'm also reading *The Big Easy* – a book about the power of emotion in advertising, by Nahana's chief strategy officer, Rita Doherty.

Listening: *World Meditates* by Sri Sri Ravi Shankar – a daily live meditation on YouTube, so that I find calm in the times of the coronavirus.

Watching: *Kingdom*, a series on Netflix because creatives need all kinds of inspiration including dramatic stories about

Ancient Chinese Dynasties being threatened by throngs of daylight-loving zombies.

■ ***Tell us something about yourself not generally known?***

I'm a Hindu who occasionally has epic Jesus dreams.

You can connect with Gordhan on [LinkedIn](#) and visit FCB Joburg's [press office](#) for the latest news and updates.

ABOUT JUANITA PIENAAR

Juanita is the editor of the marketing & media portal on the Bizcommunity website. She is also a contributing writer.

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