

Roanna Williams reflects on her term as the first female Creative Circle chairperson

 By [Danette Breitenbach](#)

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Roanna Williams is the first woman to head up the Creative Circle. Elected as the chairperson of the Creative Circle 2022 – 2024, her two years end tonight, 14 March, when the Creative Circle Best of the Year takes place. She chats about her term, the industry and the future.



Source: LinkedIn. Roanna Williams is the first woman to head up the Creative Circle. Elected as the chairperson of the Creative Circle for 2022 – 2024, her two years end 14 March

■ As the first woman to head up the Creative Circle, you are a pioneer. but, since entering the industry how has it changed? Is this change good or bad and how do you see it going forward?

Pioneer is a very big word. I was honoured that the top creative leaders in our country voted me in as the 2022-2024 chairperson of the Creative Circle and had faith that I would be the right person to take the organisation forward and make a difference.

Our industry has always been more male-dominated. Recently the Scopen *Agency Scope* most admired Creative Agency Professionals list was released – and yes you guessed it – all candidates were male.

I can immediately think of some very creative and successful female leaders who should be on that list. Perhaps the female candidates are not doing enough self-marketing. But we definitely need to see some females getting onto this list.



Roanna Williams, the first woman to chair the Creative Circle

11 Mar 2022



Working harder than male colleagues

To be successful in this industry takes persistence, resilience, patience, self-confidence and bravery. Looking back at my career, I had to work much harder and prove myself over and over again to get the same recognition as my male colleagues. It's hard and frustrating trying to understand the why.

I think a large part of it is the subtle biases that persist – an unconscious behaviour that is taught very young and as a result, infiltrates our boardrooms without us even realising. A behaviour that can only change given time and open-minded environments.

Many women have mentioned that they wish there were more female mentors in the industry. People they can relate to; who understand their challenges and can give them the advice, guidance and the support they need to navigate their careers successfully and professionally.

“ According to the data, we are still seeing inequality at the top leadership levels ”

Inequality at top leadership positions

According to the data, we are still seeing inequality at the top leadership levels. The Cannes Lions Global Creativity report, states that globally only 11% of creative directors are women.

Going forward as we embrace the interesting and somewhat daunting world of AI, the successful agencies will be those that embrace a new wave of leadership. We need talent who is capable of empathy, stamina, tolerance, patience and an ability to adapt - traits held primarily by women.

The world is changing and the industry needs to shift. By embracing the value and the power of what the female creative mind can bring, the industry will release a new energy of storytelling, problem-solving and solutions that could just change the world for the better.



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■ **Regarding the above, what are the biggest gaps in the industry? After two years as the Creative Circle chairperson, what do you think you have accomplished? What still needs to be done?**

I began my tenure two years ago with a core ambition: through actions I wanted to shift the Creative Circle from primarily being perceived as an Ad of the Month award show, to an organisation that is truly living its core purpose: to inspire the transformation of product, people and perception through the power of creativity.

It's easy to talk about the purpose but if you truly want to shift perceptions, inspire an industry, grow our country's creative product and become the powerful voice of South African advertising, the organisation needs to live the purpose from the inside.

Creative Circle achievements

Over the past two years the Creative Circle achievements include:

- CC has continued to sponsor the Blackboard, a non-profit organisation committed to transforming the creative industry from the ground up. (To view the amazing work of this organisation started by Nkanyezi Masango go to [Blackboardcommunity.co.za](https://blackboardcommunity.co.za).)
- We have three incredible sponsors who back creativity as an essential business tool on board – SAB, Nedbank and Kagiso Radio.
- The introduction of the Mza'taal Category to the Best of the Year (aka ad of the year). This celebrates the creative application of any of our diverse South African languages.
- The inclusion of two to three young learner judges into the ad of the month judging panels. They are there to listen, learn, and ask questions, to hear what it takes to make winning work, and then be inspired to apply this knowledge to their work.
- Grown the attendance of the Full Circle event. This focuses on global trends and learnings from South African judges who attended Cannes Festival of Creativity. This event has been going for quite a few years, but with the help of the amazing Creative Circle events sub-committee, we have managed to increase the attendance and to make it an event not to be missed.



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- The launch of an exciting new podcast series *Talking in Creative Circles* sponsored by Kagiso radio this month. This series will focus on discussions around industry challenges, successes and inspiration. Watch this space and tune in. It's going to be amazing.
- A newsletter that keeps members up to date on ad of month winners and other points of creative interest.
- CC accessibility by opening up the phone line to the CCOs and ECDs that sit on our exco, through our *Ask a CCO anything* campaign at the Loeries 2023.



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Roanna Williams 10 May 2023



What are your biggest lessons/learning from being in this position?

My biggest take-outs and lessons as the chair of the Creative Circle are:

- This role is very important. It's over and above your regular "job" with no compensation. So, you have to care deeply

about the industry and have the emotional capacity available to give it your all.

- It takes a village to raise the South African creative industry and tapping into the incredible minds of the Creative Circle board helps you grow and achieve the purpose of the organisation.
- Juggling your diary becomes an art form.
- Implementation gets results. Less talk more action.
- Surround yourself with a team of doers.
- Listening is a secret weapon.

ABOUT DANETTE BREITENBACH

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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