

Watching *The West Wing*, a popular television series from the early 2000s, changed the course of Reatile Tekateka's life. The show sparked a desire to be part of a team that combined her interests in international relations with her aptitude for communications and inherent skill in diplomacy. It's the reason she made the bold decision to switch careers.

"I think I always had a sense of PR or something communications-related as the direction I should take but I only articulated it in my early 20s," she says. "I initially wanted to follow in my

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father's footsteps and pursue a career in the diplomatic corps, hence the choice of Political Science at UCT and Wits. The choice to switch was based on the belief that PR was a combination of my strengths. It allowed me to be both strategic in my thinking and creative in finding solutions."

Tekateka changed course to study PR at Varsity College. Upon completion, she began her career in 2005 as an account executive at Dynamo Africa, a small agency that formed part of an integrated communications group called The Gate. In 2007, she interviewed for an account manager position at Magna Carta and was there for just over a year before being approached by a former client, Blue Financial Services, to head up PR and Communications across their African operation.

BY EUGENE YIGA

Engaging the Public

A passion for strategy and communications inspires GIBS MBA Reatile Tekateka's role in public relations.

"I was surprised by the breadth of roles that fall under the definition of PR," she says. "This presents quite a challenge for the industry in terms of establishing our value for business and having a common set of standards which governs what we do. A publicist, public affairs manager and crisis management consultant do different jobs, although they may share certain fundamental skills and principles."

In 2009, she joined Liberty Holdings where she was the first group public relations manager and then group head of PR and Communications. It was during her five-year tenure that she took a management course at the Standard Bank Leadership Academy (as part of the broader group, Liberty employees were eligible for this course) that was run in conjunction with GIBS. Being exposed to a number of the institution's lecturers made her know that she would find a way to study there.

"GIBS has a solid reputation both in South Africa and abroad," she says. "It was most logical for me given its perceived excellence and geographic location. I was not in a position to apply to for an overseas MBA programme and GIBS stood out for me as the best that South Africa had to offer."

Tekateka completed a Postgraduate Diploma in Business Administration in 2012 and an MBA in 2015, both of which

delivered what they promised. Having been a specialist her entire career, she gained a more solid grounding in general management. She also gained confidence in decision-making, which made the choice to pursue a general management role the logical next step in her career.

"Over and above skills, it delivered on amazing networking opportunities as well as friendships which I will carry for many years to come," she says. "I was exposed to some of the best minds in the country across various industries and disciplines thanks to this MBA."

A significant move

Following a brief stint at a law firm she re-joined Magna Carta for two years starting in 2014, where she was a senior account director and then business unit head looking after clients with a pan-African footprint. She then joined Econet Media as the group head of PR and Communications across their African footprint and was responsible for overseeing the communications function for the group. Her latest role is as head of Engage Joe Public, a position she began in January this year.

"It's an exciting new chapter for me," she says. "It's the first time I've taken on the managing director role at an agency, which makes this a significant move. I've had an interest in building a



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communications practice for some years now and this gives me the opportunity to apply experience gained across my work within blue chip corporates and leading PR firms.”

Engage is the PR agency within Joe Public United, a well-respected group that represents some of the best minds across related disciplines in the marketing and communications universe. It's why Tekateka was excited to work for a group that's recognised for some of the leading creative work in the industry.

With just a dozen employees, the agency has established itself within the PR industry, having been recognised with a number of local and regional industry awards. It offers a full suite of services to clients across various industries.

These include but are not limited to corporate communications, crisis management, government relations, social media strategy and implementation, and stakeholder engagement.

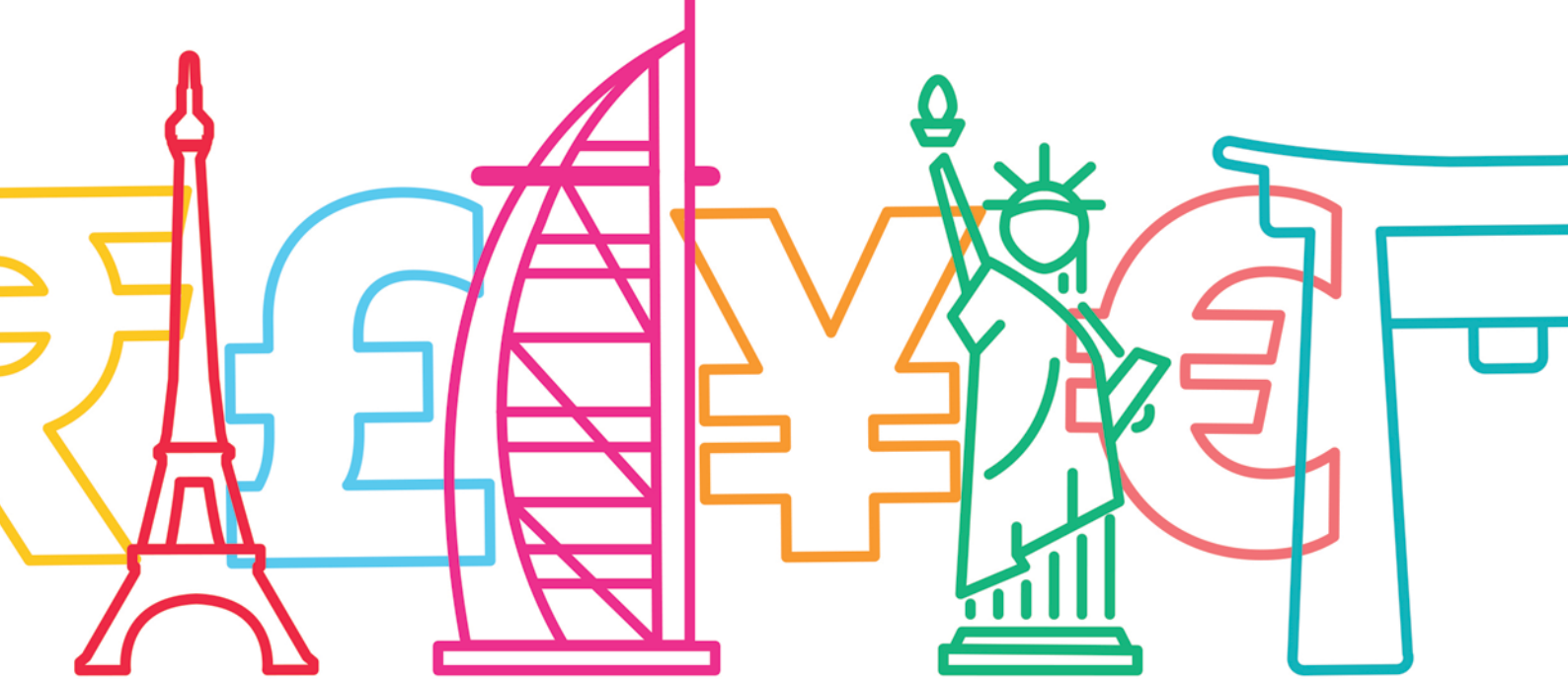
“A lot of people don't realise how much strategising we do in PR,” she says. “One of the reasons I felt it important to entrench and formalise my overall business knowledge through the MBA was precisely because of the need to have a deep understanding of business. It's only by understanding how a business operates that you're able to provide strategic counsel to clients. This is true whether you are in-house or consulting as part of an agency. You don't need an MBA to be good at PR but I do feel that business knowledge outside of specialist communications skills

is becoming increasingly important as we are being asked to tangibly demonstrate ROI and value.”

Leveraging the diverse skills

Harnessing the power to change perceptions and behaviour when a message is delivered effectively is one aspect Tekateka loves most about her work. She also thrives on the fact that no two days are the same.

“Something I've disciplined myself to work on every day is keeping abreast of the news,” she says. “You can't be in PR and not know what's going on in the world. Responding to and planning for where the news cycle is going is a critical aspect of what we do.”



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She also makes a point of touching base with her senior team on a daily basis. This lets her have a finger on the pulse of what's happening in the business even though the day-to-day running is mandated to her team. While this is easy to manage given the relative size of the agency, she has no doubt it will prove more challenging as they grow. But it's a management challenge she looks forward to tackling in due course.

"My previous role was an integrating role looking after the overall PR and communications for a group across multiple geographies," she says. "In addition to this, my role required that I work closely with colleagues in marketing, digital, regulatory and sales to name a few. My role at Joe Public requires similar skills in that, as a head of a specialist agency, I need to work with my counterparts across the group to optimise our output for clients and leverage the diverse skills which sit within the group."

A consolidation of disciplines

Overall, now is a tough time for the industry. Budgets are getting tighter and there is pressure to deliver 360-degree creative solutions. Because client expectations haven't adjusted to the limited resources, agencies have to think more creatively about how they execute and work more efficiently. Tekateka doesn't think this is entirely bad. Indeed, the idea that necessity is the mother of invention means that there is potential to see and create great work.

"The most obvious challenge is that we have to deliver the same, or in many instances more, on smaller budgets," she says. "It's forcing us to relook at our approach to client service and the solutions we offer. This has obvious implications for talent management strategies as well as overall positioning of our service offering in an increasingly competitive operating environment."

With corporates collapsing departments, running leaner, and seeking to deliver their mandate with fewer resources, professionals need to be able to navigate territory which they historically left to the counterparts in other specialist agencies. The consolidation of disciplines also means that, for example, it isn't enough to

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be a media relations specialist who doesn't understand how social media works.

"The opportunities are there for those who are willing to adapt and have started to future-proof their agencies," she says. "PR needs to carve out a new niche for itself and this means changing how we do things and drawing on other disciplines to further refine our offering... The business is doing well. It has built a solid model as a small agency but there is definitely room for growth."

Looking ahead, there are exciting plans for the agency. A key focus is using its position within the Joe Public United group to provide current and potential clients with value through an integrated business model. The goal is to build a creative agency that draws on the fundamentals of PR whilst learning from traditionally creative disciplines within its ecosystem. She believes this will strengthen the offering as a specialist agency and strengthen the overall proposition of the group.

"Our place within an integrated agency group like Joe Public United is a definite advantage for us," she says. "I've worked in big groups before but I hadn't experienced a real commitment to integration and recognition of its value the way I have here. We are also amongst some of the greatest creative minds and strategists in the industry and I believe this will have a positive impact on the type of work we produce." **GIBS**



Reatile Tekateka

Reatile Tekateka's seven characteristics of great PR professionals

These are people who exemplify empathy in a practical sense. If you can't put yourself in the shoes of someone who may not know what you know or think the way you think, you cannot advise the business on how best to communicate with its stakeholders.

PR is one of the few disciplines in which we are reminded daily that businesses sell to people and ultimately it is people who we need to deliver a message to.

Provide clients with solutions that deliver against a holistic brand and reputation management mandate whilst bringing excellence within respective disciplines to the table.

Seeing the bigger picture where others can't.

Manage reputations through scenario planning to determine how one action could lead to many outcomes, and prepare for those accordingly.

Have an inherent ability to understand people, how they think and how they take in information.

Trust your instinct. Once I learned to trust it, I've found it to be my true north.