

Sue Napier returns to advertising, her happy place



By Jessica Tennant

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The Hardy Boys (THB) has its lucky hands on Sue Napier, who also believes a little bit of luck has had a role to play in her achievements to date. This combined with her upbringing and the people and experiences that have helped shape who she is today, and having a supportive family that motivate her to do the hard yards.

“It goes without saying that we are really excited that Sue Napier will be joining The Hardy Boys team,” says CEO Dale Tomlinson. “As the newly appointed MD, Sue will work with the Exec at THB to strengthen both the internal and external development of our client relationships to ensure that we are responsive, relevant and agile in meeting their demands and expectations. Apart from the wonderful energy she will bring to the agency, her depth of experience in leading and building top teams and overseeing some of South Africa’s leading brands, she will also add substantially to the depth of guidance and leadership we can bring to our clients in an ever more demanding business climate.”

Napier adds, “I am extremely proud to be joining The Hardy Boys, an agency I have long respected and admired. Dale and his team have built a truly remarkable agency. The tenure of its clients, as well as the team of incredibly talented people who work for THB is testament to this, as is the exceptional work that the agency produces. There is a culture and an energy about THB that is infectious and inspiring. I feel truly honoured to have been appointed to this position. I simply cannot wait to join the team and get started.”

Coming from Mr Price (MRP), she is particularly happy to be back in the advertising space. “I know now, without a doubt, that the advertising industry is where I am supposed to be... In fact, it [THB] was the first agency I ever interviewed at some 20 years ago straight out of college, and Dale didn’t give me the job. He is never going to live that one down! So, I have come full circle.” In more ways than one, she’s now back in Durban and proud to be part of the creative talent that exists there.

Here, she talks through her experience at the various agencies she worked for and what they’ve taught her. She also shares a bit about how she cracked the so-called glass ceiling as a woman in leadership, the importance of having a good support system and doing what you love.



Sue Napier

■ How does it feel to crack the so-called glass ceiling as a woman in leadership, especially in the advertising space?

I was fortunate enough to be brought up by parents who taught me that through hard work and commitment, anything was possible. I have been fortunate to have been surrounded by incredible role models throughout my career, both male and female, whose success was testament to their work ethic and their passion. Luck also has had a role to play – being in the right place at the exact right time. Recognising those moments, believing in myself and being prepared to do the hard yards have all contributed to where I find myself today.

Every stage of my career has taught me something and has contributed to my present – TBWA Hunt Lascaris was the most incredible learning ground – it is where I “learnt” advertising. As MD of Ireland/Davenport which is a position I held from the inception of the agency, for 11 years, reminded me on a daily basis what hard work was all about, how important it is to surround yourself with people you both respect and like and to never take success for granted.

I am incredibly excited to begin my journey at THB – to rise to the challenges ahead, to learn from the people around me and to continue building with the Hardy Boys team, what can only be described as a remarkable culture and business.

▣ What advice would you give to other aspiring women hoping to do the same?

Do what you love. To work in advertising it has to be in your blood. It has to make your heart beat that little bit faster.

Put your head down, get your hands dirty and do the hard work – it will pay off in the end.

And above all, have respect for yourself, and for those around you – be curious about the world, read, watch, listen and be open to learning.

▣ What are you most excited about?

I am so happy to be back in advertising to be honest – this is my happy place!

I loved every moment of my time at MRP on the proverbial “other side of the fence.” I met amazing, talented people and learnt so much from them. I will always be grateful for the time I spent there and the opportunity I was given to do something completely new and different. And it brought me back to Durban – my hometown.

▣ What do you think of the industry in Durban?

I am so proud to be working in advertising in Durban. Durban has always been a hub for great creative talent but I don't think truly receives the credit and the respect that it is due. As a city, Durban has for a long time lost talent and the ambition of that talent to Johannesburg and Cape Town. Having now worked back in Durban for a year, I cannot express how blown away I have been by the talent that exists, in all spheres of creativity in Durban. There is a resurgence of creative energy in the city and I am thrilled to be a part of it.

It goes without saying that with ever-evolving technological development and innovation, geographic location doesn't impact on an agency's ability to deliver on a client's wants and needs.

I cannot wait to see what the future holds for THB.

▣ What do you bring to the agency and how do you plan to grow it?

Apart from the years of experience and learning I bring to the agency based purely on my number of years in the industry as well as the invaluable experience I gained running Ireland/Davenport for all those years, I believe I bring a fresh set of eyes, energy and enthusiasm to the table.

I believe strongly in culture and the culture of THB is deep down what drew me to the agency. I look forward to continuing to build the culture and to have fun while doing it. Healthy, robust working relationships both with clients and the agency team have also always been a focus for me and something I believe is paramount to success. Strong, long-standing relationships built on trust and respect is something that THB has long been known for. I look forward to continuing to build on these relationships and to absolutely having a lot of fun along the way!

When talented people are united towards achieving a common goal, when they are working in an environment that not only brings the best out in them but also inspires them and they are having fun, this is a happy place to be. A talented, hardworking, inspired, happy team is a pretty formidable combination in any business.

▣ What do you love most about your career in advertising?

For me it is the perfect balance between my brain and my heart, between business and creativity. There aren't too many industries that deliver so perfectly on both. I could never work in an environment that was void of creativity.

I have also always loved the ever-changing nature of the industry – the speed, the innovation, the technology and the pressure. No two days are ever the same and each day brings a new challenge. It is not for the faint-hearted, but it is most definitely for me!

Finally, I love the creative product. I am in awe of both the strategic and creative process and the brains that drive them. I have massive respect for both areas of discipline. And then if you integrate a talented, service-driven, hungry, tenacious

and efficient project management team into the mix, the sky is the limit. To witness these three areas of discipline within an agency, collaborate, integrate and truly deliver is like poetry in motion.

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

Listen!

I am going to sit and listen and talk with my team as well as to our clients, to get under the skin of the business and our clients' business, so that I may gain a thorough understanding of the issues, the challenges and the opportunities that lie ahead of us.

I very much look forward to meeting each of our clients and starting my journey with them.

■ What motivates/inspires you?

On a personal level, my children, husband and family inspire and motivate me. I am incredibly close to my family, which is why it's so wonderful to be back in Durban close to them. My husband is incredibly supportive of my career. He is a great source of guidance and extremely good at grounding me, especially when I am under pressure. And finally being a mother to my two young daughters is without a shadow of a doubt my proudest achievement and my greatest source of happiness. They are my whole world.

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

I am currently reading *Daring Greatly* by Dr Brené Brown. It was given to me by a friend and it deals with a new approach to how one leads, loves, works and parents through exposing ourselves to vulnerability.

Nothing can beat TED Talks for instant inspiration and motivation. Gosh there are some clever, clever people out there!

■ Tell us something about yourself not generally known.

My dream growing up was to be a magazine editor. Hence studying journalism. And the only magazine I wanted to edit was Vogue! I still have a deep love for writing and for fashion, both of which I still get to fulfil even though I never reached the lofty heights of editor of Vogue.

More about Sue Napier

Sue is a well-known and highly respected figure, having spent the last 17 years honing her extensive brand and communications experience and innovative leadership strategies in the local advertising industry.

Sue's impressive work history includes a five-year tenure at TBWA Hunt/Lascaris where she left in 2005 to become a founding member of Ireland/ Davenport. Created as a break-away boutique agency in 2005 with just three members, the power team of Sue, Philip Ireland and John Davenport went on to win clients including BMW, Investec, SA Tourism, Vodacom, Plascon, Avis, National Geographic Channels and Fox International Channels and grew to a staff compliment of 130 over 10 years.

For the past nine months Sue transferred to the client side as MD of the Apparel division of MRP, adding value and insight to their ongoing marketing strategies.

Originally from Durban, Sue is delighted to be back in her home town and joining the THB team in this leadership role, where she will bring her wealth of industry experience, tenacity and passion to lead the company into a new era of advertising.

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