Mentoring the future moguls

By Leigh Andrews

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Imagine giving your career a much-needed boost by completing a special CEO grooming programme tailored to SA's specific market conditions. Burson-Marsteller SA shares how this could be your reality through their Executive Development Programme.

On 20 February, global strategic communications and PR firm Burson-Marsteller announced the introduction of its Cornerstones Executive Development Programme. It's specifically designed to develop the future generation of leadership of the firm in SA through on-the-job mentorship and structured training and coaching over an 18 to 24-month period.



De Villiers and Von Holdt.

Explaining the need for the executive development programme, particularly in SA, they share that according to South Africa's Indicative List of Scarce Skills that was approved by the South African Cabinet as the basis for prioritising investments in skills development and implementing the Immigration Act of 2002, the second highest category is for experienced and qualified senior managers in the specific areas of project management, financial management, production planning, logistics management and business leadership.

There is no doubt that there's an overall need to raise leadership standards in organisations in South Africa and move towards more ethical and entrepreneurial approaches, but specific skills needs vary widely from sector to sector. Research from the Centre for Creative Leadership (CCL) has pinpointed some of the key challenges as leading diverse teams, managing change and complexity, coaching, collaboration and engagement.

This skills deficit has caused employers to seek new, innovative ways to face the skills challenge, including a combination of exploring new talent sources, providing additional training and development to existing staff and focusing on developing new skills and enhancing existing skills in their business. On how that in turn benefits the overall industry and economy, they share that for Burson-Marsteller, it's about attracting and retaining key talent, providing stability and sustainability.

Winning the war of ideas

In today's world of exponential change, organisations that become entrenched in the status quo are at major risk of disruption. So if you're not asking questions about how your organisation is navigating and plugging into disruption and tapping into new talent for the future, you'll never win the war of ideas.

In addition to this, while the Cornerstone Executive Development Programme, with its focus on leadership development for candidates with at least 10 years' experience under their belts, does not have a direct impact on entrants into the job market, the roll-on effect will. That's because Burson-Marsteller has, over the last 22 years, provided capacity for interns on an annual basis.



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> This on-the-job training, known as the Starting Blocks Internship Programme, forms part of the Burson-Marsteller Training Academy, which has led the industry, not only developing new entrants with practical skills and experience, but also equipping them to go out into the wider working world with knowledge and confidence.

Burson-Marsteller also provides a programme known as the ASSET Internal Training Programme and portfolio of executive level training workshops for clients. The longer term effect is that new entrants to the job market can be inspired to become part of the Cornerstone EDP.

Managing millennials' management mindset

On the general lack of on-the-job mentorship and structured training and coaching in the majority of workplaces, they say these perceived barriers could be associated with organisational culture and flattening of structures, the complex demands of a modern workplace and a lack of understanding of the value of coaching. This is then coupled with the perspectives of a new generation, as well as the behaviour and attributes of millennials and their relative lack of interest in being mentored by seasoned professionals. Too often, coaching and mentoring are simply not seen as priorities for the business and there's a resistance from senior management to spend the time due to other commitments, with few adequately equipped with the required levels of skills and experience to perform the task.

The specific organisation's leadership and management styles could also be to blame, as a smaller organisation or family-based business may well have more directive approaches to leadership and management, which make the introduction of a different 'style' more difficult. The credibility of internal coaches and mentors is paramount as well as the demand for coaching versus the capacity to deliver, which may mean the added expense of external coaching.

Looking to those mentors in particular then, most impressive to me is that the 'potential CEOs in training' will be led by strong females.

> *We've just won the @FMAdFocus African Agency Network of the Year for the second year in a row! #FMAdFocus2016 @B_M pic.twitter.com/gM8PzBp2Ln* — B-M Africa (@BM__Africa) November 23, 2016

Sharing what Bridget von Holdt's recent addition as business director brings to the team, they elaborate that she has been involved in public relations and run a successful business for over 30 years, with a portfolio of clients that covers all sectors and practices. For decades, she's been committed to the development of youth in the profession, which has involved lecturing at learning institutions as well as an intern programme. So, while many interns will vouch for the fact that Von Holdt is a tough coach and trainer, they also concur that when they go out into the job market after having worked with her, they have the skills and training needed to take on any project or client. Many a past employee has gone on to great positions, managing large PR firms in this country. Then there's Burson-Marsteller Africa network's founder, Robyn de Villiers, who was awarded an EMEA SABRE Award for Outstanding Individual Achievement in 2016 for her contribution to the Public Relations industry across Africa – the first African to be recognised with one of these awards. Coupled with COO, Ruth Kolevsohn; strategic planning director, Caroline Halton; and business director, Lyn Fourie, the members of the executive team acting as advisory board as they bring together more than 100 years' combined experience across multiple sectors, from both in house and consultancy backgrounds.

Three strong candidates are currently on the Burson-Marsteller management team and have been identified for the Cornerstones Programme: associate directors Nkateko Khosa and Melba Geca, along with recently promoted business director and EXCO member, Karl Haechler. They're currently recruiting and inviting applications from suitable talent outside their own organisation to fill the remaining positions on the programme. If you think you have the ideal candidate in mind, note that they should have at least 10 years' experience in the industry, with management experience and exposure to the digital world.

Click here for more on the CEOs-in-training programme, here for more on Von Holdt, and follow Burson-Masteller South Africa on Twitter for the latest updates.

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

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