

How Sorbet's Jade Kirkel sells a feeling

 By Jessica Tennant

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Brand manager of [Sorbet Group](#) and daughter of founder Ian Fuhr, Jade Kirkel believes that the key to managing a brand is to realise that “every person in the company is essentially a brand manager and has a fundamentally important role and responsibility in embodying the brand at all times”. Her role is to give Sorbet employees the tools, know-how and drive, as well as create an environment in which they can do this well.

Furthermore, because Sorbet is predominantly a franchise business, she also needs to ensure that all the franchisees buy into the culture as well. She admits to being called the brand ‘Rottweiler’, as to overcome this means to be a little unpopular at times, and she’s OK with that (which is perhaps one of the reasons her dad often jokes that his biggest problem was that he ran out of children).

Here, Kirkel shares more about her role as brand manager for what is becoming the 'Starbucks' of beauty salons, and her perspective on working for your dad, being a mother of three and staying in the job market, and why to stop trying to make everything balance all the time...

■ When and why did you join Sorbet? Why do you believe in the brand?

I joined Sorbet in 2009. I remember my father announcing at the dinner table one evening (I was about 17) that he was going to start a chain of beauty salons. After the initial shock wore off, I smiled politely and said, “Well good luck with that, Dad.” I must admit my initial belief in the brand was more of a ‘is this a joke’ kind of response. But I knew my dad had three things. He was a leader. He always put people first. He genuinely believed in serving others before making money, and those three reasons were enough for me to know that this brand would be something special one day.



Jade Kirkel

■ Tell us about your studies/work experience: what did you study, where did you work and/or what did you do before joining Sorbet?

I studied Marketing and Politics at UJ. Politics because I loved learning how policies and governments shape the different countries. Marketing because I felt I had a creative flair that I needed to learn how to put to use. I then went on to study a Post Management Diploma at Wits Business School in 2008 where I completed a two-month internship at Investec. I always knew I would join Sorbet after I had completed my studies and I was excited to put my learnings into practice. (Although I believe that studying is wasted on students and if I had to go back now I would ask a lot more questions and take in a lot more information.)

■ What is the number one lesson you’ve learnt about branding over the years?

Gosh, there are so many lessons I’ve learnt over the years but if I had to narrow it down to one it would be this: the success of a brand relies on having a very strong brand voice. One that is clear on who it is and what it stands for, consistent in both it’s actions and words and, finally, stands for something real and meaningful.

■ What does your role entail on a day-to-day basis?

My day-to-day functions are never static (which is great because routine goes against my nature). I make sure that every poster, every email, every promotion, every partnership, every social media post – basically everything we do – is true to our brand and community, and constantly cements our brand voice.

■ **What have been your biggest challenges with regard to managing the Sorbet brand in SA and abroad (and how did you overcome them)?**

My biggest challenges are growth and consistency. In terms of growth, as the brand gets bigger, it gets harder and harder to keep a hold of it and make sure that everyone in the company is a believer and is living the Sorbet way. In terms of consistency, because we are predominantly a franchise business, we need to ensure that all the franchisees carry through the branding and marketing at store level and are on board with our brand direction and strategy.

When you buy into this brand, you need to buy into our culture. We are totally culture crazy at Sorbet and we reinforce the culture and brand values every opportunity we get. We call it the soul of Sorbet. People before profit, investing in our community, servant leadership and passionate service. Training and workshops are another way we overcome the challenges by making sure we share knowledge openly and transparently at all times.

Sorbet UK marketing comes with its own set of challenges and we're basically starting from scratch, just a little wiser and possibly less naïve. I am not heavily involved in the branding and marketing of Sorbet UK for now. My sister, Courtney, focuses on that area and thank goodness she is as passionate and driven as I am.

■ **Why are you proud to be the brand manager of such a rapidly scaling business?**

I'm proud because when my dad started this business no one truly believed he could do it and he met with many sceptics along the way. When I started we had 10 stores. I made it my mission to build a brand that South African women would come to trust and love. We sell a feeling and we wanted people to walk out of a Sorbet feeling better than they ever thought they could, and I think to a large extent we've managed to achieve that. We now have over 180 stores countrywide and the comment we hear most often from people is that they love the friendliness of the staff, the consistency of the treatments and that you can go to any Sorbet and know what you're getting. If we continue on this course, then anything is possible.

How do you plan to build the brand going forward? Any exciting developments/innovations that we can expect in the near future?

Cementing the strong brand voice and staying true to what we stand for and believe in will help make the future a little easier. We intend to continue on entrenching the soul of Sorbet ideals, taking risks, being bold and really touching the lives of women and men everywhere. We would love to take the brand into Africa (so watch that space) and grow our amazing extension brands Sorbet Drybar, Sorbet Man and Candi & Co. Our Sorbet product line is continuously expanding and we have two very exciting product ranges coming in 2017 and 2018.

■ **Your dad is the founder and CEO of Sorbet. How do you find working with your dad, and what advice would you give to other women who work for their dads?**

A few years ago, a magazine interviewing me once asked, "Why did you decide to work for your dad?". I answered, "Why should I work for someone else's dad and build his company so that he can give it to his children one day?". This is a business run by a family. My sister, my twin brother and my cousin are all shareholders of the business (my dad often jokes that his biggest problem was that he ran out of children). Everyone is invested. Everyone is passionate. We all want to see this business succeed. You cannot ask for a better foundation to a business than that.

It can come with challenges. We had to earn our respect, we could never demand it. We've put in the extra long hours. We take every decision and encounter to heart. But in the end, we are the brand's biggest advocates and we love it and live it all day. I'm just lucky he started a beauty business, because that was right down my alley.

■ **Currently on maternity leave, why do you believe in women staying in the job market? Has being a 'mama' changed your view on this at all?**

I could talk about this subject for hours. I am the proud mama of three totally adorable girls (Maya, and my newborn twins Ally and Libby). I have read many books on powerful women and mothers in the workplace and I read every article and Facebook post that comes my way. I am a strong believer in women staying in the job market. Oprah's favourite people are teachers and mine are women who start their own businesses. I often get into trouble for my somewhat bold opinions, but I feel quite strongly about women staying in the workforce and making a difference to our world. I try where I can to encourage women to stay active in the business world to start their own businesses or charities, to encourage, promote and

champion other women.



As women we are proactive and intuitive, we bring a different level of understanding and emotions to business. We put our money back into society and education, we raise families and nurture and build our own girls to dream big. I constantly tell my daughter that she can do and be anything. The stresses of being a mom to a toddler are short lived, and we've seen what happens when women can break through that barrier – they become real change makers. The incredible Pakistani teenager Malala famously said, "Extremists have shown that what frightens them the most is a girl with a book."

What advice would you give to other mothers/businesswomen in this regard?

The trick is to stop trying to make everything balance all the time. Sheryl Sandberg writes in her book, *Lean In* that people talk about the work-life balance and when you pitch 'life' against 'work', life will win every time. When in fact the two are so intertwined. It is not one versus the other. It's just called 'living'. Every time someone asks me, "How do you find the balance?", all I can imagine is this huge scale in front of me with work on the one side and life on the other, and there's me standing at the bottom trying my absolute best to make this bloody thing balance. Changing, moving, shifting small pieces of my

me into each one until they sit perfectly balanced, and then at the bottom of the scale stands 'Guilty'.

She could win awards for the role she plays in my life. Guilty's role is to come out every time the scale tips and swat me over the head with a cricket bat. Oh, and when its something to do with motherhood she swats me twice. Guilty. Guilty. Guilty. Are we being fair to ourselves? Can I just live my life the best I know how? Can I dump the scale, the cricket bat and the guilt all at once? I love the saying: 'you need a village to raise a child'. I think one of the most important things to do as a mom is to have what I call my S.W.A.T team. It consists of someone who can drive, someone who can cook and someone who doesn't like going out on Saturday nights. Having a strong supportive team around you that you can rely on and trust is a game changer.

■ A bit about you, i.e. your beauty secret or how you spend your free time, etc.

At the moment free time is when I take a shower. With newborn twins and a busy toddler I am on the go all day. But my favourite thing to do is go for a 30-minute run, put my earphones in and zone out. I also love going out and being social and sharing crazy motherhood stories over a glass of wine with my equally exhausted friends. I try go for regular manis and pedis just to feel good and for some time out. It's important to have some me time every now and then.

And for some happy news, this weekend is Sorbet's happiest sale of the year, with 20% off all retail products from 24 to 26 March. Have fun!

ABOUT JESSICA TENNANT

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