In a country that just a mere 10 years ago excluded more than 75 per cent of the population from participating in the economy, the concept of transformation and empowerment is more than a necessity or an imperative, it is now a hygiene factor. However, together with empowerment came a lot of enrichment, entitlement and window dressing. This is not to say that black economic empowerment (BEE) by captains of industry is wrong. It is just that true empowerment must be just that – true!

Importantly, what is the motive behind companies transforming? Is it fear of exclusion from business opportunities, is it the threat of losing existing business...
or is it the ‘dreaded’ word – the charter? Empowerment is for the people who matter and can be equipped to take our country into the future. Empowerment must be given to the people who need it, the ones who can shape our future – the youth. Only then will we achieve true transformation in the advertising industry and the country as a whole.

Investing into the future
This was the motive behind Grey WW launching the Grey Action programme, (GAP). This is an internship programme that has employed 10 paid interns for the period of a year. All interns have been assigned to the relevant departments where their skills base lie. All have been immersed in their accounts and with their coaches/mentors. These coaches/mentors (including top management) have been trained at Vega in the real skills of mentoring, which as we have discovered is very different from coaching or managing. It is a separate and very specific process that allows a coach to become a mentor. We have learned that while most can be a coach, very few people can become mentors in the true sense of the word.

While the motive for this internship programme has been to develop a level of PDI middle management for Grey, we also see it benefiting the advertising industry as a whole. Grey WW is the first advertising agency to pilot a MAPP SETA learnership in conjunction with the mfsa. We believe that with this accreditation we can then give these youngsters a real chance at finding employment within the industry if financially Grey cannot afford to keep them all once the year is up.

When launching GAP I did an extensive amount of research into what the pitfalls of such programmes are. While I know that the sentiment of the industry is to transform, and it is happening, we have to do it right! The major reasons why these intern programmes fail are the following:

- Lack of commitment from top management;
- Lack of understanding of true coaching/mentoring;
- Relegation of the interns to ‘professional photostaters’.

Grey has acknowledged that to eliminate the threat of failure encompasses a great deal of work and effort. When we had launched the programme, we spent weeks reviewing CVs and interviewing candidates to ensure that we had the correct spread of interns i.e: those with tertiary education from institutions such as: CIDA, AAA School, Vega and universities, as well as those with absolutely no tertiary education who just ‘wanted a break.’

So far, every intern is involved in the day to day running of their relevant positions. They have been given projects and are expected to deliver.

Transformation takes hard work and commitment but it can be done. We need to put our prejudices aside and allow those who are being empowered to empower us. If that is our motive and if all agencies embrace this, we can transform.

Ann Nurock is CEO of Grey Worldwide SA

Take-away

- Put your money where your mouth is!
- Be truthful and honest in your efforts to empower.
- Allow yourself to be empowered.