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A new girl in town

Managing director of MullenLowe Open **Louise Roberts** explains why she is launching SheSays Abu Dhabi, what it hopes to achieve, and how

I started my career as nomenclature ‘workexperience2’.

After a fluke conversation on the Tube, I engineered a week’s work experience at BBH in London.

Whilst there, I obtained the email address for Sir John Hegarty. Moments after I hit send I was summoned to his office. All it took was some common sense, some guts and a few passionate words on an email to see the person behind the initial at the end of BBH.

Sir John told me he had never received an email from a work experience candidate before and this turned out to be the reason he wanted to meet me. Among other things, he told me my passion for the industry was contagious and to never lose it. And that is now as it was then.

‘Workexperience2’ is now the managing director of MullenLowe Open UAE. And I’m not your typical managing director of a large network agency in the Middle East. I am a woman.

Sadly, there are not many women in leadership roles in this industry, and this is even more poignant in the UAE. This is not only a shame but a significant waste of the UAE’s potential, and what inspired me to launch SheSays Abu Dhabi.

SheSays is a global not-for-profit organisation with a purpose to support the advancement of women in creative industries. Our ultimate goal is to create future leaders to propel our industry forward.

Abu Dhabi has all the components to achieve this. It is a growing cultural and artistic hub of the region, home to the Louvre Abu Dhabi, and soon to be home of the Guggenheim and Makers District. Equality is also now on the UAE’s agenda, forming part of the 2020 UAE strategy. But these things are not connected yet, and this is where SheSays Abu Dhabi can help.

Under my stewardship, SheSays Abu Dhabi will work towards creating the right conditions for women within the creative industries to be more successful. If done right, it could inspire bigger movements within the region. SheSays Abu Dhabi plans to achieve this in three ways:

1. Engage the future of our industry

My passion for this industry was fueled by my experience as ‘workexperience2’. The creative work I saw. The insightful people I met. The energy of the office environment (pictured).

I feel fortunate that I work in such a vibrant and innovative industry. I am keen to ignite passion for the creative industries amongst students in the region – and attract emerging female talent – in the hope that one day they will talk as passionately about our industry as we do today.

2. Attract the best talent on the globe

Abu Dhabi continues to challenge every

common preconception many have about the UAE. Before arriving, I had several misconceptions of the status of women in the UAE, and I am not alone. I believe this is a contributing factor to the lack of global female talent attracted to this region.

It’s not a surprise that many young talented women come for the life experience, and not a career. It is tough enough for women to navigate a highly male dominated industry, let alone the perception that women are oppressed in this region. Which is why SheSays is so important. It gives women a platform – and who better to abolish those preconceptions than women themselves? Hopefully this will encourage the best female talent across the globe to see Abu Dhabi as a global hub for creativity and innovation.

3. Nurture the talent in our industry

I have been incredibly fortunate to have worked alongside some of the best talent in the business. Individuals who have guided, nurtured and inspired my career. I understand the importance of mentors, at every level. I recognise the benefits of learning from other industries and the value of absorbing knowledge from experts in our own fields. I hope SheSays can offer the same support and encouragement to women in the creative industries in Abu Dhabi through events, training and mentorship.

I am excited about the future of SheSays Abu Dhabi and the journey we are about to embark upon. I will apply all the things that I have learned along the way to help achieve our goals, and I look forward to the day I can pass the baton over to another woman who is ready to set new goals for SheSays Abu Dhabi, and perhaps to a day when SheSays Abu Dhabi doesn’t need to exist.

