

## **Inclusive Leadership: How Are We Really Showing Up?**

**Debbie Craig**

### **A big surprise!**

A short while ago I was surprised to learn that I had been short-listed in the Accenture 9th Gender Mainstreaming Awards in the Inclusive Leader category. Interviews followed and I started reflecting what it really means to be an inclusive leader. I also thought about my own role models and mentors – and how I was showing up.

My early work years were shaped primarily by male role models. People that taught me to be brave, strong, stand tall, speak up, take charge and make a difference. Only later did I recognise the qualities that made me exceptional in my role of facilitating individual growth and team development such as intuition, empathy, openness, warmth, acceptance and encouragement.

I stepped into leadership roles really young, often the only female in male dominated environments - mining, heavy industry, consulting, retail. It was confusing time and I often got it wrong as I either drove too hard or didn't claim my space enough. Only later did I experience the impact of female leaders – and it was not always ideal. They were still caught in the slipstream of how they got to the top – by being like their male colleagues.

### **Successful or powerful?**

For a while I became like them- tough, results focused, not showing any vulnerability or weakness. I started my own consulting business at 24. I was “successful” but not “powerful”. Luckily one day I participated in a talent assessment centre and got feedback – it was not pretty! My empathy was at an all-time low! Soon after, I chose to deep dive into personal transformation. Who was I, what did I want, who did I want to be? This journey of exploration into my talent and potential – hasn't stopped.

So, I set out to help others discover their talent and potential (and let go the limiting beliefs and behaviour that derailed them). Over the years I built some amazing long-term partnerships, relationships collaborations and organisational impact. I also suffered some major disappointments and unresolvable “break-ups”. Not everyone appreciated my call into their “stretch-zone”, the direct feedback and “coaching” or my occasional empathy failures!

### **Home to corporate refugees**

Catalyst became a home to “corporate refugees” – many who just couldn't take the corporate stress and constraints to their well-being and dreams – or were recovering from burn-out – or those who knew there was more to life but couldn't risk it on their own. The majority of these were women – although we have loved and appreciated our “brothers” who helped us see reason on the days when all seemed too much.

We offered consulting opportunities as well as a community, coaching and access to tools and skills. Those who embraced the principles of learn while you earn and our values of being courageous, creative and collaborative thrived.

### Creating spaces for being ALIVE

I also started World Alive offering personal transformation workshops and retreats (Alive, Connect for Women, Quantum Leap Retreat) for people to discover more about themselves, their purpose, and their potential. Probably some of my most rewarding life experiences have happened in this space.

Over the years, my purpose and intention evolved. What I really hope to create and leave a legacy of is:

- To create a place where people feel accepted, encouraged, inspired and safe enough to stretch
- To create a place where people can expand into their potential without judgement or exclusion based on anything other than how they show up and the value they add
- To create a place where people can be honest with themselves and each other and where we help each other become the best versions of ourselves
- To create a place where we can experiment and fail forward to accelerate confidence and competence and discover our boundaries and conscious choices.
- To create a place where we can be whole people with real lives and enables balanced contribution and reward for value
- To create a place that focuses on whole-hearted authentic relating that heals the past and imagines the future in a supportive collaborative way

I hope that in my home (with my step kids, guardian kids and soul youngsters), with my Catalyst team, in conversation with my friends and in my interactions with my clients and my client teams and retreat participants, that I can in some way live up to this ... and that I continue to have people around me to care enough to give me feedback (with love) when I don't!

I am looking forward to contributing to purposeful projects to do just that – watch this space! I hope you join me on this quest!

And a huge shout out to Business Engage and all the sponsors of the Gender Mainstreaming initiative. Thank you also for recognising me as The Inclusive Leader Winner for the Southern Africa, entrepreneur/individual/consultant category. It has helped me see more in myself and in my role in supporting others to build up the next generation of women (and all marginalised groups) - and the men and women who support us.



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# SOUTHERN AFRICA AWARDS

**INCLUSIVE LEADER**

**ENTREPRENEUR/  
INDIVIDUAL/CONSULTANT**

- 1st Debbie Craig
- 2nd Samantha Pokroy
- 3rd Janine Rebelo
- 4th Peta Horn



## **ABOUT DEBBIE CRAIG**

Internationally-recognised people strategist, Debbie Craig is the founder and MD of Catalyst Consulting. For the past 20+ years, she has been transforming organisations, teams and individuals locally and internationally in over 5 continents and 15 countries. Debbie holds a B.Com, PDM, and MBA and is a registered Master HR Professional through the SA Board for People Practices (SABPP) and an international NeuroChange consultant. Debbie is the author of several best-selling books: *"I am Talent"*, *"I am Alive"* and *"Accelerated Learning"*. She has written numerous published articles and regularly presents at local and international conferences.