

What's Next?

Jean Grow, PhD

"It's time to model character in our leadership."

What's Next? is framed by an exploration of the top priorities of 25 executive women who signed on to launch Time's Up/Advertising. This white paper, second in the series, focuses on four areas these leaders expect to see significant change: within themselves, at their agencies, across the advertising industry and within the Time's Up/Advertising organization. Within each area, three themes emerged. Yet, at the heart of these findings is the need to "make sure that I'm checking my own human desire to be comfortable." Now is the time for the advertising industry "to model character in leadership."*

We must "hold ourselves a hell of a lot more accountable."

These women feel a grave responsibility to keep the momentum of Time's Up/Advertising moving forward. Some spoke of an atmosphere of "us versus them" and feeling an immense responsibility to change that. "It's my job to help people get out of their comfort zone." Expansive and inclusive mentoring is also imperative. "I need to be championing women... we have got to make room for different types of people at the top." Tangible change topped the list of expectations for their agencies, with a need to move beyond the four walls of their shop to secure both talent and ideas. "Clients expect no less." These women leaders also feel responsible for "creating brave spaces to have brave conversations." At the same time, "we cannot villainize men." When speaking of the advertising industry as a whole a big concern is that the conversations around Time's Up/Advertising will grow silent, including within the industry press. We must "look for opportunities where you can have industry conversations as a whole," and then "hold ourselves a hell of a lot more accountable." We need "codes of conduct." These changes would go a long way toward building trust. We also need "ambitious steps to ensure that all agencies are addressing the fundamentals of diversity... through our words and behaviors." For Time's Up/Advertising, there is an acute awareness that bringing men along is crucial to the success of the movement. This will be "no small task." Time's Up/Advertising's perceived lack of visibility is problematic for these women. Having signed on early, their expectations are high and they are looking for "more structured ways to participate" and expect ramped up transparency. Finally, a generational gap is becoming apparent. In the end, the need to build trust, framed by a clearly articulated "north star," is imperative to the ultimate success of Time's Up/Advertising.

"It feels like us versus them."

When considering these executives' priorities, at a baseline, there is a clear need for honest, empathic sharing. "All the cloak and dagger stuff behind the scenes is hurting men as much as it's hurting women... If we don't talk about that openly it just gets worse." At the same time, there is "a lot of empathy, but empathy can only get you so far." What's Next? shares the wisdom of these women leaders to help focus the advertising industry on its "north star."

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"I have not lost sight of where I've been."

The Women

These women see themselves as **voices of change**. They are "a source of help and support for up and coming females, for people who need a safe place to ask questions." They view their role as change makers, "championing women and making room for different types of people at the top." Because, as one woman stated, "I have not lost sight of where I've been." The knowledge that some men aren't comfortable hiring women because they don't know how to talk with them "makes me feel like I need to have some good conversations with my guy friends." They are acutely aware of their obligation to **lead by example**, "to show up in the way that I expect other people to show up." And, "when I make mistakes, I need to stand and acknowledge that." However, "you have to first draw the poison. You have to give people a place where they can come together and talk and heal and get stuff out on the table and then move on." Equally important, "I need to find ways, through my leadership position, to ensure that I don't turn the volume down on this conversation." For them aspirational **mentoring matters**. "I want to see you at my job level in half the time it took me." All of them expect that they will "push to have multiple mentees," coaching "many young women" along the way. Sometimes that will mean private conversations with young, inexperienced women. "I've taken young women aside, explained to them, nobody's going to listen to you while you are dressed like that." Some might interpret this as shaming. Rest assured these women call it keeping young women safe, while preparing them for success. In the end, "the greatest gifts are those really deep, raw, honest conversations."

- "Try not to run from hard conversations."
- "Help people get out of their comfort zone."
- "Mentor and nurture the next generation of talent."
- "Be a strong voice for women, but not alienate men."
- "Take accountability for imperfections and mistakes."
- "Demand an equal voice, even when it's sometimes hard to define."
- "Speak about issues and make sure that we've got some proof points."
- "Work really hard to encourage women to have a voice and not be afraid to use it."
- "Push for my (your) salary to be at the same level as other people (men) at my level."

"What gets measured gets done."

Their Agencies

For these women **tangible change** within their own agencies is imperative. Intention is not enough. We must, "walk the talk" with a focus on "changing behaviors that breed the conditions in which different people feel they cannot thrive." Across their agencies from top to bottom, they are emphatic that "we must constantly challenge ourselves to have courageous conversations." We need to "invest heavily in our ideologies," while at the same time holding leaders to account because "what gets measured gets done." Yet, it's clear that many agencies are myopic and need to **look beyond their four walls**. We must "bring in advocates that could help champion the voice of this movement." We must seek "problem solvers from other industries." Hiring within the same networks and using the same tired hiring practices is holding the advertising industry back. Research tells us people hire people like themselves. And so, the broken system just keeps replicating itself. Finally, their words make it clear that **focusing on women is not enough**. Men must be part of the solution. We, "cannot villainize men" because "we can't fix the system, unless we take the system with us – and the system is men." The bottom line is this. "Our clients are not going to give us business until they see a more diverse group of people at the table."

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Their Agencies cont.

- “Sign Free the Bid (Work).”
- “Bring conversations out into the light.”
- “Do not tolerate sexual harassment of any kind.”
- “Drag HR out of the back office and into the light.”
- Require “mandatory unconscious bias training for all employees.”
- Facilitate “women’s groups (ERGs) to advance women’s careers at a fast pace.”
- Implement “stay interviews, not done with a direct supervisor.”
- “Bring in speakers and have a central fund to cover it.”
- “Every time a line opens, hire diverse talent into it.”
- “Start looking at people that couldn’t afford ad school and went to another college.”

“Make money change the issue. Unfortunately it’s the only thing that does.”

The Industry

These women fear that the industry would **grow silent**, once again, about the issues that Time’s Up/Advertising brought to the surface. “It is still a very young conversation and it needs time to mature.” To mature, there needs to be “racially honest conversations.” Including being “honest about what people were fired for.” Too often we, “just let them (harassers) go quietly... Then nobody knows how many foxes are in the hen-house.” Non-disclosures, remain a poisonous tool, that protects harassers and the status quo, at the expense of victims. There is a growing need for the industry to **demonstrate accountability**, not just to employees, but to clients and to consumers as well. The industry needs to “stand on the right side and be advocates for driving accountability.” The advertising industry bears responsibility for keeping people safe. It “needs a better series of checks and balances” with “leaders instilling the right behaviors.” The industry must “enact systemic change that will consider the very different structures across agencies.” Finally, advertising must **prioritize diversity**. When we “expose a diverse mindset to articulate the problem we have a greater chance of achieving the adjacent possible.” To achieve the adjacent possible, “we have to make room for different types of people at the top” and at every level on the way up.

- “Have open industry conversations, town halls across the country.”
- “Create more avenues and channels to share boardroom discussions.”
- “We need to have C-level coaching and we need to embed impartial, objective people.”
- “Invest in development.”
- Facilitate “more deep dives into assessment.”
- “Do audits on pay equity and change pay accordingly.”
- “Give equal leave to all parents” and encourage them to take it.
- “Fast track development for women and people of color.”
- “Stop fighting each other over diverse talent and start growing your own.”
- “Collect a database, of sorts, of great female talent,” like inVisible Creatives.
- “Write a manifesto for what the delta looks like. We need a code of conduct.”

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"People just want to know what's going on."

Time's Up/Advertising

For Time's Up/Advertising to succeed "we have to **bring men along**." After all, "it's not just women who are gonna make women successful." To that end, "we have to make guys part of our solution." That's no small task. "Some men are in this incredible period of self-doubt." Complicating this is the "ingrained good old boys' behavior that people don't really know how to get rid of." On the other side are a lot of good men and they feel "scared to come forward to share their story." We must create space for them. "Times Up/Advertising needs to figure out how to bring men in as allies, to strengthen the cause." Time's Up/Advertising must also **be more visible**. People are looking for "high, high, high visibility." They are looking for "more structured ways to participate." They want to know what is going on, to "hear more from Time's Up, like... progress reports." Showcase, "here's what we accomplished last year" and "shape a narrative story around that." Help the advertising industry learn "what's appropriate and what not." They want to support its work, especially the legal fund, and many of these leaders are willing to "pay dues." Yet, there's another problem. Time's Up/Advertising needs to **build trust with juniors**. "Younger women think of us as Auntie Lydia (Handmaids Tale)." Further, "the starting point for a lot of younger women is deep cynicism." They may see the movement as "a bunch of privileged white women who were part of the system and got their jobs by blending in with the system." This, despite the fact that the executive director of Time's Up/Advertising is a woman of color. That kind of deep cynicism coupled with multiple organizations trying to address similar issues leaves Time's Up/Advertising with challenges, but also opportunities. Find "ways to provide support women, so people don't feel so alone." Then anchor that support to Time's Up/Advertising's "north star." These women executives are Time's Up/Advertising champions. Now make them brand advocates.

- Keep the industry "educated about what is going on."
- "Have task forces and action items."
- Provide "anonymous ways to share stories."
- Create "conversations that feel like they're scaled across the country."
- Show us "stats that demonstrate the impact of the dollars raised."
- Be clear about the "legal fund for women in advertising and what it's accomplished."
- Hire "good old-fashioned account and project management people to drive initiatives."
- "Have a bigger conversation around inclusion."
- "Start bringing in men... making them part of the solution."
- "Continue to embrace a broader definition of acceptance and representation."
- "The lack of diversity leads to lack of perspective and a lack of so much empathy."

UNDERCURRENTS

Having explored these executive women's perspectives on what's next, two undercurrents threaded their way into virtually every conversation. First, the need for safe spaces and second, the need to invite others into the conversation. A third undercurrent emerged through its echoing absence. There was virtually no mention of the other and, often competing, organizations that are also committed to expanding and changing the advertising industry. Collaboration is key.

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“You feel shame.”

Safe Spaces

The genesis of Time's Up/Advertising was sexual harassment. Shame permeates these experiences. Thus, it is not surprising that the need for safe spaces cropped up everywhere, but dominated no particular discussion point. At a personal level these women understand the imperative nature of “taking ownership” for creating those safe spaces. Many also felt a compelling need to “be personally available to people who need me.” At the same time, many took their agencies to task to “just fucking do something about it.” They challenged the industry to do better. “We can't kid ourselves that good intentions are enough.” As we await the verdict in Harvey Weinstein's rape trial, we are reminded of the origins of the Time's Up movement. Whether guilty or innocent, we are also reminded of the need to transform the outdated, patriarchal power structures that perpetuate unsafe spaces for women across the advertising industry.

“We have got to make room for different types of people.”

Inviting Others In

Without an exception diversity threaded its way into every conversation, often, before the subject was even broached. Diversity, in all its forms, clearly resonates as imperative for creating a better and more sustainable advertising industry. We must, “lead by example, by making a meaningful difference for the agency, the industry and world as a champion for women, diversity and inclusion.” Many of the women also saw the need “to hear from the next generation of women.” So too, do these leaders see the necessity of having men at the table. We “cannot villainize men as a whole.” Without bringing everyone into the conversation, and supporting their journeys, Time's Up/Advertising's momentum will be in peril.

“Sometimes it feels too big.”

Collaboration Is Key

Time's Up/Advertising emerged on the heels of other organizations that have already established themselves as stakeholders of change. She Runs It (formerly Ad Women of New York) has been giving voice to, primarily, executive women for more than 100 years. Ad Color has been rising up and reaching back to diversifying advertising for more than a decade. The 3 Percent Movement, launched in 2012, has become a vocal champion of creative women through an intersectional lens. There are legions of small, but mighty, organizations that have targeted specified needs, from Free the Work to inVisible Creatives to a raft of others waiting to be born. It's time to collaboratively join forces to bring the advertising industry into the ever-more diverse, and we hope equitable, 21st century.

Together everyone in advertising can do more to “change hearts and minds and make an impact.” Moving the advertising industry forward is not just up to the executive advertising women who signed onto Time's Up/Advertising. It's up to the entire industry. My final white paper on women that will be coming out soon, will speak to the imperative of diversifying the advertising industry. Following that I'll release a second series exploring the thoughts of executive advertising men. To learn more about me and my work see [GrowHer.blog](https://www.growher.blog) or follow me on Twitter at [jeangrow](https://twitter.com/jeangrow). To contact me for consulting, you can find me at jean.grow@gmail.com.

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