

Expert Interview I with Michelle Lee, Freelance Strategist

Including | thoughts on having fun and resolving stigma around menstruation

>> Michelle guest curated Strands on July 7, 2022. [Read it here.](#)

Tell us a little bit about yourself and what keeps you busy. How did you end up doing what you're doing today?

I am a freelance strategist based in Toronto, Canada. I've been in the industry for about 20 years and am part of the Naked alumni crew (I worked in both the New York and Sydney offices) which is how I know Faris. I've been an avid follower of Genius Steals for a long time. More recently, I reached out to Faris and Rosie to be guests on my podcast, Grow Op, and well...here I am!

What excites you most about what you do?

Every day is an opportunity to learn something new. I have literally worked on everything from wind turbines to incontinence.

What beliefs define your approach to work? How would you define your leadership style?

Have fun: If you can't have fun doing what you're doing, why bother?

Be a coach, not a boss. Coaches are empathetic. They allow themselves to be vulnerable and have a team based vs hierarchical/authoritarian relationship with those they work with.

What has been the most rewarding project you've worked on, and why?

Working with Kimberly Clark to help resolve stigma around menstruation. There are so many ingrained and subconscious behaviours around periods, even in Western culture. It was fascinating to try and debunk the shame that surrounds this topic across different gender lines and age groups.

We are big believers in diversity -- Not only because we believe in equality, but because we also think it's better for business. The

Black Lives Matter movement has shaped industry conversations around both global injustice, and also lack of representation in our industry. How do you frame these kinds of conversations, both internally and with clients? Is there an emphasis on action, or are the conversations really more about communication?

Canadians like to think of themselves as accepting. We are practically the poster child of multiculturalism, yet while we mean well, our behaviour doesn't always follow. To make progress, we need to acknowledge our own inherent biases.

Within the industry, we need to work together to reduce the barriers to entry. Each agency launching its own DEI initiative, while commendable, cannot overcome the massive scale of this issue.

Switching gears a bit, how do you find time to balance personal interests with your career? Do you believe work/life balance is possible? Anything you've implemented that you recommend that others try?

I have structured time (ie 10 min daily morning meditation and 30 min daily cardio) and I also have unstructured time with my kids. After 3pm and on weekends they can be the best and most fun "interruption engines."

What's your media diet? Where do you find inspiration?

The APG Canada Slack group always has lots of recos. Beyond that, I also quite enjoy Japanese reality shows because they always give me a ton of ideas around challenging social norms and conventions. Beyond Terrace House, check out Ainori Love Wagon and Future Diary for a quick yet immersive dip into Japanese dating and youth culture.

As you know, we believe there is so much value in having a wide range of teachers. What's the best piece of advice/knowledge you've stolen, and who/where'd you steal it from?

Kids are the best teachers. They are much wiser and more insightful than we often give them credit for. One of the best pieces of advice they've ever given (and sung endlessly) to me: Let it go.