

The business  
of poetry:  
*unlocking cultural  
meaning, building  
relationships and  
developing leaders*



*mandy de waal*

**ABSTRACT:** As a medium for celebrating the unique relationship each person has with the world, poetry has long been the voice of truth and a restorer of perspective in history. In South Africa the upsurge of youth interest in poetry, the increased importance of praise poets in business and the role that culture plays in marketing is invigorating the role of poetry in commerce. This is underscored by the role that poets are playing in developing business leadership and the heightened search for meaning in the workplace. Once a stranger to industry, poetry is now becoming an increasingly appreciated business and management tool.

Once upon a time there lived an emperor who was vain and insecure. One morning he decided it would buoy his spirits immeasurably if he had the best attire in the kingdom. He got the best tailors to make him the best suit in the realm. Now, these craftsmen were smart and knew how to extract value from customers. They hatched an incredible plan: they told the emperor they had the finest cloth in the world, but only people who were incredibly wise could see it. The emperor, of course, fell for their proposal and before long the tailors, the emperor, the courtiers, as well as all the king's horses and all the king's men, were madly enamoured with this non-existent cloth, which was sewn with non-existent thread to make a non-existent suit. You know the rest. The emperor paraded through his kingdom completely naked and everybody fawned about him. That is, of course, until a young boy stepped forward and shouted: "The emperor has no clothes on!" The moral of the story? The tailors were consultants and the young boy a poet.