Improve your networking skills

By Sophie Baker   24 Jun 2015

Networking is important to build relationships and increase your circle of contacts. These contacts can help you, refer you to people (or refer other people to you) and teach you valuable lessons. Networking is also important if you want to establish your own authority and make your name as a key player in your industry. Here are some practical, easy to follow tips to help you instantly improve your networking skills and capabilities.

Take it offline. Email and social networking can be great to make initial introductions, but to really build connections you need to get to know people in the real world. Make appointments for lunch, coffee, or face to face meetings wherever possible. Attend conferences or events, and talk to people there. This sets you apart from the constant influx of internet relationships and allows you to gain some real momentum in the relationship.

While you're at it, stop looking at networking as a chore or even a business gain. Treat any networking opportunities the same as you would the opportunity to meet a new friend or partner. Be polite, friendly, and interested in them. Don't be overeager or overbearing, and remember to ask questions as well as answer them. Avoid spending your time worrying about where this new interaction might lead, what benefits you could get from it, and when to ask for their business card to set up a meeting. Instead, be authentic. Find common ground and keep conversation light-hearted. If you allow yourself to become truly interested in the interaction you're taking part in, others will know that you are genuine. As a result, they'll warm to you more easily and your relationship could turn out to be very rewarding (in both a business and personal capacity).

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If you're not sure how to get started with networking, make a promise to yourself to reach out to someone new twice a week (or even once a week if you prefer). You don't have to ask them for anything - just find somebody whose work you find interesting or who you think has done a great job, and tell them that. The idea is simply to connect with people, not to try and leverage off a relationship. People are likely to be flattered, you'll consistently make contact with new people, and you'll probably come across plenty of people within your industry, which is never a bad thing.

Finally, one last tip to really improve your networking skills is this: don't just meet people, introduce people. By introducing two people who can benefit from each other, you can grow your network vastly. This is because it is rare for people to actually go out of their way to help others and give them something (in this case, a contact or an opportunity). You become somebody who connects people, and connections really are the lifeblood of networking. If you reach out to people and put them in touch with each other, you will be top of their list of people they want to return the favour to when they meet other connections with potential benefits for you. ?

There are loads of ways to improve your networking skills. Some are easier than others, but we believe that these four tips are not only easy and practical to implement, but can really make a difference to your networking skills right now. Give them a try for a few months and hopefully your book of contacts will expand even quicker than you had anticipated.

ABOUT SOPHIE BAKER

Sophie Baker is the content producer at Biz4Afrika, a Mcrosoft-owned online hub providing help, information and networking opportunities for small businesses, through Content Studio.
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