

How to master the art of networking

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While some business owners may shudder at the thought of networking and what it could entail practically, most entrepreneurs know that it is one of the fundamental aspects of marketing.

Helen Nicholson business networking specialist presented Master the Art of Networking at the Wits Business School last week.



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She explained the advantages of LinkedIn. “If you have a minimum of 500 connections LinkedIn can be a powerful tool.” Nicholson says the network grew by 42% in 2015 and is used by more men than women. This implies a more professional site used for peer to peer business relationships.

The financial sector has the largest presence with Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya showing the biggest user base.

She says men and women network differently. Men would share a personal issue such as being diagnosed with an illness, to 50 to 70 people, while women would choose only four to eight close friends. For women, this translates into a network of

11 to 15 while for men the multiplier is much more than double. She points out that powerful networks were established at boys' schools such as St Johns and King Edwards.

Nicholson provided some tips on how to work a room. "Make sure your name badge is visible, always top right. And to remember the names of people you are meeting repeat their name three times as naturally as possible." For example, ask the name, confirm the spelling, and say nice to meet you – and the person's name.

"Breaking into a group of three is easier than a group of two. Start looking at and nodding to the person holding your interest. After a while the person's focus will turn to you, and then make the appropriate interjection."

You should be widely read to increase your chances of hooking into a range of conversations. "Diversity is key," Nicholson says.

Nicholson does not advocate the 'fake it till you make it' approach but rates honesty and integrity as brand cornerstones. Personal branding, she says, is your RQ or relevancy quotient. "It requires consistency as a key ingredient to build trust. Yes, you can reinvent yourself, but reinvent with integrity. She cited Lady Gaga as an excellent model of reinvention.

"Be the best you that you can be," she says. "If you're an introvert, be the best introvert you can be. Introverts make great networkers."

Curiosity accounts for 30 percent of what makes a good networker, she says. "When engaging, networkers should apply a listening, talking ratio of 60 to 40 percent.

Nicholson stressed the importance of a good elevator speech. "Wrap it up in one sentence. It should make the listener want to find out more. "The basic structure is to introduce yourself, say who you are, what you do and how it could help the potential customer, in other words, I am, I do, so that..."

The elevator speech should be adapted for different scenarios: colleagues, clients and social interactions. Repeat and practise your elevator speech so that you are never caught off guard, Nicholson says.

She says making a good first impression saves a lot of work down the road taking "17 interactions to fix a bad first impression".

Most importantly work 'givers gain' Nicholson says. "Be willing to give a free referral, free service, or a gift. If you come from abundance you'll get it, if you come from scarcity you'll get that instead."

ABOUT IZA GREK

While niche is the common buzz word, generalist also works. I have deep experience in writing about food processing and renewable energy. I have cross sector experience on any topic you can think of - and this to great effect. My knowledge of media assist my private clients in their approach.

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