

Media Article



Vocational Guidance Services

BUILDING ON YOUR NETWORK

"Political skills, is a key factor in a senior manager's success". This was a statement made by a candidate to me last week. My initial reaction, as well as the reactions of other candidates in the group I was assessing was very negative – I think as Kenyans we have come to see 'Politics' as a 'dirty' word. However, when we probed the can further we came to realize that he had meant positive political skills – such as determination, confidence, being 'high profile' and showing charisma – all things, ideally, politicians should possess.

In a word, these skills are all about being a good net-worker (both internally in your organization, as well as externally, within your industry or profession). If you perfect your networking skills then, as the candidate was trying to say, you will be a success.

So what is networking; why and how should you go about it? Networking really just means making and maintaining a wide range of personal contacts or connections. It is about building relationships, giving and sharing information and advice. You can network in person (at cocktails, trainings and functions) or over the phone or email. For many senior positions, (such as 'Public Affairs Directors' or 'Policy Advisors'), a candidate's contacts or network is of vital importance.

What can you use networking for? Well, research has shown that a high percentage (up to 80%) of people get their jobs through networking – jobs that are never advertised. Networking can help you improve in your present job- by keeping up to date on information and innovations – so joining a professional association would be a good idea, and ensures you don't fall behind on industry policy, either.

Networking can help you launch a business; you can rely on 'word of mouth' or your network's network to use your products and services, as well as use experienced mentors to give free advice on how to start up and operate. Many professionals in similar or even the same field as you might want to collaborate rather than see you as a competitor.

Sharing your work stresses and worries with others in the same field can also bring you a sense of relief as you realize you are not alone. You get to laugh about common problems, bounce around ideas as well as build friendships in the process.

So, apart from the obvious venues to developing a network (night schools, seminars, industry launches etc), you'll find people pick up new contacts at the hairdressers, on buses, career guidance groups and exhibitions. Remember, always stay in touch, don't allow yourself to stay isolated in a back office; don't develop tunnel vision or you might find your career going no-where fast. Although you might feel you don't have the opportunity or time to network, that's every time you interact with others – even in a social setting. Confidence is key to success and no one succeeds alone – so get out there today and start building up your network!

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