

Strategic Networking: The value of mentorship

When I applied for the Commonwealth Women Mentorship scheme, I had an overriding goal- to cultivate a healthy relationship with my mentor in which I can tap from her wealth of experience and expertise, and in turn be of good conduct, play my part, adding value wherever I can. So far, I can honestly say my goal has been met and expectations surpassed. My mentor has been so expressive, open, and sincere in her advice on issues. Her eagerness and willingness to support me is amazing.

One of my biggest takeaway from our sessions is the importance of strategic networking in career success. Networking must have a purpose and its purpose should be in tandem with one's purpose in life. Thus, self-awareness is the first step to networking. This is because networking takes time and "time is life". By brilliantly linking strategic networking to time management, my mentor made me realize how one networks have a bearing on the value one places on time. In other words, it is vital for one to choose one's crowd as lost time can never be regained. Being deliberate while networking has not occurred to me until now.

Moreso, my mentor explained the trilogy of networking, comprising three circles- the big circle (which I have no control over), the inner circle (where I deliberately choose my mentors) and the closed circle (in which mentor-mentee relationship transcends into valuable, bankable and reliable friendship). In addition, I learnt from her that poise, confidence, competence and presentation is essential in creating the right impression with one's networks. Overall, competence is most essential. "There is a measure of confidence that comes with competence", she says.

Three lessons stood out for me from my mentor's advice: first, the importance of adding value to my networks (even with more successful networks, I must ensure the relationship is symbiotic, not parasitic). Second, realizing the need to preserve valuable relationships through regular communication. Third, understanding that no network or relationship is cast in stone. It could change overtime and I must adapt.

After the session and spurred by the assignment she gave me, I clearly defined my life's purpose, created a plan of how I would meet potential mentors/networks- why I would like to meet them, what I would say when I meet them and what I hope to gain from them. For those who I may not meet, I created a list of things they have done which I can learn from- books they have written, interviews they have granted and reports about them. I intend to follow through on this plan.

I am determined to be strategic while networking. My aim is not just to have networks but valuable ones. My mentor has exposed me to areas of familiar issues that I have never thought before. Her wisdom is impressive. Thank you, Commonwealth Women Mentorship Scheme, for the rigour in selecting high quality mentors for upcoming female leaders. I am indeed blessed to have her.