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Women in Science Column – July 2018

Networking and Personal Branding

A key component of networking is to be memorable and leave positive impressions in the minds of people you meet. This means acknowledging who you are and being able to effectively articulate it when communicating with people i.e. developing and owning your personal brand. Branding is mostly used in the world of marketing and sales to help business effectively sell their products to target customers. Concept of personal brand is quite similar except here you are trying to make yourself marketable to professional world.

A personal brand can be understood as a “collection of perceptions” people have about your talents, passions and experiences. Developing a personal brand is valuable since a strong reputation can open doors for new and exciting career opportunities. Effective personal branding can differentiate you from other professionals in your field and can help you stand out against the competition. When people are well aware of your talents and passions, they are far more likely to tap you for relevant assignments.

Here are few strategies to get you started;

Building your story: First step towards creating your personal brand is to pay closer attention to your strengths, passions, key accomplishments and how do you want your network to remember you. Start by listing keywords that describe your unique skills and experiences. Ask your colleagues and friends for help. Next, create a vision statement for your brand much like what successful businesses do. For example, if your objective is to become a world-class expert on wheat breeding then your 10-year vision could be “Being globally recognized as a leader in the field of wheat breeding”. Then you can craft your path to achieve your professional vision with a solid foundation of your strengths and experiences. This becomes your narrative.

Making your narrative public: Just developing a personal brand and hoping others will see it through your work will not generate sufficient awareness for your brand. It’s still possible people in your close circle are aware. However, leaders and professionals in other parts of the organization may never hear about your valuable contributions unless you take steps to communicate and become visible. A simple tactic could be to narrate your story on various public forums. It could be through social networking sites like LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter or blogposts or personal

websites or even corporate intranet. You may contribute research articles in your area of expertise or write about the social causes you value. Remember to keep the messaging positive and focused on highlighting your personal brand.

Take control of your story: Some people feel uncomfortable at the thought of self-promotion but it's pivotal that you take control of your narrative rather than letting others do it for you. Help others understand your uniqueness. Create a crisp elevator pitch about your personal brand and use it to tell your story when meeting new people or rejuvenating old relationships. Connect your past experiences with your present role, describe how these shaped your values and how you see yourself achieving your professional (and personal) vision. An elevator pitch is useful beyond times when you are job hunting. It can help you subtly highlight your skills in social settings which can unexpectedly lead to that next professional or personal opportunity.

Network, Network, Network: Once you are armed with awareness and recognition of your personal brand and have communicated a consistent public message about yourself, next step is to go meet new people, build new relationships. When it comes to networking, most often people tend to associate themselves with those in their immediate team or company and fail to cultivate meaningful relationships outside. By doing this you are limiting your visibility to this close group of people who may not be able to elevate your profile to highest level. Instead, broaden your professional network by visiting local networking events, professional meetings or social events (neighborhood gatherings, people with similar hobbies, friends of friends) etc.

Personal branding can feel like a burden for many professionals. But once you have built a clear understanding of your uniqueness and identified ways to communicate it with the world, it's less daunting (though equally important) to maintain your reputation. Know that personal brand can change over time especially as you gain new experiences or learn new skills. Remember to constantly update your network with key highlights of your personal brand which is why it's not only important to create new relationships but also to maintain old ones. By following these simple strategies, you can ensure people are realizing your true self and can appreciate your talents.

References:

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