



15 Things I Learned in Canada

by Jeri Gomonda following the International Business Services Mission to Toronto May 2007

This is not an exhaustive list by any means, but the tips I have most put into practice. The list was also submitted to the Women's Club newsletter and has since been circulated in other countries. Please feel free to pass it on.

1. **Always carry your business cards.** Always. I have been doing this since I came back, and am surprised at how often I have actually given out my card.
2. **Check email often and answer quickly.** 24-hour turn-around on answering email has become the outer limit - if you want to be seen as professional, you must answer in less than 24 hours.
3. **Technology rules!** Well, not rules, exactly - competence, courtesy, and efficiency also count big time, but email, websites, Skype and so forth are now standard. They are not exotic things used by the elite. You have to have them!
4. **Public speaking skills are necessary.** You have to be able to speak confidently to people, whether one person or hundreds. When you have competition, and we all do, the person who mumbles, rambles, talks too long, and appears shy is written off fairly quickly in favour of more eloquent people. It is a fact of life: We are all busy; no one is going out of their way to compensate for your weaknesses.
5. **Have collateral material and keep it up to date.** (Company profile, CV, bio statements, that sort of thing.)
6. **Have a one page bio ready.** It should have your photo, name and contact details, and a career summary. This is used to introduce you if you are speaking somewhere, and is also useful if your CV is long. Do not go over one page!
7. **There are amazing women in Africa!** The ladies we met were so energetic, lively, fun, and serious about their work. And to hear them describe what they do, I was fascinated! I would love to go work for some of them.
8. **Nobody does just one thing.** Everybody had a wide portfolio in their actual businesses, and quite a few also had a charitable activity on the side. Several of the 19 were involved in a women's association like The Women's Club.
9. **Businesspeople are the same, no matter where we were from.** Between the participants and the business community we met, and this included people from South America, North America, Asia, and Africa, we all have the same problems. In particular, we all struggle to get clients to pay in good time, to keep clients from stealing ideas from proposals and either doing the job themselves or hiring someone cheaper, and to balance home and work demands.
10. **Perfect your "elevator speech".** This is a 25 word description of what you do. People won't listen to a long story, they don't want your whole CV. Entice people with a brief, well worded mini-speech.
11. **Innovate constantly.** You might think your service is basic and cannot be changed, but you would be mistaken. You need to add new services to keep customers. Examples: If you run a clothing store, keep a client profile and call customers when something new comes in that is their size or favourite colour, or perfectly accessorizes the outfit bought last month. A printer could offer pick up and delivery, or jobs completed in 24 hours. There is always something more that customers want.
12. **Talk to everyone.** Don't write off anyone as not relevant to your needs. Sometimes that completely unrelated contact turns out to be just who you need, or who your boss needs. If you can link up a friend or colleagues with someone they would not have access to otherwise, you have done a good deed, and someone will do the same for you.
13. **Be on time.** This is a standard, not an extraordinary feat.
14. **Opportunity abounds!** There is plenty of unmet need in the world, and plenty of business to those who look for it and have the ability and willingness to provide it.
15. **Even in a little country like Malawi, it is possible to export services.** Sell a newsletter online; give training programs in another country; translate for external clients, organise conferences for associations from other countries, the list is endless. The phrase "exporting services" sounds more complex and unattainable than it is.

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Access Professionals is pleased to serve as the secretariat for The Women's Club and the Association of Marketing Professionals.