

Achieving Success Through Networking

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Ronald Tusingwire is a successful business lawyer in Kampala and the current UECD chairman.

He did his educational career through a scholarship from UECD Switzerland.

Sarah: What was your motivation to learn the profession of a lawyer?

Ronald: I have always been very competitive, and I enjoyed competing with my friends in school. However, I was weaker in science subjects than some of my classmates. One of my teachers noticed this and sat me down for a career counselling session. She told me that she saw a successful lawyer or politician in me and encouraged me to pursue my passions and interests rather than just competing for the sake of competition. That advice resonated with me, and I decided to study law.

Sarah: Does that element of competition still play a role in your professional life?

Ronald: Definitely. Competition can be a healthy and motivating force as long as it's not the only reason you're doing something. I still enjoy competing and trying to excel, but now I have a clear focus on my passions and interests, which makes the competition more meaningful and fulfilling.

Sarah: What do you do as a business lawyer in a consultancy firm? Can you tell us about a typical case?

Ronald: Mainly, with two colleagues - an engineer and an economist - I am working on cases where the clients have running construction projects and are experiencing issues with the deliverer or the government department overseeing the project. We study the project documents and develop solutions to resolve the problems.

Sarah: Can you take us through a typical day?

Ronald: A typical day for me starts as early as 7 am. We meet as a team to discuss the cases we are working on. We all have our specialities and work together to come up with solutions. After the meeting, we usually start to read and study the project documents and decide who handles what aspect of the project. In the evening, we meet for short debrief.

Sarah: How often do you go to court?

Ronald: I no longer have to go to court myself. I now have lawyers working for me who handle court appearances.

Sarah: Do you have other private businesses on the side?

Ronald: My consultancy work feeds my law firm and creates business for it. As mentioned, we are a construction consultancy, and if the case is not settled, it goes to arbitration, which my law firm then handles.

Sarah: What makes you the happiest in your job?

Ronald: When I deliver all that the client wants. It makes me happy as it makes everything worthwhile. Including the sacrifices I've made.

Sarah: Speaking of sacrifices: How do you balance your work, your partnership, your three children, your presidency in the Rotary Club, your dog breeding and your friends?

Ronald: It's a challenge. My wife sometimes doesn't understand why I'm not home by 7 pm, but I have to explain that there are bills to pay and that my job as a lawyer in private practice can be unpredictable. I sometimes do not know when the next payment will come or how much it will be.

Sarah: How do you manage this uncertainty?

Ronald: I focus on what's important and prioritize my time. I also make sure to spend time with my children and have a good relationship with them. I bring them to school daily, and they visit me at the office several times a week. They may not understand my sacrifices, but they appreciate the results - like a working TV where they can watch cartoons.

Sarah: You are a very successful lawyer. What would you recommend a young professional learn to make their career successful?

Ronald: Building relationships is vital. I advise young lawyers to cultivate meaningful networks, even in school or at University, as the people they meet can become clients or colleagues. Networking can be done through simple activities like joining a debate or book club, hosting a dinner with friends or even social activities like drinking.

Sarah: How did you build your network?

Ronald: In law school, I started a discussion group with friends. Our friendship grew: We started visiting each other's homes, supported each other during difficult times and even started investing money together. So we grew into an investment club that currently has around 40 members. We continue to meet monthly at a member's place and sometimes bring our families. As we got older, our salaries grew, and we started investing more and more money. We started by buying land, selling it to small business owners, and then investing the win in shares on the Nairobi stock exchange and trusts.

Sarah: Do you have values that are especially important to you?

Ronald: So many. But especially «honesty». It's the key to anything. If you are honest, you can keep a network. And then I think social consciousness is also essential.

Sarah: What does that mean to you exactly?

Ronald: To appreciate that we're all meant to be different. And that this is a strength. We are all created in different ways, but we each have a contribution to make.

Sarah: What would you recommend a graduate that has just gotten the degree and is looking for a job?

Ronald: My advice to recent graduates looking for a job is to focus on building relationships. Similar to dating, show your best side and work on getting to know the people in your industry. I also recommend finding opportunities that expose you to the right people, even if it means taking an unpaid internship. Don't rush, and make a good impression because sometimes there is no second chance. Remember, it's through relationships you get to success.

Sarah: Did you start as an intern yourself?

Ronald: When studying at Makerere University, I worked as a messenger for a law firm. The pay was terrible, but the connections I made were far more valuable. My father introduced me to his friend who owned the firm. By delivering paperwork, I met people who changed my life and made relationships that still hold up today.

Sarah: So the recommendation would be to find something that exposes you to the right people, maybe even during the study.

Ronald: Yes, use the time. Become an intern, do an internship. Even if it is unpaid, it will allow you to learn and see what reality looks like. And as you're doing things one after the other, the important people will see you, see your ambition, and think: Hey, this person might be helpful. Sometimes in life, there's no second chance.

Sarah Fluck
Freelance Swiss journalist living in Kampala