

Boost Your LinkedIn Profile with Recommendations

BY RICH MAGGIANI | Fellow

I JUST WANTED A GOOD PLACE to eat breakfast.

That was my early morning goal at McCarran International Airport last month. A handy kiosk listed the restaurants (and shops) in that particular wing of the airport. Some of the restaurant names were familiar, national chains, while many others were new to me. A short, informational description followed each name.

As I scanned the list, one entry caught my eye. The words “fresh Italian” were part of the description. I had been at this restaurant in the past. I had seen their food stretched along a steam table. And there was nothing fresh about it. A wry smile crossed my face. Informational? Hardly. Marketing? Definitely.

So I approached the two agents at my departure gate. “Can you tell me a good place to eat breakfast?” I asked. The two women discussed it a bit between themselves, then looked to me and said, “Try Sammy’s.”



Social media has transformed the way we communicate. This column discusses the intricacies and ramifications that social media has on our everyday personal and professional lives. Suggestions for topics are welcome. Email me at rich.maggiani@solari.net.

You already know where I’m going with this. Few believe you when you tell them that you are the most dedicated, competent, professional technical communicator on the planet. Many more, however, believe it when someone else says it. That is the power of recommendations.

In my last column, I discussed

the many reasons for increasing your LinkedIn connections. This time, I’m going to give you some guidelines for getting those connections to recommend you.

Two things I want you to know before we begin. First, whenever someone writes a recommendation, the honoree always has the opportunity to accept, decline, or edit the recommendation before it gets posted to their LinkedIn page. So you needn’t worry about what a connection might say; you always have the chance to change it or simply not post it.

Second, these are *my* suggestions for writing recommendations. You are, of course, welcome to alter these ideas to suit your needs to something that you feel comfortable about because, after all, this is your LinkedIn account. No matter how you go about it, though, adding recommendations will unquestionably boost your LinkedIn profile.

Group Your Connections

I separate my connections into three distinct groups.

1. Friends—the people I know well enough to converse with easily, dine with, spend meaningful time with.
2. Colleagues—those who I have met and know professionally.
3. Everyone else.

I write recommendations for people in all three groups. It’s easier to write a recommendation for people in the first two groups. I know them and something about their professionalism.

It’s a bit more difficult for people in the third group, but establishing a deeper connection with people in this group can have an unexpected yet welcome effect on your career. Why? Remember that the people in the third group are furthest from your inner circle and thus have access to

contacts and connections that you and your inner circle do not. These outer contacts can be very helpful. Time and again, they have been for me.

Begin by Recommending Others

Remember that wonderful adage: you reap what you sow.

When I first started using LinkedIn, one of my connections asked me to write a recommendation for her. It felt a little off-putting, but I did it, with a bit of a struggle. Of course, you can always ask your connections to write a recommendation for you, but....

What I’ve found works better, for both you and your connections, is for you to write a recommendation for them first. This results in two benefits for you. First, when that connection receives the eventual email alert about your largess, you can’t help but rise in their opinion. And second, the concept of reciprocity kicks into gear. Most people feel compelled to return the favor.

Write a Compelling Recommendation

First and foremost, be sincere. With a little effort and thought, you can write a recommendation for every one of your connections. Of course, always say something positive about them. Write a short paragraph, not just a sentence or two. The best recommendations take some consideration. Make that effort.

Make your writing clear, crisp, concrete, and concise. Don’t use generalities, use specifics. Since you will list your recommendation under one of the existing items in the Experience or Education section, include words from those items. Refer to the conference where that person spoke, the project they completed, the people they helped, the product they created. Use proper nouns when you can. Be creative. Be pithy. Be entertaining. Be personal when you can. Make it memorable.

Just don’t go overboard. Avoid being ostentatious and disingenuous.

Don't write something you don't truly feel. If you feel uncomfortable with superlatives, stick to the facts that are likely to impress.

Remember to consider your audience. While it's obvious that this connection is part of your audience, he or she is not really the main audience. Your main audience is the people who will read your recommendation: the so-called third party. Your connection is actually a secondary audience.

The advantages of compelling recommendations in a person's LinkedIn profile are that all parties benefit—the person receiving the recommendation, the person writing the recommendation, and the elusive third party. Who is this third party? It might be a potential client or employer or colleague you want to impress. They will read your recommendations, think the world of you, and take steps to initiate a mutually beneficial

relationship. In other words, they may promote or hire you.

You want your recommendations and connections to educate this third party and favorably influence their behavior. Thus, when you write a recommendation, write it primarily for this third-party audience so that your recommendations will garner the greatest impact.

Review the Recommendations You Receive

As you write recommendations, your connections will reciprocate. I always find these notifications some of the best emails I receive. And I do not take them lightly. I always reciprocate, and quickly.

I engage in a three-step process for every recommendation I receive. I write this with some trepidation, since I do not want to appear unapprecia-

tive of those who write recommendations for me by engaging in some critical process when I should just accept their recommendation as a gift. The opposite is true: I am enthralled and grateful when someone writes me a recommendation. Still, this is my profile and my career, and ultimately, I am responsible for the content of my LinkedIn profile. And so are you. In fairness, I must say that I fully expect those people who I write recommendations for to follow this process as well. So here's my process:

1. I review the recommendation for accuracy and correct any errors I find.
2. I consider lightly editing the recommendation while keeping with the author's original words whenever possible, and offering these changes to the author. I certainly correct any typos and grammatical errors.
3. I always accept the final recommendation. Remember, you always have an option of not posting a recommendation if somehow the process has gone awry. Fortunately, I have been more than pleased to post every recommendation I have received. And I expect that if you follow the process I advocate, this will be the case for you as well.

Fortune Favors Enterprise

Over time, you can boost your fortune by giving and getting recommendations through LinkedIn. More and more, professionals are using LinkedIn to connect and work with other professionals. Stay ahead of this curve by spending a bit of time every day on your LinkedIn account: invite connections, write recommendations, and then field the eventual recommendations you receive.

Start right now by inviting me! Tell me you are a reader of this column and an STC member. Together, we can soar to greater heights. ■

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