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If You Don't Feel Like You're Bragging, You're Probably Underselling Yourself
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As a former management consultant and recruiter who has seen thousands of business and career stories, I have found that women generally have a tougher time speaking up about their accomplishments, positioning themselves as experts, or otherwise selling their stories, skills and experience. As a career coach, even when I encourage my female clients to speak up, (and these are accomplished women from the best firms in their industry — Goldman Sachs, NBC, Gap) these women often don't go far enough in selling their accomplishments. In fact, it is only when I outright tell them to brag, boast, and even *gloat*, do I get the confidence, enthusiasm, and moxie that really differentiates and attracts. Therefore, consider yourself warned: you need to go farther than you think. If you don't feel like you're bragging, you're probably underselling yourself.

Write down your accomplishments so you have the evidence up front and center. If you're an executive, go line-by-line through your resume and detail every project you completed, every relationship you developed, every impact you had. If you're a business owner, go deal-by-deal and itemize your specific contribution. Document your accomplishments so you can look at them objectively, and recite them in all their glory without blushing.

Design a story that memorably hangs together, not a laundry list of facts. Categorize your achievements by function – sales, marketing, operations, finance, management – so you can batch all the tales you weave and make them easy to remember. Or look for other patterns – you're especially good at turning around crisis situations, or you're the go-to person for dealing with all types of people, even difficult ones. You want a frame or structure for your story to guide the listener and make it easy for him or her to get engaged. An engaged listener wants to hear more, is more likely to spread the word, and can more accurately represent you.

Practice regularly till it flows. I love professional associations for the chance to meet people, learn about the latest trends and news, *and* practice telling your story. You need to gauge people's reactions in the real world. What do people remember from your story? Are they interested? Are they confused? If you find people are remembering something you didn't expect, maybe you need to build your story around that angle. If people are confused, maybe you need to include an example as you talk about your work.

This isn't a one-time fix. You need to constantly remind yourself about your accomplishments (there will be new ones after you do this exercise the first time!). You need to refine your story over time because your target audience and goals change, and your story should reflect what you're aiming for, not just your past. You need to remember to brag because you'll forget since it doesn't feel natural. I know firsthand about the need for constant vigilance. Just a few weeks ago, I approached an organization about speaking at their annual conference. I knew there was an excellent fit, and still, as I look back at my earliest emails, there was an air of "Please pick me!" in my correspondence. When the organization appeared lukewarm, I finally threw caution to the wind and itemized briefly but clearly and in no uncertain terms exactly why they should book me. I'm speaking there in a few months! I thought I was being too loud. But that last email was probably the first and only time they actually *heard* me. Are you being heard?

Caroline Ceniza-Levine helps people find fulfilling and financially-rewarding career paths, as the co-founder of www.sixfigurestart.com, career coaching by former Fortune 500 recruiters. She is the co-author of "Six Steps To Job-Search Success" 2011, Flat World Knowledge and of the best-selling "How the Fierce Handle Fear: Secrets to Succeeding in Challenging Times" 2010, Two Harbors Press. She is the co-host of the Next Generation Career Success Video Summit (www.WouldYouHireYourself.com) and a stand-up comic with www.comicdiversity.com.