

**Q&A from Mastering the Art of Bragging:  
What Today's Leaders & Other Humble Professionals  
Need to Know**

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*We didn't get to answer all the questions that came up during our recent Northwestern career seminar. So here they are. (The questions are listed verbatim as you submitted them.) Let's keep the learning—and the bragging—going! You're remarkable—the world needs to know it!*

*Always,  
Darcy*

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**1. I'm interested in raising new funds for a business venture. It's hard to tell people how good my team and me are without sounding arrogant.**

There's a big difference between arrogance and confidence.

People think we're arrogant when we say or do things that put someone else down in order to build ourselves up.

For example, in competitive situations (such as raising money), the tendency might be to put your competitors down, or even unintentionally criticize your potential funder if they don't have the vision to invest in you. That will be seen as arrogant, even if you don't mean it that way.

Confidence is feeling strong in who you are, with no need to put anyone else or anything down.

It's being perfectly comfortable not having all the answers—which can be tricky with a new venture! But trust in the fact that you know what you need to know, and anything else someone asks can be figured out.

Using the formula we reviewed in the webinar, the confident leader might say something to potential funders like this:

- *“I’m so proud of the potential our product has to [help the problem of X, change the industry/change the world].”*
- *“It’s an honor for me to give you a sneak peek at what few people have seen yet.”*
- *“There are a lot of amazing companies out there doing [whatever seems similar to your space.] I know, though, that we have something special going on here, and I’m excited at the opportunity for you to be involved now.”*

Finally, I’d remember that when we’re asking for money, it’s not about us. It’s about the bigger stakes that we want the investor/customer/client to feel.

As we shared on the webinar, emotion puts people in motion. So help them feel the excitement. Don’t just tell them the facts.

Congrats on the new venture!

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**2. Don't you think that your LinkedIn profile, Facebook page, [insert other social media here] is bragging at its finest? Showing your professional accomplishments and recognitions for the world to see feels like the ultimate brag to me.**

We talked about this a little on our webinar. Yes, all of these public avenues are places to tell YOUR story, as YOU want it to be read/heard. The tools give you more control over your personal message than ever before.

But I’m not convinced everyone is using these tools “at their finest.”

I’m actually a little worried we’ve gotten sloppy with social.

Because these tools are so accessible (and for the most part, *free*), I’ve noticed that smart professionals sometimes ignore the impact of what they share on their professional and personal outposts.

They’ve gotten sloppy.

Don't let that happen to you!

What does sloppy look like? On LinkedIn, it's this:

- **No picture.** (C'mon, folks, you have a camera in your pocket. And you look like what you look like. As Springsteen sang, "You ain't a beauty, but hey, you're all right.")
- **No summary.** If you want an ultimate brag place, this is it. But remember, the secret to mastering the art of bragging is to put emotion with your pride points. What are you proud of? Honored to be? Who are you excited to help?
- **Out-of-date job information.** At least have your current role listed and fleshed out.

On Facebook, sloppy means forgetting that anything you write or post is part of your digital footprint. Forever. Friends or no friends. The web has a way of coming back to you.

So is social media the ultimate brag? It can certainly help support who you are or who you want to become. But don't forget that it all starts with YOU—making sure you are clear, confident, and in control over what the world knows to be true about you. As the baseball great Dizzy Dean said: "It ain't braggin' if it's true."

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### **3. How about establishing yourself as an expert and becoming a speaker/author/consultant in your field?**

How about it? Go for it!

Seriously, if you're going to put yourself out there to help others, you absolutely have to get comfortable with telling your story.

In fact, those of you in professional or personal services industries actually have it a little easier than those in traditional corporate roles, since someone typically expects to hear what's unique and special about you in order to hire you.

You can stand out, however, when you focus not on what you do, but on the result you can create, the pain you relieve, the transformation you enable.

("Don't tell us what you can do for us," said NO potential client, ever.)

So to establish yourself as an expert, first get really clear. The world doesn't need just another speaker/author/consultant. They need the difference that you make. What is it? Use that as your pride point and share often.

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**4. Do the rules re bragging differ for non-profits & volunteer organizations vs. business? I recently did some exceptional research for one of these, which I presented well (as an experienced educator, I know how to present info effectively) and as part of my presentation mentioned in passing that I had been a high school teacher at 2 of the world's #1-rated schools, because I was providing some examples from those settings. (This was before getting my doctorate & being a professor). Immediately I not only lost the audience, but also friendships. No compliments on the critical info I shared and people snubbing me at subsequent gatherings. Your input would be appreciated.**

I'm sorry that your experience telling your story didn't go well.

I notice you talked about sharing lots of INFO. But today, we don't need more information.

We need more interpretation. More "here's what this means." More connection. More caring.

Did you unintentionally come off as "better than" everyone else because of your emphasis on your own higher education? The art of mastering the art of bragging is NEVER to diminish someone else, but to ensure that you're not hiding your own light. (See my answer to question #1 above about arrogance vs. confidence.)

The great part is that you can recover from this. Here's how.

Choose two or three of the people who you respect and want back in your life. One by one, tell them that you are doing some hard thinking about how to better share your ideas and content, and that you'd value their perspective. Invite them to coffee or lunch. You pay.

Share with them that you noticed something didn't go right with the presentation you gave, and you perceive that you turned people off. Share that was never your intent, and so you want to understand what happened and would really appreciate that person's input.

Then SHUT UP SHUT UP SHUT UP. The worse thing we smart people can do is to forget that others are smart, too. Listen.

When they stop, say, “What else?” Then SHUT UP SHUT UP SHUT UP. Listen more.

Rinse & repeat until they’re done.

Resist the urge to defend yourself (“Oh, you misunderstood—what I meant to say was . . . .”) No. NO and no.

If you hear that you’ve somehow offended them, apologize. And mean it.

Then, after you’ve collected the ideas (call it qualitative data if that feels better) from those conversations, look hard at what you will do differently the next time. How might you connect with the audience differently, rather than talking at them (or worse, down to them)?

Practice using the bragging formula (emotion + pride point) with a friend. Change “I did exceptional research” to “I was grateful to have access to these exceptional resources.” Change “I have all this education” to “I was proud to earn my doctorate so I could make a bigger impact in situations like X.”

Ask for help, and keep working on it. I know you’ll succeed.

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## **5. Will you be addressing how to measure the success of your brags?**

No, we didn’t talk about this on the workshop, but it’s a great question. The important thing is to recognize what success looks like to YOU.

Why are you feeling the need to brag more in the first place? Are you getting overlooked? Want more opportunities? More flexibility? Faster growth?

Measure your success by getting the results that matter most to you. Don’t compare yourself to others—that’s a losing game.

If you’re not sure what success looks like to you, this article on my blog includes a link to a free tool I use with my clients to help them map out their future vision.

<http://redcaperevolution.com/managing-your-career-vision/>

## **6. Do you see effective bragging as telling the story with words & visuals? Any examples come to mind of taking action with copy and visuals?**

If you can come up with a picture that tells your story--instead of a thousand words—you'll always capture more attention.

You've probably heard the story of Steve Jobs describing the first iPod not as a digital music player, but "1000 songs in your pocket." That's a picture.

I'd read a story of an entrepreneur in the 1990s walking into a venture capitalist's office without the usual armor of spreadsheets or PowerPoint slides. He simply threw his notebook on the table, and said, "Imagine having the web at your fingertips from here."

He went on to be funded to develop tablet technology.

Can you see that picture?

In the small bragging snippets we talked about, you may not have as much time to paint a picture. (If you make it work, I'd love to hear your examples—please send them to me at [Darcy@RedCapeRevolution.com](mailto:Darcy@RedCapeRevolution.com).)

But when you have a longer opportunity (such as a presentation or an interview), definitely think hard about the metaphors, fairy tales, movies, and comparisons to current events you can use to draw pictures that help create clarity and often, can motivate emotion.

(Note: I'm no expert. I'm a word girl. I use visuals about as well as Donald Trump uses subtly. But I'm learning!)

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## **7. How do you respond to someone who tends to "one up" you when you tell them your success story?**

You smile and say, "That's great! Tell me more."

Someone else's success doesn't diminish yours. If they're that needy for the validation, give it to them.

It's not a zero-sum game. Your good things don't count less if good things happen to others, too. Let's want good things for everyone.

You can afford to be generous.

## 8. Can you please speak to how you might inspire confidence in colleagues/superiors internally vs. external clients?

When we're working with external clients or customers, we've often taken some time to think about who they are and what they want. In some organizations, there's even a detailed process to evaluate this to ensure you're set up to make the sale.

But we don't always use the same strategies when we're influencing and motivating internal colleagues, no matter what their role.

If you want to inspire confidence in your colleagues or superiors inside your own organization, start with understanding these things:

- **Who are they, really?** What's their background beyond the role they hold now?
- **What do they care about, or value?** (Watch what they do, not what they say.)
- **Where's their pain?** (By pain, I mean what's the thing they worry about most? What's the thing that wakes them up in the middle of the night?)
- **What's the best way you can be helpful to them?**

If you're not sure, a confident person isn't afraid to ask.

- Say *"I realize we'd been working together for a while, but I realized I don't know much about you or your goals. Would you have time for a cup of coffee to get to know each other a bit?"*

Most people are flattered that someone cares enough to ask.

For more ideas, I have a free tool, "What to Say to Build Confidence at Work." It offers scripts and phrases you can use in a variety of situations with peers as well as bosses or external colleagues. Download it (again, for free) here:

[www.Tinyurl.com/RedCapeConfidence](http://www.Tinyurl.com/RedCapeConfidence)

*Thanks for being on the webinar! If you have other questions, just reach out. And send your success stories, too! If I can do anything to serve you, your colleagues or family, it'd be my honor.*

*--Darcy*