

Self-Leadership Challenge #5: How to Self-Promote Without Bragging

I once coached a leader named Margaret, a Human Resources executive who, along with her team, was responsible for 125 leaders within her large organization—no small feat. However, as a result of a company merger, Margaret and her team suddenly found themselves responsible for almost double that—245 leaders—and were informed that due to cost-cutting measures, they would have no additional staffing. So, overnight, Margaret and her team were faced with almost double the work and no added help.

Margaret came to me feeling anxious, wondering, “Can we do it? Is it possible?”

She and her team created a vision, devised a strategic plan, worked weekends and late nights, and ultimately did an exemplary job of managing their larger mandate. In fact, within one year, they were working like a well-oiled machine, effectively managing all of the 245 leaders without incident.

When Margaret’s annual performance review came, her boss praised her wholeheartedly. He congratulated her on a job well done and let her know just how much the company appreciated what she was able to accomplish.

How did Margaret respond? She shook her head modestly, and said, “Oh, it’s OK. It was nothing....”

[When Margaret met with me](#) and shared the outcome of her performance appraisal, she must have seen an expression of surprise on my face, given the tremendous effort she and her team had put in during the last year.

She shook her head. “I know, I know. I can’t believe I said that!”

After debriefing the situation, Margaret shared that she hadn’t taken the compliment well because she was uncomfortable in that moment and didn’t want to appear boastful.

Promoting ourselves and talking about our accomplishments in an unboastful way can be uncomfortable for many leaders. It is absolutely true that nobody likes to listen to the braggart who goes on and on about all the great things he or she has done. But there’s a difference between bragging from a place of insecurity that makes you *need* attention, and simply bringing attention to your achievements—with a combination of humility and pride.

Margaret and I talked about how she would have liked to respond to that compliment, and we even prepared a statement that she memorized in case the opportunity arose again. About a month later, Margaret’s boss’s boss came to see her to also express *his* appreciation for her hard

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work. This time, she was prepared. When the compliment came, Margaret responded, “Honestly, it took everyone on the team working long hours and even weekends, but I’m really pleased with what we did, and I’m so glad you appreciate it.”

By answering in this way, Margaret gave credit to everyone on the team, demonstrating that she is an excellent leader. But it also allowed for some self-promotion without putting the emphasis

only on herself. Then, she brought it back to “*I’m* really pleased with what we did, and *I’m* so glad you appreciate it.” As a result, she was able to show awareness of her own accomplishments without resorting to bragging.

Self-Promotion is Self-Leadership

Are you like Margaret? Have you avoided self-promotion out of the fear that you’ll be seen as a braggart or as someone who doesn’t have humility? I know that being humble is a foundational characteristic in many cultures, and I wholly respect that. But if you avoid promoting yourself on the job, your hard work may go unnoticed. I tell my clients, “Please only learn to be a good self-promoter if you want a successful career and higher compensation!”

Despite the benefits of self-promotion, most senior leaders still avoid sharing their “wins.” Some of them think, “It’s not that big of a deal. I’ll wait until I achieve something bigger, and *then* I’ll talk about it.”

Others ask me, “Shouldn’t talking about my accomplishments be my boss’s responsibility?” Well, yes, probably. But let’s get real. Put yourself in a modern-day superior’s shoes. Financial pressures are creating increasingly flatter organizations, which means bosses have a larger number of direct reports than ever before. Also, the need for companies to go beyond domestic borders to continue their growth trajectory means not only do bosses have more direct reports, but those direct reports may be located all over the world. So, be empathetic to the fact that top executives’ jobs have gotten more and more difficult over the years, and their ability to focus on and promote upwards each individual who works for them has become stretched very thin.

You can now hopefully see how today—more than any other time in the history of modern capitalism—self-promotion has become a vital part of [self-leadership](#). As such, by letting your boss know on a regular basis what you’re doing, you are actually making his or her job *easier!* The boss will be grateful because—trust me—when it’s time for your yearly performance management review, he/she will be better able to endorse you to upper level management. You will not only be helping your superiors, but also demonstrating strong self-leadership and solid [Executive Presence](#) in the process.

Another point to consider: By keeping track of your accomplishments along the way, you will be better prepared for your next performance review without the need to invest hours in reflection

and writing time. You'll be glad you can avoid that feeling of, "Did I miss anything?" that often accompanies your own self-assessment in annual performance reviews.

How to Self-Promote Without Bragging

Promoting yourself without bragging takes a bit of finesse while you're first learning the art. With that in mind, here are some specific steps you can take:

- 1) Send regular emails to your boss—not about yourself, but about the good work of one or more of your team members. Give those deserving people a spotlight; that will show your superior that you're a terrific leader without taking credit yourself. And, by the way, sending this email about *others'* accomplishments is an excellent way to demonstrate your own *self*-leadership, too.
- 2) Shortly before your performance review, make a list of accomplishments you want to highlight to your boss. This is your chance to let him or her know your strengths. If it helps you feel more comfortable, spend a little time phrasing your remarks so that they don't sound boastful, using proven facts to support your claims. For instance: "The revenues of the Alberta project exceeded expectations, and the strategy the team and I put in place reduced costs by 12 percent."
- 3) Don't miss a chance to let someone else praise your good work "upward." If a client, customer, or colleague sends an email expressing gratitude or saying they were impressed with your work or the work of your team, forward it to the boss with a message saying how grateful you are that this person took valuable time out of their day to send positive feedback.
- 4) Always try to applaud another person before you mention your part in a project's success. For example, "Shania worked evenings to finalize this plan, and her efforts really helped me seal this deal. I appreciate having such solid team support." Notice that you use the words "I" and "me" without taking all the credit for yourself.

If you continue to feel uncomfortable when mentioning your own accomplishments, spend time planning the words you will use, as if you were selling a new client on your company's products or services. Practice the phrases at home or with a friend or a peer you trust until you reach a point where sharing your accomplishments feels more natural. Then, you'll be promoting yourself without the need to brag at all.

BRENDA BENCE

**BUILDING SUCCESSFUL LEADERSHIP BRANDS
FOR COMPANIES AND EXECUTIVES**

Do you want to strengthen your self-leadership skills? Check out my latest book, Leading YOU™: The Power of Self-Leadership to Build Your Executive Brand and Drive Career Success, where I share dozens of tips, tools, and techniques to help you rise to the top in your career.

Brenda S. Bence is an internationally-recognized branding expert, Certified Executive Coach, Certified Speaking Professional, and the author of several award-winning books, including *Would YOU Want to Work for YOU™? How to build an executive leadership brand that inspires loyalty and drives employee performance*, *Master the Brand Called YOU™*, and *Smarter Branding Without Breaking the Bank*.



In one of her recently released books, *Leading YOU™: The power of Self-Leadership to build your executive brand and drive career success*, Brenda brings her many years of transformational coaching successes, insights, examples, and real-world stories to the rewarding task of helping leaders reach their full potential.

After earning her MBA from Harvard, Brenda spent the bulk of her career as an executive in *Fortune* 100 multinationals, building brands across dozens of countries spanning four continents. Now, as President of her own company, Brand Development Associates International, she travels the world speaking, training, and coaching individuals and companies to greater success through creative, yet practical, personal and corporate brand and leadership development. Visit www.BrendaBence.com.

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