

On Bragging

Tim Culvahouse, FAIA

Some people are comfortable telling others their accomplishments and abilities, and others aren't. I'm not particularly comfortable doing so, myself.

But bragging – if you want to call it that – is both necessary and important, if one is to share those abilities productively. Not only will “tooting your own horn” help sell your abilities; if you toot accurately and clearly, it will help you find people who will really appreciate you.

Easily enough said, but for some of us not so easily done, so here are four work-arounds:

1. **Brag about the people you employ or work with.** You'll get credit by association, you'll be seen as a generous individual with whom people would like to work, your colleagues will feel valued, and, before you know it, they will be returning the favor and bragging about *you*.
2. **Brag about your competition.** I know, this sounds like a dumb idea, and it can be if you do it in overly broad strokes. But if you articulate precisely a particular thing that another firm has done well, you demonstrate *your* insight and expertise as well as – or maybe more than – theirs. (Because, heck, they might have stumbled onto that solution by accident, but *you* recognize it for what it is!) You demonstrate self-confidence. And you give yourself an opportunity to mention something of your own: “We ran into a similar situation, which we resolved a little differently”
3. **Brag about someone you've learned from:** a teacher, a mentor, an employer (or employee), a consultant or contractor, a friend or relative, or a client. Describe something specific that you learned, and you demonstrate your own expertise while sharing credit and drawing your listener into the lineage. Which brings us to what may be the best method of all:
4. **Teach something to someone.** Take the time to explain – to a client or a potential client or just someone you happen to be chatting with – some bit of specialized knowledge or insight. You won't have to *say* you're an expert, because you'll be *demonstrating* that you are.

You can do these things in your formal communications (as, for instance, in this Tip Sheet) as well as in person. Each is an instance of *demonstrating* your knowledge and understanding, rather than merely *asserting* it. And without feeling like a big wind-bag.