

Do Your Friends Know What You Do...?

Most people can recall at least one time when they needed help with something and without hesitation a friend or relative offered a referral. Have a pain in your neck? See Dr. Weber. Need a math tutor? Call Mary Jones. Not sure how to report the gain on the sale of your home? Call my tax guy.

But as quick as they were to recommend a doctor, a tutor, or a tax preparer, do these same people know what you do? If they were in a similar conversation with someone about what you do for a living, would they even think of offering your name? If they tripped over the perfect job for you, would they know it? For most of us, the answer is, no.

It is your job to help people understand what you do. You need to create a marketing campaign about you, so that job opportunities will come to you without you even being present in the conversation.

Consider this conversation between a data security manager and a friend on the 6:04 train out of Grand Central Station:

Data Security Manager: *"If I don't find someone quickly who knows about Extranet & Internet DMZs and network security, I'm going to have some serious problems on my hands. Just today we had another major problem with our PIX Firewalls and Split Managed VPN, and all our routers and switches went down."*

Friend: *"I haven't the slightest idea what that means, but I know a guy who does. Here's his name and number; give him a call and maybe he can help."*

Whether you are in the market for a new job or not, this is how you want to be known. It's all about personal branding, but most people recognize only archetypical professions. Think about whether your family and friends really know what you do, and then start educating them.

Your goal is to have job opportunities come to you without you even being present in the conversation.

But before you start broadcasting to the world what you do, prepare a carefully thought out marketing pitch and try it on some trusted colleagues.

Avoid Expansive Labels

Telling people you are a banker, a consultant, or a sales person won't even begin to educate them in what you do. Be more specific.

- ▶ A lawyer can be a criminal lawyer, an intellectual property lawyer, an immigration lawyer, a securities lawyer, a real estate lawyer, a tax lawyer, an international lawyer, a family lawyer, and a multiplicity of other specialties. Plus, you can be in private practice, government practice, or corporate practice.

Educate

Much like the lawyer paradigm, telling someone you are a programmer is not precise enough, but might also evoke a deer-in-the-headlights question, “So...what do you do, then...?”

Don’t assume the other person knows much about computers. Be prepared to define your specialty at varying levels of understanding, and be patient even if you have to explain Programming 101; *“Computers follow instructions from programming languages that, unlike human language which can be ambiguous at times and yet still be understood, requires a great deal of precision and completeness to enable the computer to produce the intended action. What programming language does have in common with human language is that there are many different languages. My specialty is helping companies design first class web pages using HTML programming.”*

Promote Your Value Proposition - Not Yourself

Offering your job title does little to help people understand what you do and can also be perceived as condescending. Think in terms of a marketing brochure, not a resume.

If you are a management consultant, your marketing message should be something like, *“I help organizations improve productivity and customer satisfaction, which in turn enables my clients to reduce costs and increase sales.”* That says a whole lot more than, *“I’m a management consultant.”*

Your goal is to keep the conversation going, so when you pitch yourself in terms of what you do for others, it often evokes curiosity with typical follow-up questions such as, *“How do you do that?”*



Give people a reason to think of you, to contact you, and to refer you.

Avoid using a title, discussing a process, or using terms that produce blank stares and stop the conversation at your first sentence. Explain who you help and what types of problems you solve. People relate to this.

Marketing yourself along these lines may require practice, so sketch a presentation to try on a few trusted colleagues. Then, whenever you catch yourself saying, *“I’m an accountant,”* quickly replace it with your marketing message that describes the value you bring and for whom. It may feel awkward at first, but the more you practice, the more comfortable you will become.

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