

## OFFICE SPACE

## CAREER COUCH

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# Showing Your Worth Without Showing Off

**Q.** You've begun to suspect that the importance of your stellar contributions to a big project is eluding your boss. How do you lobby for the credit you deserve without seeming like a smarmy self-promoter?

**A.** For starters, don't put the burden on your boss to keep tabs on your accomplishments. A boss who adequately recognizes and rewards employees is harder to find than a good sushi bar in Wyoming. "In today's environment, many people are stuck doing the equivalent of two jobs. They don't have time to notice your performance," said Peggy Klaus, author of "Brag! The Art of Tooting Your Own Horn Without Blowing It" (Warner Books, 2004). "Your boss isn't psychic. You need to take matters into your own hands."

**Q.** What's the best way to promote yourself?

**A.** Regular progress reports are a good basic approach. Ideally, you've got a list of specific goals that came out of your last performance review, or a set of project objectives that you can tick off. If so, you can send memos to the boss letting her know as each goal is accomplished, said Judith Glaser, an executive coach and the chief executive of Benchmark Communications, an executive coaching and management consulting firm in New York City. Even if you don't have that list, you can send reports. But list outcomes rather than tasks. No one cares that you spent 70 hours last month on business development, but they do care that you landed three new clients and paved the way for a fourth. You can adapt your reports to whatever format your boss prefers — e-mail, written memos, voice mail — as long as you keep a written copy for your annual review, Ms. Glaser said.

**Q.** Is there a more artful way to approach it?

**A.** A more subtle approach is to find a way to have regular, informal conversations with your boss that trumpet your work without grandstanding, Ms. Klaus said. The secret, she said, is to refine your storytelling: think of talking about yourself the way you talk about others you admire.

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"When we talk about the accomplishments of someone that we adore and are proud of, we tell a story," she said. "We include the context, the drama, the challenge, all these interesting tidbits. And then when we go to talk about ourselves," she added, we forget these skills. "We slip into a monotone and deliver a laundry list."

Hallie Hart, 37, a financial adviser in San Ramon, Calif., often uses her accomplishments in conversation. Ms. Hart says she'll often seek her boss's opinion about a decision as an excuse to update him on a project. She recently let him know that she had organized a high-profile networking dinner honoring Shinae Chun, director of the Women's Bureau of the United States Department of Labor, by inviting him to the dinner. "I don't think of these conversations as bragging," Ms. Hart said. "I think of it as sharing with people around me who I am and what I'm passionate about. The accomplishments are part of the larger picture about my enthusiasm for my work."

**Q.** Are there any taboos about promoting your work?

**A.** It's rarely appropriate to toot your own horn in a team meeting, Ms. Glaser said. One of her clients, a senior executive at a pharmaceutical company, thought the best way to have his achievements recorded was to slide them into any group meeting or conversation. He thought he was "supporting" his team's work by relating progress. Everyone else thought he was an egomaniac.

**Q.** Is it better to be explicit or indirect?

**A.** Ideally, you want a mixture. But Ms. Glaser says the subtlest, most effective way is to make broadcasting what you're doing inextricable from the work itself. Last year, she coached one client, an employee of a financial services company, who managed a large project spanning many departments. The woman enlisted many senior executives

by explaining the project and how it could help their work. At the end of that year, she was one of a small, elite group of employees not on the senior executive team to be invited to the annual executive retreat.

**Q.** Is there a way to enlist your colleagues in singing your praises?

**A.** What goes around comes around, Ms. Glaser said. If you want to create an environment in which others talk up your achievements, do that for them first. You may also lend your expertise or time to colleagues as a way of highlighting your skills in that area. "The best thing in the world is to never have to sell yourself," Ms. Glaser said. "The accolades come out of referrals and people's gratefulness for your contribution."

**Q.** But can you go too far in praising others instead of yourself?

**A.** Sure, and people whose primary responsibility is to lead teams are most at risk. There is a danger of passing all the credit along to those who execute the plans, without highlighting your own skills and talents in managing, Ms. Glaser coached one senior pharmaceutical executive last year whose chief executive didn't think he had the chops for a promotion because all he talked about were the accomplishments of the team. He had to learn to include himself in the story and to make clear what insights, research or work on his part had helped the team. "If you are always eating humble pie," Ms. Glaser said, "you're much less likely to get to taste the promotion pie."



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