

Embrace Yourself: The Art of Self-Promotion

Kittie W. Watson, Ph.D.
President and CEO, Innolect Inc.

Consider the following questions:

1. Is it easier for you to “brag” about *yourself* or someone else?
2. What were you told as child that influenced how you talk about your accomplishments?
3. What were you told early in your career about how to gain visibility and recognition?
4. Who influenced you the most in “telling your own story” and your business today?
5. What advice would you give a new woman entrepreneur about self-promotion?

Women have been starting businesses at a higher rate than men for the last 20 years and tend to create home-based micro (less than 5 employees) and small businesses. Women are expected to create over half of the 9.72 million new small business jobs by 2018 (Forbes, 2012). American women own 30% of small businesses, which generate \$1.2 trillion a year in sales. Although the number of women-owned firms is growing at 1½ times the national average, many struggle to get past the \$250,000–\$499,999 revenue mark. (State of Women Owned Businesses Report 2012). Even so, more than a quarter of a million women in the U.S. own and lead businesses with annual revenue topping \$1 million—and many of these businesses are multimillion-dollar enterprises. Clearly, many women have the vision, capacity and perseverance to build thriving companies (Hadary, 2010).

When asked what gets in the way of revenue growth for women-owned businesses, one of the biggest issues cited is women’s own self-limiting views of themselves, their businesses and the opportunities available to them. Numerous research reports suggest that women’s own socialization and communication patterns may sabotage their effectiveness and impact.

Recently GWBC formed a committee to review and offer suggestions to enhance our reward and recognition activities. As the committee reviewed the trends and reports from the last few years, we noted that the GWBC region has a high number of qualified women do not receive the recognition and rewards. Unfortunately, many qualified women miss opportunities because they:

- fail to understand the importance of visibility and positioning;
- are not nominated;
- do not complete the application when nominated; and/or
- Do not self-nominate.

Members of the committee explored the issue with a vigorous discussion. The committee came to a conclusion that reinforces gender research--***many women find it difficult to “sing their own praises.”***

Women more so than men believe that their contributions will be recognized and rewarded without having to self-nominate, ask for a referral, or talk about their own contributions. Unfortunately, our socialization, especially in the south, often creates belief systems that view self-positioning opportunities as immodest, arrogant, boastful, cocky, unprofessional and/or showing off.

As an advocate for women-owned businesses, GWBC is in the business of helping WBEs build their capability and skill at positive self-promotion. GWBC’s mission is to partner with women to increase their visibility and recognition for their hard work and success. It is important for women to tell their story and position themselves and their companies for even greater success. This article presents current gender communication research as it relates to self-promotion and executive presence as well as suggests opportunities for increasing visibility in 2013.

Socialization and Self-sabotage. Women and men typically engage in distinctive styles of communication with differing purposes, rules and understanding of how to interpret talk. These communication patterns and practices are socialized by our families, friends and life experiences. Men use networking, ingratiation and self-promotion strategies more than women do. While nearly three-quarters of women recognize that promoting oneself is important, 51 percent have been told that when they "toot their own horn," they are being too aggressive.

Gender research reports suggest that women often use self-limiting communication practices. Read the list below and check the ones that you’ve noticed in yourself.

- _____ 1. Are often poorly equipped to self-promote, showcase accomplishments - “brag” (may not be as visible to corporations and senior management as men).
- _____ 2. Use weak language patterns that marginalize what we say – qualifiers, apologies and indirect communication.
- _____ 3. Are uncomfortable with self-promotion and taking credit for ideas and work performed (Avoid highlighting our own accomplishments).
- _____ 4. Limit opportunities for visibility by displaying humility and waiting to be acknowledged.
- _____ 5. Fail to “ask” and miss out on financial and visibility opportunities; rarely articulate what we need as often (or as effectively) as men.
- _____ 6. Let cultural inhibitions cause awkwardness when talking about our own accomplishments.
- _____ 7. Tend to say, “I got lucky” or “It was nothing” after receiving a compliment or achieving success.



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- _____ 8. Often feel uncomfortable taking credit for ideas and work performed.
- _____ 9. Are more likely than men to downplay our accomplishments, expertise and knowledge.
- _____ 10. Recognize impression management as an effective tool, but reject its use for ourselves.

If you checked one or more of these statements, you are involved in self-limiting practices. Make a personal commitment today to modify your behavior and strengthen how you talk about yourself and your company.

Overcome Self-limiting Practices

Overcoming self-limiting practices is a two-step process. The first step is to recognize our personal habits, belief systems and patterns of communication that get in the way of gaining positive recognition. The second step is to identify new behaviors to apply and use when opportunities are present. Consider some of the new practices you can begin in 2013.

- Make time to assess and create a personal accomplishment/impact inventory.
- Assess personal communication practices to strategically increase visibility and impact.
- Form a personal board of directors (operational, personal, and strategic network).
- Sell Yourself; *No One Else Will*.
- Play “the organizational game” and find ways to get your name/brand known.
- Remember, it is your job to find ways to gain recognition and visibility.
- Contact other women who have won an award previously to find out whether or not you are eligible.
- Make a list of awards in your industry and for awards that target women for which you might apply.
- Break free of language weaknesses that make women’s ideas (voices) invisible and/or destroy confidence
- Move out of your comfort zone and build strong support networks.
- Develop and practice your personal “elevator speech.”
- Tell stories about your experience and success.
- Share your accomplishments.
- Learn how to build compelling messages and strong stories to capture attention and imaginations.
- Ask for what you want (i.e., others to nominate you for an award).
- Consider how “Actions Follow Beliefs” - if you believe it is unbecoming to self-promote you will miss valuable opportunities to grow your business.
- Finally, read the short story, *King’s Cross*, by Maeve Binchy.

There are a number of opportunities for WBEs to showcase your business in 2013. Consider one or more of the following:



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- Volunteer to give your “pitch” at a GWBC event.
- Sign-up for GWBC matchmaker events.
- Sign-up and attend “Pitch parties.”
- Submit a GWBC LACE Award Nomination.
- Submit an Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year Nomination.
- Submit an Enterprising Women of the Year Nomination.
- Submit a nomination within your own industry group.

Remember, YOU are your own best marketing asset. Make the most of your opportunities and commit to increase your own visibility and brand this year.

Kittie W. Watson, Ph.D., is founder and President of Innolect Inc, a global strategic change and leadership development consulting firm...*Innolect Grows the Leader in Everyone*. The author of over 15 books and numerous articles, her most recent book is ***Leadership Coaching: The Fast-track to Effectiveness***. She is a member of the GWBC board, serves as the GWBC South Carolina Voice Chair and on the WBENC Forum Leadership. For more information:

KittieW@Innolectinc.com or www.Innolectinc.com.

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