

Clear evidence: Stand out by pointing to outcomes

Ever felt the need to prove your value to your boss? Ever felt like your hard-won accomplishments are considered “lightweight”?

Are you skittish about articulating how your work contributes to the overall organization?

If so, take heart. This column will help you to communicate your value without seeming narcissistic.

Before you read on, write down what you’d normally write to make your boss aware of an accomplishment about which you’re proud — and see how it fares when you look at the most common mistakes women make in an exercise like this.



**Women’s
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THE MOST COMMON MISTAKES

■ **Misused adjectives:** Did you use words like “top quality,” “cost-effective,” “excellent” or “appropriate”? If so, you’ve lost a huge opportunity to feature your results.

For example, “secured five desirable clients” lacks punch. The technique for correcting this error is the fill-in-the-blank question, which forces you to rephrase your outcome more powerfully.

Here’s how it works: “The five clients I secured were desirable because they _____.”

“Using the fill-in-the-blank technique evokes a degree of specificity that produces a much stronger outcome statement: “Secured five new clients away from ABC competitor, with combined initial orders of

\$XXX, each of which agreed to stock an inventory of our products valued at \$XXX annually.”

Which outcome statement would your boss find more impressive?

■ **Misused verbs:** Does your statement include words like: “promote,” “support,” “coordinate,” “educate” or “attend”? If so, consider this example, “Attended all ’04 meetings of the XYZ committee.”

Warming a seat is not an accomplishment, so this isn’t an outcome statement. The technique for correcting this is to ask “why” regarding the verb: “Why did I attend the XYZ meeting?”

Usually, the answer reveals that the activity served some higher purpose, such as neutralizing a problem, creating an opportunity, building a strategic relationship, etc.

Remember, it’s not the various activities you’ve done, but the outcome they produced that you need to capture — and by which you’ll be judged.

Applying that technique to our example might create this improved outcome statement: “Secured on-the-record support of our policy on X from three member companies during the XYZ meeting.”

■ **Misused comparison words:** Outcome statements containing words such as “increase,” “decrease,” “expand,” “reduce,” “more” and “improve” usually lack clarity.

For example: “Achieved a 10 percent increase in attendance at the 2004 conference” doesn’t reveal the utility of that increase. You could raid the nearest assisted-living facility and increase attendance.

Instead, be specific about the composition of that additional 10 percent: “Achieved a 10 percent increase in attendance by CEOs of targeted prospect companies at the 2004 conference compared with the 2003 level.”

GETTING YOUR WORDS ACROSS

■ The communication of your outcomes should not occur too frequently. Ask the boss how often he or she wants to be briefed.

■ Your briefing should not be a narrative, whether written or verbal. Instead, bullet your items.

■ Don’t use “I.” Instead, start off your outcome statements with powerful verbs.

Clearly, the crafting of evidence-based outcome statements is a fairly tedious process, but the investment pays tremendous dividends. Your accomplishments and their impacts will be more visible, and your boss will likely be more willing to engage with you because you will have established a track record of superb clarity.

Providing your boss with evidence-based outcome statements will also establish a firm foundation for your performance review, insulating you against the possibility of a gut-feel or best-guess assessment by your boss.

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