

**The Art of the Humblebrag**

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“A fool tells you what he will do; a boaster what he has done. The wiseman does it and says nothing.” (unknown)

Remember when bragging used to be considered a bad thing? It actually wasn’t that long ago, but it seems like a distant memory. Imagine what our favorite social networking sites would be like if you stripped away the shameless self-promotion – you’d start seeing the digital equivalent of tumbleweeds ambling across an otherwise quiet Feed.

Humblebragging is defined as, “Making a seemingly modest, self-critical, or casual statement or reference that is meant to draw attention to one's admirable or impressive qualities or achievements”1. Sound familiar? For a few common examples, take a look at the following garden variety humblebrags:

1. **So humbled…So…honored…So grateful**2**.** This is the most common tactic for sharing something that a person is proud of. Note that the humility infused setup will always be immediately followed by news of the subject’s participation on a panel, receipt of recognition, giving of a speech, or contact with a celebrity relevant to their line of work. If you have been sucked into the Feed and encounter the words “humbled”, “honored”, “grateful”, or others of their ilk, then keep scrolling.
2. **My life has been hard, but I’m crushing it.** These posts are seemingly micro-sized motivational speeches but are actually boasts in sheep’s clothing. They are a fabulous way to talk about the adversity a person has historically encountered but how they presently have the American Dream in a headlock. Look for shots of a person on a boat, reclining on a private jet or otherwise flaunting the trappings of success. As a general rule, treat these posts like you would fluorescent coloring on a frog in the Amazon, and give their owners a wide berth.
3. **[Insert Name] did a great job…and so did I.** This is the more Machiavellian derivative of example #1 that uses the misdirection of applauding someone else while making sure to peek your head into the frame. Example: humblebragger participates in a noteworthy event hosted or moderated by someone else. Humblebragger then compliments said host on their performance while displaying a picture that includes both the humblebragger and the target of their self-interested praise. While a clever adaptation of the humblebragging genre, it’s ultimately as transparent.

The problem with all of this false modesty is that it’s been proven to [make people dislike you](http://time.com/5095144/humblebrag-bragging/). A 2018 study from researchers at Harvard and the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill suggests that humblebragging actually makes people like you less than if you were to employ good old-fashioned self-promotion. One of the study’s authors, Ovul Sezer, suggests, “You think, as the humblebragger, that it’s the best of both worlds, but what we show is that *sincerity* is actually the key ingredient.”

To be clear, I’m not calling for an elimination of all promotion – that would essentially destroy the marketing industry, and well-executed advertising can be important to getting what you want, personally and professionally. Rather, I propose that we evolve to what I’ll call “Self-Promotion 2.0”. In other words, eliminate the sleight of hand and embrace sincerity. Here are some ideas:

1. **Mention what you did, hold the humility**. If you feel compelled to share an accomplishment with the cybercommunity, then simply share it without the sneakily self-effacing lead in. Per the study referenced above, people may still find the self-promotion annoying, but it will be relatively less annoying than the equivalent paired with a side of humblebragging.
2. **Offer something of value.** One of my favorite featuresof LinkedIn, before it got all humblebraggy, was the articles that people would share. The Feed was essentially a curated collection of the best business thought pieces across an array of topics, and I loved the daily exercise of leveling up my thinking in relevant areas. The beauty of article (or video) sharing is that if you consistently distribute high value information relevant to your industry, you become associated with thought leadership in your field. Let’s bring that back to the forefront. On the flipside, one positive trend I’ve noticed is a lot of people are starting to publish more original content on the platform which is a great way to stay current on my friends’ and colleagues’ long-form perspectives on issues resonating with them. Keep up the good work!
3. **Advertise future events.** While a fairly utilitarian application of social networks, this is a practical way to get the word out about upcoming events that those in your network may want to attend. What’s refreshing about these posts is that the objective is in plain sight and not obfuscated by feigned meekness.
4. **Promote someone else without agenda.** If you observe someone do a kudos-worthy job of something, a wonderful way to acknowledge them is through social media. Just make sure you aren’t trying to grab some of the reflected glow for your own benefit. This one doesn’t even fall into the self-promotion category, this is just encouragement for the sake of making someone else feel good.

Man, it feels good to get that one off my chest. Interested in any reactions or comments, fire away with feedback.

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1Merriam-Webster

2I’m embarrassed to admit that a younger me has deployed versions of the “So humbled…” post in an early attempt to get involved in the self-promotion game. I feel about that like I do about parting my hair down the middle in the 7th grade – it seemed like a good idea at the time, but I now regret it. And, no, this footnote is not some meta attempt to reference the existence of my own humblebrag-worthy accomplishments by citing the fact that I’ve humblebragged in the past.

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