



# REDEFINING BRAGGING

MASTERING THE ART OF FEARLESS  
SELF-PROMOTION Meredith Fineman

“Brag” is a dirty word. I’m here to change that. I use it intentionally. I want to get your attention, then show you how to do it.

You are amazing, and I want everyone to know it. I got so tired of hearing people say that talking about themselves “feels bad” or that they are scared people will think “I’m full of myself.” I set out to change these sentiments through a decade of coaching, training, speaking, advising, and helping people Brag Better and get what they wanted out of their careers.

When people think of bragging, they often go straight to the idea of throwing themselves a parade. That’s one way of bragging. By all means, throw yourself a parade, but that’s not what I mean when I say we all need to Brag Better. Bragging Better requires cultivating pride in your work and then taking small actions that help you share it with those around you. To MakeLoveNotPorn founder, international rabble-rouser, and speaker Cindy Gallop, bragging is about “giving yourself credit” and “getting the megaphone out.” Gallop believes that hyping your own work is “doing yourself justice” and necessary to survive.

Being unafraid to speak articulately about yourself, your life, and your accomplishments not only makes you feel great, but also leaves a positive and lasting impact on your listener. I want you to feel so good about bragging that you feel free to shout your greatness from the rooftops—and then help your colleagues and friends do it, too.

Bragging Better has nothing to do with pretending—to yourself or to others—that you’re more qualified or confident than you are. Knowing how to brag well is different than faking it till you make it, which we all do when it’s necessary. And I’m not here to teach you how to insert self-promotion into a conversation at inappropriate times. You won’t be learning any tacky gimmicks.

I want you to find a quiet confidence in your opinions, abilities, and background, and then turn up the volume to share your attributes with your boss, clients, book club, community, neighborhood, and the world.

It’s an exciting time to figure out what you stand for and to share it with confidence and conviction.

**You are amazing, and I want everyone to know it.**

## THE QUALIFIED QUIET

This is for The Qualified Quiet: those who struggle with or need help finding, feeling, acknowledging, translating, and expressing their amazing abilities, qualities, and accomplishments. In other words, it's for the 99.99999 percent of us who feel uncomfortable talking about ourselves. To some degree, we are all part of The Qualified Quiet. It has nothing to do with introversion or extroversion, but with your reticence to talk about aspects of your life in order to get what you want.

If you have done the work, but you don't know how to talk about and tout it—you're part of The Qualified Quiet. The Qualified Quiet occupy the opposite end of the spectrum from those who brag loudly without focus or adherence to truth. They have experience, but they don't know how to talk about it. They want more than they are currently getting, but they're afraid to say so. How will you know if you've "done the work?" Even if you're having difficulty identifying it, I promise you have already done a lot of work. (By the way, "loud" people without the hard work background never question whether they have done the work.)

Bragging Better is an ongoing practice, like any other skill. You have to practice being proud of what you've done and sharing it with others.

And if you don't take the time to brag, it can hurt your career. I've seen clients, friends, and acquaintances miss out on big projects because they didn't throw their hats in the ring. It makes me mad—at the person making the choice, but also at the system that makes it easier to duck out than to stand up (and that only makes me want to work harder to change that system).

Oftentimes, these successful individuals spend their time and focus perfecting the brand of their organization and, ironically, have not invested in their personal brand and communications strategy. This happens often with communications people, which might sound counterintuitive. You can hawk your own clients until you're blue in the face but doing the same for yourself feels scary and foreign.

Being a member of The Qualified Quiet is a *good* thing. It's not a weakness; it's a strength. We need you. You are essentially the backbone of our society and workforce. We just need to hear from you. You are the majority, not the minority. You are so not alone in feeling bad when you talk about yourself. After all, helping my clients brag about their work is what I do for a living. If we were all good at it, I'd be out of a job.

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## WHO IS THE QUALIFIED QUIET?

### YOU MIGHT BE A MEMBER OF THE QUALIFIED QUIET IF YOU . . .

**Have trouble talking about your accomplishments to others.** You are never, ever alone in any of these feelings. I coach people over this hump every single day. We all have trouble to some degree—nobody is ever a perfect Brag Better case. We can always improve.

**Feel icky when you see someone else self-promote.** Does someone talking confidently make your skin crawl? Sometimes this can be because you're not used to seeing it. Or because it makes you wonder about how you would go about doing that for yourself.

**Work in an arena of numbers, data, technology, or science, where any work not tied to firm correct answers doesn't exist.** I see this regularly in fields like research, science, and technology—more specifically mathematics, chemistry, healthcare development, medicine, engineering, biology, and data science. These are industries where not giving numbers and firm results is unthinkable.

**Want to barf at the thought of giving a speech.** During every speech I give (and I give them multiple times a month), I am positive I am going to pass out for the first thirty seconds. Of course, I never do. A fear of speaking in public is incredibly common. Just don't let it hold you back from getting what you want.

**Can chat all day about how great your friends are, but when it comes to yourself, you're silent.** This is true for so many of us. It's so easy to talk about our friends and clients, about how much we love them and what they do for our lives. This makes it even more confusing. You do know *how* to hype—you do it all the time—but when it's time to tout yourself, it doesn't compute.

**Have trouble raising your hand in class, even when you know the correct answer.** Having the quiet confidence to raise your hand and give an answer, whether you're in a classroom or a big meeting, is terrifying. But I want to help you do it anyway.

**Expect your work to speak for itself.** This is a big one, and one that affects all of us. Your work doesn't speak for itself. Nobody else knows better what you've done or the hours that you've clocked. If you do not share your work with other individuals or audiences, no one else will. If your work is highly technical or hard to explain, you must learn to clearly describe it to others so that your accomplishments can be recognized.

**Won't seek well-deserved credit.** This happens often if you work in groups or are in a junior or midlevel position and your name is not at the forefront of a project. Receiving credit is a delicate balance between making your team and your boss look good, while also ensuring that your contribution is noted.

Speaking up, and particularly speaking in public, is a very common fear. According to a 2012 study, people fear public speaking more commonly than they fear *death*. In the first thirty seconds of speaking on stage, I panic; I feel convinced I am going to drop dead. And yet here I am, and I'm still alive. You can get past this fear, even if you feel like you want to run and hide, barf, or disappear (I've heard it all, baby).

## YOU HAVE TO CHAMPION YOU

Fern Mallis—“Godmother of Fashion,” founder of New York Fashion Week, industry consultant, host, and author of *Fashion Lives*—says it perfectly, “Toot your own horn, because there aren’t always people who toot it for you.” Your work won’t be recognized unless you champion it. If you can’t champion your own work, neither can anyone else.

Keep in mind:

- You are far more ready than you think.
- Getting your name into conversations to propel your-self forward is crucial.
- You are there because you deserve to be.
- Your achievements are worth talking about.
- You can land that job, you can secure that promotion, you can get more money, you can feel better about your job, and you can feel seen.

I want you to be loud and proud about what you’ve accomplished, but I also want you to be strategic. You need to have a plan for promoting yourself, and you need to understand what it means to Brag Better.

## THE THREE PILLARS

The three pillars of Bragging Better are to be proud, loud, and strategic. These ingredients get you where you want to go in your career. While that next career step means something different for each person—a new job title or fund-raising for a startup—it will help propel you to the next phase of kicking butt. And don't worry about timing. It's simultaneously never too early and never too late to Brag Better. Start where you are and iterate from there. We are all works in progress, so lacing up and starting now is a great place to begin.

### BE PROUD

This is the essential first pillar of Bragging Better. You need your enthusiasm and your pride. This goes beyond stating your achievements or promoting yourself within a work environment—you need to treat your accomplishments as the facts that they are. If you're not enthusiastic about your achievements, nobody else can be. If you're not there yet, you'll get there. But for now, stand strong in your convictions and your work, and you will eventually convince others, too.

**It's simultaneously never too early and never too late to Brag Better. Start where you are and iterate from there.**

Repeat to yourself over and over again that *bragging is simply stating facts*. You published an article in a big publication: fact. You contributed significantly on a panel: fact. You landed a big-name client: fact. You clearly stated your message in an important meeting: fact. It's easy to believe we haven't done anything of significance, but we're focusing on the facts of your work, your accomplishments, and your life. This is all rooted in firm reality. Your brags will be based on real events, which makes them far easier to share. You'll be reframing your fear and building a list of facts and accomplishments, which can make bragging a lot easier.

Plus, you've gotta do this for our society and world. Please. We have gotten so far away from facts that rooting yourself in the real, tangible, and evidence-based world is helpful not only for bragging but for our conservation of truth.

## **BE LOUD**

When I say "loud," I'm not referring to the actual volume of your voice. "Loud" means consistently sharing and advocating for yourself and your work. It also means using your voice to help other people—not just yourself. People won't know who you are, what you're about, what you want, and what you need unless you tell them. You have to lay it out. Purposeful volume will get you farther than you ever imagined.

Your employer, your clients, your friends, your colleagues, and your boss all need to hear from you. You're shooting yourself in the foot by not speaking up. You're also doing a disservice to the people you work with, your company's product, or your message when you stay quiet. You are valued because of your point of view, so you need to share it. And frankly, that's part of your job and the reason you were hired.

## BE STRATEGIC

If visibility doesn't align with your bigger life goals, there's no point in going after it—it's just more noise. You have to channel your brags in a way that strategically reinforces your goals.

Your keen sense of your goals is what keeps you focused for success. According to tech revolutionary Steve Jobs:

***People think focus means saying yes to the thing you've got to focus on. ... It means saying no to the hundred other good ideas that there are. You have to pick carefully. I'm actually as proud of the things we haven't done as the things I have done. Innovation is saying "no" to 1,000 things.***

Knowing what you want to get out of your brags is essential. What do you want? What are you gunning for? Maybe you are working toward a speaking gig or that big promotion, or maybe you're simply hoping to talk to your boss about the hard work you've done. Maybe you just want to be able to introduce yourself or raise your hand in a meeting without sweating through your shirt.

Having a strategy will also help you identify your audience and meet them where they are, so they can better absorb your message. Your strategy drives your brags and helps you get what you want.

## WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BRAG BETTER?

### BRAGGING BETTER IS ...

**Using facts to shine and tell the truth about the work you've done.** I tell anyone who will listen: If you've done the work, you're only sharing the facts. And it's crucial that we stay committed to truth. We live in a time where what's real and what's "fake news" is muddled. You are here to set the record straight and to show others that the truth matters. I want you to radiate with pride. No matter the accomplishment, there's a better brag for it.

**Having confidence in yourself and your voice: not letting anxiety or self-consciousness get in the way.** Bragging Better builds your confidence in what you bring to the table and in sharing your value. Your voice is valuable—epically so—to you, your employer, your friends, and your future. Through this process, that self-consciousness will give way to a stronger you.

I tell anyone who will listen: If you've done the work, you're only sharing the facts.

**Speaking up: not only when it matters for you, but also when it benefits those around you and helps raise all voices.**

Bragging Better is not just for your benefit. Your ability to confidently share your work will inspire those who are afraid to raise their voices, too. It's also part of your responsibility to think about how you can showcase the voices of the people who have also done the work and deserve recognition. We cannot do it all ourselves, and paying it forward is gratifying and does a true service to others, whether we know it or not.

**Having a practiced delivery, whether online or offline: knowing what you're going to say, how you're going to say it, and what you're going to do with it.**

You are here to brag, and that takes a lot of practice. Every-thing and anything worth having takes time, effort, and training. It's a muscle you will learn to flex, but you have to hit the gym and do some reps. Whether you're in front of the mirror, a friend, or a work bestie, understanding not only what you're going to say but how to say it is the key.

**Being concise and clear with your brags: coming up with specific, catchy vocabulary to describe yourself and your accomplishments.** Specificity is the key to helping someone latch on to your message and understand you. Being creative and having fun with it will make you memorable. Not only will you be confident, but you will no longer feel like a stiff, overly rehearsed robot. What fun is that? You can have fun being you.

**Knowing who you are and how you want to be perceived.** Most people don't consciously choose how they want to be perceived. Part of my job is to nudge people to make big-picture choices. It requires that we step back and think about who we want to be at work. It isn't easy; in fact, it can be terrifying. But, sitting with those thoughts around what you really want to be known for and what you want to inspire when you walk into a room sets you above the rest. The majority of people don't and won't take the time to think through these concepts.

**Having clear goals for bragging: knowing where you want your brags to land and having a firm grasp of what achieving these goals will mean for you and your career.** Goals make you work harder, more thoughtfully, and with clarity—whether you want to talk about a project, land a speaking gig, or share online. No matter how small that goal is (raising a hand in a meeting or sharing something you wrote with a friend), it's a win. It should be clocked and celebrated. Part of Bragging Better is also celebrating yourself and seeing how far you've come.

**Making clear requests for others to promote you with intent and gratitude: being kind in your requests to help others help you, as well as guiding them through it.** Fundamentally, people want to help you succeed. But you have to tell them how, where, and when to help you. Otherwise, they are unsure of what to do and only have their own ideas of what help means. Define help for yourself and ask that of others. It's a vulnerable act to ask for help, but it will show others that asking for help is not only important but admirable and doable.

## BRAGGING BETTER IS NOT . . .

### **Fabrication or exaggeration: share about what you've done, and never lie about it.**

Lying is not productive, nor is it necessary. It undermines your integrity and the integrity of those associated with you. Check yourself if you're feeling inclined to lie. Your accomplishments, as they are right now, are enough. They don't need to be exaggerated to land well and Brag Better. It's the *how of the brag*, not the *what*.

### **Volume without focus: being loud without strategy is useless, will only damage you, and cannot further your goals.**

You can always get attention by being the loudest in the room, literally or metaphorically, but volume is useless if you're in the wrong room. In other words, being loud but lacking strategy will do more harm than good. When you learn how to Brag Better, you will know how to strategize and strike when the opportunity arises. By channeling your message, you are aligning your past accomplishments, expertise, and hard-won victories with what you want to achieve, learn, and gain in the future.

You can always get attention by being the loudest in the room, literally or metaphorically, but volume is useless if you're in the wrong room.

**Always asking others to promote you without returning the favor: bragging is a two-way street, and the best part comes from your understanding how important it is to let others brag, too.** Asking people to brag for and about you is an important skill to cultivate. Understanding how and when to ask and when to offer to brag on behalf of someone else is just as powerful. Sometimes choosing not to brag about yourself is the right move. By promoting someone else and letting them shine, you reinforce the idea that everyone can win.

**Preventing others from shining along with you: there is plenty of space for everyone's unique accomplishments, and jealousy will only hold you back.**

It's easy to be jealous. Our modern world feels designed to make you feel inadequate, with a constant feed of beautiful, happy images of seemingly perfect lives, curated to a T. It can feel awful, but it's also not real. Coming to that conclusion takes a lot of time and self-control. Jealousy holds you back more than anything else. It causes you to miss the beauty in your own life.

**Using harmful language: punching down or insulting others to get your brags across defeats its entire purpose.** As you rise, your friends rise will rise, too. Insulting the work of others or putting someone down to get where you want to be might feel good in the moment, but in the long term, it's bad practice and bad energy. It's not what you want to put out into the world; do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Be a good example—you never know who is following your lead.

**Negativity about yourself and your work: cutting out qualifiers about yourself and putting yourself down.** We are often meanest to ourselves. I have said much meaner things to myself than anyone else has ever said to me. We are our own toughest critics and doing the work to change your self-talk is some of the hardest work we can do. Healthy criticism and a tight, focused lens on your work are important. Being mean to the person who does the work—you—is not.

**These are the rules of the road. You can refer to them whenever you need to, in your daily life, or when you're tempted to be mean to yourself or jealous of others. They are a guiding source of what to do and what not to do. Not gospel, but bumpers on the bowling lane of your brags. 📌**

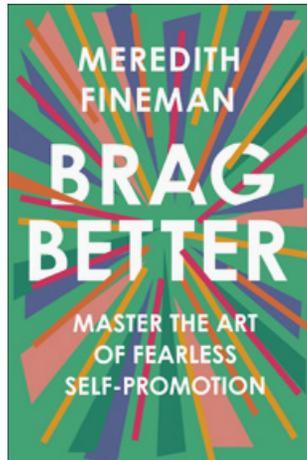
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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Meredith Fineman is an entrepreneur, writer, and media expert with over a decade of experience training individuals to use public relations as a catalyst for positive career change. Fineman is the author of the bestseller *Brag Better: Master the Art of Fearless Self-Promotion*, which came out in June 2020 with Portfolio (Penguin Random House). She is the founder and CEO of FinePoint, a leadership and professional development company with a focus on visibility and voice—for individuals and groups in Brag Better Bootcamps. She speaks and trains a number of topics, including self-promotion as a skill for professional success, women and bragging, and the changing work landscape around voice. She is a freelance writer of 16 years.

Learn more at [www.meredithfineman.com](http://www.meredithfineman.com)



## Porchlight

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