

Talking about your business

Obviously, I hope, it is essential to be able to give a brief, comprehensible statement of what your business does.

Some people have businesses whose primary activity can be expressed in a single sentence (“We help owners of small businesses who want to sell their business maximise its value at the time of sale”). Others, such as coaches, can offer a wide range of services to a variety of clients.

So, it is important to modify the first sentence to: *Obviously, I hope, it is essential to be able to give a statement of what your business does that is brief, comprehensible and useful to the particular person to whom you are talking.*

It is never helpful for me to say “I can coach anybody in any business subject”, because even if true it doesn’t give the listener anything to get their teeth into. In particular, it doesn’t present what I do in terms of why a client might employ me - ie, what their problem might be. Which of the hundreds of contacts they have are they going to mention me to? Never give blanket generalisations when saying what your business does.

I could say, for example, “I coach small businesses in the IT sector how to win more business through better bid writing”. Now, the person I am talking to almost certainly knows at least one IT company and it may well be the case that they know whether or not it needs, or might need, this service.

Of course, someone’s willingness to refer you to their contacts relies on more than just a clear statement of what the business does. But, conversely, if they’re willing to refer you, but can’t work out to whom, or what to say about you, nothing will happen.

Some people are extraordinarily resistant to this idea. It is as if they think that, by saying on one occasion to one person that their business works for IT companies, it will be forever doomed to serve this market sector and no other. But there is a difference between what you say you do and what you actually do. What you say you do has to be useable by the person to whom you’re talking, otherwise what’s the point in saying it?

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