

DEFINING YOU

S T A T E M E N T
P A R A G R A P H
D E F I N I N G S T O R Y



How Smart Professionals Craft the Answers to:

WHO ARE YOU?

WHAT DO YOU DO?

HOW CAN YOU HELP ME?

Mark LeBlanc · Kathy McAfee · Henry DeVries

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PART II
DEFINING
PARAGRAPH

by Kathy McAfee

Preface

If you had to make a choice between fitting in and standing out, which would you choose? Perhaps it depends upon the situation. Maybe you'd need to consider how much risk and how much reward is involved. Or who is in the room. Perhaps your reaction might be an automatic response based upon your past experiences, social conditioning, cultural norms, peer pressure, and other factors.

Like many professionals that I know, you may struggle from time to time with how to position yourself professionally; how to introduce yourself in networking situations; how to present yourself online via social media; and how to talk about your skills, experiences, products, services, expertise, and value proposition to others. You intuitively know that the impression you make with certain influential people could make a material difference in your future. How can you say the right words in the right way to make the connection and win the business (or land the job, get the promotion, or make a friend, etc.)?

This dilemma affects so many different types of professionals: from small business owners, entrepreneurs, consultants, coaches, authors, corporate professionals, attorneys, engineers, financial advisers, accountants, in-transition employees seeking new job opportunities, even college students who have yet to launch their careers. I believe that every working professional can benefit from doing the work contained in this book.

As an executive presentation coach, I've seen some professionals do very well in these challenging situations. They have clever elevator pitches or thirty-second commercials that get attention, make people laugh, and get the business. I've also seen other equally talented professionals struggle, sweat, and toil trying to explain what the heck they do for a living. They either

become tongue-tied or they run on and on and on. It can be very stressful when it's your turn to introduce yourself in a business or social situation.

But it doesn't have to be this way. This part of the book will help you find a new path to positioning yourself for authentic, sustainable success. I believe that you can stand out and fit in at the same time by using the strategies and techniques that you'll find in this empowering book.

Working with my coauthors Mark LeBlanc and Henry DeVries has helped me understand, at a very deep level, how I want to be known professionally. It has helped me as a business owner, a professional woman, and as a human being to become more self-aware and conscious of the choices that I have for the work that I seek and the clients that I engage.

My hope for you in reading this book and applying its simple but powerful principles is to have the same kind of profound transformation in your personal and professional life.

Here's to defining you, owning your voice, and claiming your personal leadership brand!

Kathy McAfee

CHAPTER 4

Develop Your Defining Paragraph

Rowena had dedicated her career to the field of higher education, helping students complete degrees that would lead to rewarding careers and meaningful work. She also had a particular passion supporting women in business and entrepreneurship. As a professor of management studies at a prestigious private university in Connecticut, she was well loved and admired by her students and faculty peers. She even cofounded a center for women and business in order to develop female leaders and help corporations leverage the full talent of their female workforce. Rowena was leaning in way before Facebook's COO Sheryl Sandberg did her famous TED talk and wrote the 2013 best-selling book, *Lean In: Women, Work and the Will to Lead*.

Unexpectedly Rowena received a phone call from a recruiter asking her if she'd be interested in a job at a different university some 500 miles away. It was a stretch job—skipping the position of Assistant Dean to becoming a full Dean of a business school for a prominent university in upstate New York. Rowena was excited, but nervous. She wondered how she could compete with other candidates who had far more experience than she had.

Rowena hired me as her executive coach to help prepare her for the various rounds of interviews that were part of the university's search process. She was very passionate about her work and had great energy. These were definite strengths for her. But she looked younger than her age and she worried that this could be a negative factor for the position she was going for. Her LinkedIn profile was, at best, ordinary. Her online profile gave the impression that she was perhaps not quite ready for such a

big move ahead in her career. But the most intricate part was her difficulty in articulating who she was and what value she could bring to the new organization.

How did we solve this problem? We developed a defining paragraph for her—one that was powerful, concise, and above all, authentically Rowena. As she dove into the seven-sentence structure of the defining paragraph framework, she began to discover more about herself, her mission, her expertise, and the outcomes she had been able to produce for her clients (in this case, her students, peers, faculty, dean, provost, administrators, alumni, donors, and community).

Rowena realized that she was so much more than her title and current position. In many ways, Rowena discovered her personal leadership brand in the process of crafting her defining paragraph. With each out-loud practice of her defining paragraph, her confidence and conviction grew. Her voice, body language, energy and eye contact along with the compelling words and structure of the defining paragraph communicated that she was the ideal candidate for this job.

She made it through each round of the interview process, engaging and impressing the search committee, faculty, and student leaders who participated in the interviews.

In the end, she got the job. She had effectively leap-frogged over two steps to become the Dean of the School of Business and Economics of a major university in America. She achieved her goal!

Experiencing the power of the defining paragraph to position oneself and land the desired position, Rowena took my advice and modified her defining paragraph and showcased it on her LinkedIn profile. In chapter 6 you will see how Rowena modified her defining paragraph to work as the summary in her LinkedIn profile.

Rowena's success story is one of my all-time favorites. It reminds me of the power of the defining paragraph. Not only is

it an effective tool to define who you are and what you have to offer, it helps you get meaningful work that fulfills your potential.

How can this happen for you, too? Let's start by examining the basic structure of the defining paragraph.

Follow This Seven-Sentence Framework to Craft Your Defining Paragraph

1. Your name
2. Your company's name
3. Defining statement for your primary profit center or area of expertise [P]
4. Defining statement for your secondary profit center or area of expertise [S]
5. A credibility statement
6. Your value statement
7. Your approachability statement

Take out your smartphone and take a picture of this seven-sentence framework. Why? Because I want you to commit this structure to memory. I want you to star it as a favorite on the browser of your computer brain. You are going to see it in your mind's eye. You will come to rely on it in a multitude of situations. Never again will you suffer or struggle when you are faced with one of these six situations shown on the next page:



Not only is the defining paragraph an effective tool to define who you are and what you have to offer, it helps you get meaningful work that fulfills your potential.

Six Immediate Applications

- When you have one minute to introduce yourself
- When someone asks you “What do you do for a living?” or “Tell me about yourself”
- When you want to be considered for a new high-profile assignment
- When you realize it’s time to upgrade your LinkedIn profile. You can use your defining paragraph to improve your LinkedIn profile (or other social media sites) with a powerful headline (under your name) and a summary that helps you connect with influencers.
- When you need to convince someone why they should hire you and what makes you different
- When someone wants to know what types of referrals and business connections are best for you

Before we dive into crafting your defining paragraph, let’s review a few fundamentals. Please keep in mind the following guidelines or “rules” as you embark on creating what will become the most powerful positioning tools you have ever had.

The Seven Rules

1. **Leverage it strategically.** The defining paragraph is for you first, and for your listener/reader second. Use it to become more self-aware and self-confident.
2. **Be introspective.** Spend ample time reflecting and being honest with yourself about your strengths and areas of greatest interests.
3. **Seek feedback.** Ask other trusted people what they think are your strengths, assets, and value add.
4. **Forget perfection.** Give yourself permission to draft an imperfect version of your defining paragraph. Test, modify, and evolve.

5. **Practice out loud.** Vocal awareness is critical. Audio record yourself, listen back, and self-critique.
6. **Experiment.** Play with it. Allow yourself to get comfortable with it. Listen, learn, and keep going.
7. **Commit it to memory.** See the seven-sentence framework in your mind's eye. Let it be your go-to guide whenever someone asks you "What do you do for a living?"

Let's Take a Closer Look

It's time now to examine the individual components of the defining paragraph. On the one hand, it is a very simple tool as it has only seven parts. On the other hand, it is complex and will require you to reflect deeply upon your work. You may need to do some homework and interviews with people who know you well. But the reward that awaits you is well worth the effort. You just need to get started.

The defining paragraph starts off with the easy stuff. Sentences one and two should roll off your tongue pretty quickly.

1. **Your name.** First name and last name. Say it slowly and clearly. We want your name to stick in the mind of the listener. Imagine that there is a period punctuation mark between the two parts of your name. For example: "First name. Last name." When you see that period, pause for a split second. Breathe before continuing to the next part of your defining paragraph. Never rush it. Always take your time.
2. **Your company.** Rather than the phrase "I work for," consider more powerful action verbs such as "I run," "I serve," "I own," or "I lead."
 - a. If you are in transition or are in between jobs, you can use the second sentence to state the industry, occupation that you have experience in. For example,

“My name is Joe Smith. I specialize in the commercial aviation industry.”

- b. If you operate your business virtually, you might want to list your web address in place of your company. For example, “My name is Joy Chow. I run my dog sitting business through a website called Rover.com.”
- c. If you are a college student, consider replacing the phrase, “I’m a student at...” with “I’m completing my degree in” For example, “My name is Jane Hostoff. I am a future nurse practitioner.”
- d. If you prefer to position yourself by your personal brand, replace your company name with your brand handle. For example, “My name is Kim Kasparian. I am known as the Success Genie.”

3. **The defining statement for your primary profit center [P]**

- a. This is your opportunity to share a clear and specific sentence about your signature work or your best work. This is the work you seek more of. This should be an area of passion for you. When you share it verbally, you come alive with energy and enthusiasm. Even if you are tasked with doing something all day long, if you don’t have passion for it, don’t lead with it as your [P] sentence in your defining paragraph.
- b. If you are a business owner, look at your profit and loss (P&L) statement for the last few quarters and most recent year. Understand what products and services (and customer sectors) make you the most money. Knowing your numbers will give you better insight into how you can craft your defining paragraph.
- c. If you think of your business or profession like a cupcake, your primary profit center would be the cake in your cupcake. While it may not be as

glamorous as the frosting or the sprinkles, the cake (or your primary profit center) is the part that holds everything together.

- d. If you are reinventing yourself (your business or your career path), don't tell them what you've done or been in the past, rather tell them what you plan to do in the future.
4. **The defining statement for your secondary profit center [S]**
- a. If you are business owner, look at your P&L statement for the last few quarters or years and identify which product/service area generates the second most profitable income stream for you.
 - b. Using the cupcake metaphor, your secondary profit center would be the frosting on the cupcake—the yummy sweet thing that sits on top of the cake, or your primary profit center. It is unlikely that you could survive in business by only offering the frosting, but it is what turns an ordinary cake into a cupcake. It's necessary and adds real, profitable value to your business model.
 - c. If you are an employee working for an organization, take a look at your list of responsibilities and projects and identify the second most important thing you do well. While it may not be the work you are best known for, this secondary skill area intrigues you, benefits you and you'd like to attract more of it.
 - d. You might also consider including some of your volunteer leadership roles or special projects you are working on outside of your normal job responsibilities. For example, you may serve on a board of directors for a community nonprofit

organization whose mission aligns with your values and interests. Or perhaps you are serving as a committee member for your organization's employee resource group or diversity and inclusion initiative (e.g., women's network, young professionals' network, veterans' network, LGBTQ network, etc.) By including these volunteer roles in your defining paragraph, people may see you as a more well-rounded individual with capacity and capability for other leadership opportunities.

5. **Credibility statement**

- a. You only need one proof point or example to validate either your primary or secondary profit center or area of expertise.
- b. I recommend that you begin your statement with “In fact, ...” or “For example, ...”
- c. This is the place to use a specific, tangible, singular example. It can be helpful to incorporate a number or date in this section to make it more believable.
- d. Don't overcomplicate this part. You can showcase your credibility with a simple but confidently stated excerpt from your track record.
- e. Below are some examples (*Note: these are fictitious and are for illustrative purposes only*):
 - i. “In fact, I have a master's degree in instructional design and technology from _____ University.”
 - ii. “In fact, I have over ten years of experience designing and implementing e-learning courses for workforce development.”
 - iii. “For example, I've published a book on the topic of instructional design that is being used in classrooms at more than twenty universities.”

- iv. “In fact, my work was recently featured in the *American Journal of Education and Information Technology*.”
 - v. “In fact, I host a monthly podcast where I interview thought leaders in the field of instructional design and technology.”
 - vi. “In fact, I was awarded a gold medal in 2017 by *Training Magazine* for my gamification portal.”
 - vii. “For example, our customers have reported an increase of 25 percent in retention through my e-learning course, versus other programs they’ve used in the past.”
- f. You can change your credibility statement from time to time. You can reference something that has recently happened, or that is coming up in the near future. For example,
- i. “In fact, last month I served on a panel of experts at the International Conference of Management Consultants.”
 - ii. “In fact, this summer I’ve been invited to serve on a panel with two other experts at the International Conference of Management Consultants.”

6. Value statement

- a. Consider what is the *real* value of your work?
- b. List three or four outcomes or results that your clients or colleagues have experienced when they work with you.
- c. If you don’t know, go and ask your clients (internal or external). They are in the best position to tell you

what happens or what has happened when you work with them. Consider asking clients or colleagues this question: “What value did I create for you when we worked together?” Then stop talking. Don’t interrupt, don’t correct, don’t minimize. Just listen. Often our clients are able to articulate our value impact better than we can.

- d. It often works better if you reference more general outcomes than getting too specific. Save the specific data point for your credibility statement (sentence five in the defining paragraph).
- e. Start with the phrase, “As a result of my work...” or “As a result of our work...”
- f. Create a memorable pattern repeating the words “more” or “less” before our list of outcomes. For example:
 - i. “As a result of my work, clients have more customers, more business, more profits, and more fun.”
 - ii. “As a result of my leadership, employees are more engaged, more motivated, more productive, and more collaborative.”
 - iii. “As a result of my work, clients experience less turnover, less downtime, fewer complaints, and less stress.”
 - iv. “As a result of my team’s work, customers shop more often, spend more money, refer us more often, and give us higher ratings.”

7. Approachability statement

- a. This is where you get to share more of who you are personally, not just professionally.

- b. Try to go deeper than the standard line, “I have three terrific teenagers and a wonderful husband.” No one will believe you, anyway (at least not the terrific teenager part).
- c. Have the courage to share something powerful like overcoming adversity or a health crisis. There is strength in exposing your vulnerability. It makes you more human, likeable, and real.
- d. Keep it positive. Don’t share any overtly negative, offensive, or shocking information about yourself in the defining paragraph.
- e. Share only one personal interest, not a long list, as people will get confused.
- f. You can talk about something that is going to happen or has recently happened in your personal life.
- g. Feel free to update and change what you share in this seventh and final part of your defining paragraph.
- h. Begin with the phrase, “On a personal note...”

Defining Paragraph—the Framework

The Seven Rules

1. Leverage it strategically.
2. Be introspective.
3. Seek feedback.
4. Forget perfection.
5. Practice out loud.
6. Experiment.
7. Commit it to memory.

The Five Tips

1. Short, simple sentences work best.
2. Stay consistent with your [P] or primary profit center. Tailor your [S] or secondary profit center to fit your audience.
3. Periodically refresh your credibility statement (“In fact...”) and your approachability statement (“On a personal note...”) to stay current with your experiences.
4. Pause between each sentence.
5. Make eye contact and smile when you share your defining paragraph verbally.

The Three Tests

1. Does it feel natural, authentic, and empowering to share in a conversation?
2. Does it help you and others understand your specific areas of expertise?
3. Does it open the conversation to deeper levels of discussion?

Defining Paragraph

Your Name

Organization's Name

**Defining Statement
primary profit center
or area of expertise
[P]**

**Defining Statement
secondary profit center
or area of expertise
[S]**

**Credibility
Statement
[C]**

**Value
Statement
[V]**

**Approachability
Statement
[A]**

[Engage] "Tell me about you and your work."