

What Are Your Differentiators?

As a recruiter looking to form trust-based relationships for the long term, I do a fairly thorough screening process with my candidates. During many of these screening conversations I will ask, “What are your differentiators?”

This is a question far too many candidates hesitate to respond to; and given their level of accomplishment, that is surprising! In asking this question, I am attempting to draw out my candidate to reveal why my client should look at him or her among other candidates. My point is, you need to know your value. If you can’t articulate your value, how can a potential employer know it?

I recently had a conversation with the head of career development from Carnegie Mellon University, and she recommended that I read the book *Mirror Mirror on the Wall Am I The Most Valued of Them All?* by Leo Pusateri¹. It is a guide to differentiating yourself, and from what I have read thus far, it contains many excellent pointers.

The Value Ladder

One tool provided by Pusateri is of particular relevance to job seekers. The “Value Ladder” is an assessment tool that helps you realize your true value. The ladder consists of seven questions meant to ultimately define your blueprint to success. Let’s take a quick look.

1. Who are you?
2. What do you do?
3. Why do you do what you do?
4. How do you do what you do?
5. Who have you done it for?
6. What makes you different?
7. Why should I do business with you?

These seven questions are directly correlated to the following concepts, respectively.

1. Background
2. Unique Value Proposition
3. Business Beliefs
4. Process
5. Client Successes
6. Differentiation
7. Real Value

These issues are unavoidably more complex than may be expanded upon in the scope of this article. However, I want to focus on a few things in particular that I think can be very helpful.

Pusateri coined the term Unique Value Proposition (UVP)□which is #2 above□to talk about how you come up with your personal statement, as regards how you stand out from your competition. Some refer to it as a “positioning statement.” As I read what Pusateri had to say and compared it with my experience, I found that on this I was in complete accord. To put it concisely:

It is essential to have a clear, confident, and *consistent* message about why you are such a unique and valuable asset to a client.

This holds true on many different levels, whether you are a candidate for a new position; a hiring manager trying to promote your company to a desirable candidate; or in business development and trying to partner with a new client.

The key is to leave an indelible and lasting impression. However, there is no one way to do that, and therein lies the beauty of it. I cannot attempt to give you a formula to develop your UVP. Rather, I would like to stress the importance of differentiating yourself, which will create more and more opportunities.

How do you differentiate yourself?

Let me share with you some responses I get to the question, “What are your differentiators, or how do you stand out from the other security professionals in the field?”

Here is what I often hear—once the response of “Gee, I didn’t really think about that too much!” is out of the way: “I’m a team player”; “I am a hard worker”; “I can get along with just about everyone”; “I work well independently as well as with others”; “I have a diverse background.”

These are all positive answers, of course, but they don’t convey a sense of uniqueness. As you can see, they are all very common answers that we *all* use. What I am suggesting is, try and figure out what makes you a genuine asset, and capitalize on that! If you can’t tell me, how is anyone else going to know?

Your UVP must create interest and clearly define your value, as it relates to all potential opportunities that exist within your field of expertise. It is key to take into account who, exactly, you are messaging to, what challenges they face, and what solutions you can provide them. Finally, be sure you can customize your UVP to different audiences.

If you are stuck on exactly how to start, or if you feel awkward spending time thinking about why you are so brilliant and charming... just step outside yourself, and ask people who work with you! Try asking your current manager, your existing clients, your loved ones, or whoever else. And whenever a client gives you a compliment, *write it down!* If nothing else, it might help when you are having a bad day. And when you are preparing for an interview, by all means read up on why you are such a great candidate.

Look for consistencies in responses from others and make notes on them. Then ponder how you can creatively message your value in a clear yet creative, concise and compelling way. Be sure to create an emotional connection through your words. I am sure most of us can agree that when someone is passionate about something, it shines through.

Here's the bottom line: Position yourself, instead of just throwing yourself in the general candidate pool. No one is going to think you are of real value if you don’t think so about yourself. They cannot genuinely appreciate you until you've reflected on the question of what differentiates you, and that is possible only if you can articulate this very thing to another person. So start doing some soul searching! Ask a few others, perhaps, and find out what really differentiates you from those around you.

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1. Pusateri, Leo J. *Mirror Mirror on the Wall Am I The Most Valued of Them All? The Ultimate Element of Differentiation Is You*. Financial Entrepreneur Publishing, 2001.