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## *Being Modest vs. Boastful*

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Welcome to *the 60<sup>th</sup> episode* of Golden Talk, brought to you by the [Iran-Australia Language Institute](#). I'm [Dr. Alikhani](#), the creator and organizer of the Golden Talk series. In Golden Talk, we aim to provide our audience with opportunities to notice English in the context of real-life situations and topics, offering them authentic language exposure. We also focus on helping our audience learn to develop their thoughts, take turns in conversations, and enhance their communication skills. Meanwhile, we also feel responsible for raising awareness about topics that impact our lives, encouraging our audience to practice arguing for or against ideas and to develop their critical thinking skills. In this episode, titled "**Being modest vs. being boastful**," we'll explore how being too modest can hold us back while boasting can turn people away. It's all about understanding the value of our achievements without overshadowing others.

## Ideas in Conversation

Read this conversation between a radio show host and a psychologist about *being modest vs. boastful*.

**Jeremy (host):** Welcome back, everyone, to another episode of Golden Talk. Tonight, we're exploring the fine line between being modest and being boastful. Joining us is Dr. Holland, a renowned psychologist specializing in personality dynamics. Welcome, Dr. Holland!

**Dr. Holland:** Thank you for having me. It's a pleasure to be here to discuss such a fascinating topic.

**Jeremy (host):** Let's dive right in. Modesty and boastfulness are often seen as **opposite ends** of a continuum. Can you explain what each of these terms means in the context of personality psychology?

**Dr. Holland:** Certainly. Modesty is a trait characterized by a person's tendency to **underplay** their achievements or qualities, often out of respect for others or a desire not to appear **arrogant**. It's associated with **humility** and a low self-focus. On the other hand, boastfulness involves exaggerating or prominently displaying one's achievements or qualities, usually to **gain admiration** or **acknowledgment** from others. It's often linked with a higher degree of self-absorbedness and a **need for validation**.

**Jeremy (host):** Can you share some real-life examples of how these traits manifest?

**Dr. Holland:** Absolutely. Take, for example, someone who has just received a promotion. A modest individual might mention it only when asked and **downplay the significance, attributing** their success **to** their team or timing. Conversely, a boastful person might bring it up **unsolicited, highlighting** their unique contributions and efforts to underline their superiority.

**Jeremy (host):** It sounds like context and intention play significant roles in how these behaviors are **perceived**.

**Dr. Holland:** Precisely. Context is key. Modesty in one culture or setting can be perceived differently in another. For instance, in a job interview, modesty must be balanced carefully with confidence, so as not to **undersell** oneself. Similarly, what's considered **boastful** in one social circle might be seen as simply sharing good news in another.

**Jeremy (host):** So, it's not just about what is said or done, but how, where, and why it's expressed. How should we handle these subtle differences without **tipping too far in one direction**?

**Dr. Holland:** It's about social intelligence — the ability to **read the room** and understand the social norms of a given context. For example, **self-deprecation**, which might be perceived as something unhealthy by many people, can be a form of modesty that's **well-received** in certain environments, adding **a touch of** humor and relatability. However, it's also important not to self-deprecate to the point of **undermining** one's own value.



**Jeremy (host):** Speaking of value, how does the balance between modesty and boastfulness impact personal and professional relationships?

**Dr. Holland:** Relationships thrive on authenticity and respect. When someone is consistently boastful, it can create distance and resentment among peers, as it often **comes across as** lacking empathy and respect for others' achievements. Modesty, when genuine, fosters an environment of mutual respect and appreciation. However, **false modesty** can be just as damaging as it may be perceived as insincere or manipulative.

**Jeremy (host):** Are we talking about humblebragging? Can you tell us more about it?

**Dr. Holland:** Humblebragging is a term that's become quite popular in recent years. It refers to the practice of sharing a **seemingly** modest or self-deprecating statement that's actually intended to draw attention to one's achievements or successes. The key here is that the speaker wants to boast about something but masks it as humility to avoid **appearing vain** or boastful directly. A common instance is on social media, where someone might post about how they're struggling to choose between two prestigious job offers. The **ostensible** modesty or expression of a 'problem' actually serves to highlight their desirability as a professional without directly bragging about it.

Humblebragging can be tricky because it often **backfires**. People tend to recognize and react negatively to **humblebrags**, seeing them as insincere, which can actually harm the speaker's reputation more than straightforward boasting. So, basically, humblebragging is a blend of modesty and boastfulness that can confuse the line between the two.

**Jeremy (host):** Now, in the age of social media, where people often curate their lives to highlight successes, how has the perception of these traits changed?

**Dr. Holland:** Social media has certainly **amplified** the visibility of both modesty and boastfulness. The key difference now is the scale and the permanence of these expressions. While social media can be a platform for genuine sharing and connection, it also creates a space where boastfulness can flourish **under the guise of** sharing life updates, leading to even more humblebragging.

**Jeremy (host):** Are there any strategies people can use to create a healthy balance between modesty and boastfulness?

**Dr. Holland:** Mindfulness is a powerful tool. Being mindful of one's intentions when sharing achievements or qualities can help maintain this balance, which means you need to learn to be more empathetic. The more empathetic, the less judgmental.

**Jeremy (host):** Those are incredibly valuable insights. Any final words before we wrap up?

**Dr. Holland:** My advice is to strive for authenticity. Whether you're leaning towards modesty or boastfulness, make sure that your actions and words are a true reflection of your values and beliefs. And **let me leave you with this:** it's completely okay to celebrate your achievements; just be mindful of how you do it and the impact it has on those around you.

**Jeremy (host):** Dr. Holland, thank you for such a thoughtful conversation. And thank you, everyone, for tuning in. Until next time, keep striving for balance and authenticity in all that you do.

# Useful Language

## Modesty

1. **down-to-earth (adj.):** Being humble and realistic about one's achievements or status.

*Despite her fame, she's very down-to-earth and talks to everyone on set.*

2. **understate (v.):** To describe something in a way that makes it seem less important or serious than it actually is.

*He understated his role in the project, saying he just did what anyone else would have.*

**playing it down (informal):** Making something seem less important or significant than it is.

*He's playing it down, but he was the key player in winning the match.*

## Boastfulness

3. **blow one's own trumpet (informal):** *to boast about one's achievements.*

*She doesn't hesitate to blow her own trumpet when it comes to her cooking skills.*

4. **show-off (informal):** Someone who likes to display their abilities or possessions too much.

*He's such a show-off, always talking about his new gadgets.*

5. **bragging rights (informal):** The right to boast about something because one has achieved something noteworthy.

*Winning the championship gave them bragging rights at school.*

6. **full of oneself (informal):** Having a high opinion of oneself, often without justification.

*After getting the promotion, he became full of himself.*

7. **name-dropping (informal)**: Mentioning famous people one knows or has met to impress others.

*She's always name-dropping at parties to seem more important.*

8. **humblebrag (informal)**: Boasting in a way that is disguised as a humble statement or complaint.

*He humblebragged about how he just can't decide which prestigious university to attend.*

9. **big-headed (informal)**: Having an inflated opinion of oneself.

*Ever since he won the award, he's been really big-headed.*

## Discussion Questions

1. Can you recall a time when being modest about an achievement made a situation better for you? How did others react to your modesty?

Read the following discussion questions and think about them.

2. Share an instance where you felt someone was being too boastful. How did their behavior affect your perception of them?

3. Some people argue that modesty should be considered a more important trait than confidence in professional settings.

Others, however, believe that confidence, even if it borders on boastfulness, is crucial for success in professional settings. Which side are you on?

Provide reasons and examples to support your answer.

4. In your opinion, is there a fine line between self-confidence and boastfulness?

5. Think of someone you admire for their humility or modesty. What about their behavior inspires you? Conversely, can you think of a public figure whose boastfulness has had a positive impact on their career or personal brand?