Positioning Statements

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What is it and why should I have one?

A positioning statement is a means of effectively communicating your brand. It is a professional introduction. Your positioning statement includes your professional identity and demonstrates the relevant and compelling elements of your experience and areas of strength, as well as the problems you are good at solving, the work you love to do, and what you are known for. You should end your positioning statement by reiterating your interests and goals. This will help the person with whom you are talking determine how they can best help you.

Positioning statements may be a 10 second quick introduction or a 2-3 minute response to the question, “Tell me about yourself”. Make your statement clear and to the point.

Positioning statements should change depending on the person with whom you are talking. The focus should be on the listener and what you would like them to know about you.

Positioning statements provide you the opportunity to demonstrate who you are and what value you can bring to the person with whom you are speaking. It also gives the other person an idea of what your goals are and how they can assist you (and vice versa). Positioning statements are flexible enough that they can effectively be used in a variety of situations, such as at a business reception and during an interview.

Following are some quotes that demonstrate the value of positioning statements.

Eric Lunstrum, MBA '02, who created his positioning statement prior to a Silicon Valley site visit, shares this story about his success:

"During our tour of Silicon Valley, A.T. Kearney invited the MBA students to a reception. Within a couple minutes of our arrival I met a Senior Consultant who asked me, 'What can I tell you about A.T. Kearney?' This is where having a well-rehearsed positioning statement paid off. I began listing my work experience and interests concluding with, 'How would my skills be of value to your organization?' We then spoke for about a half hour on the e-business consulting opportunities at A.T. Kearney. I am confident that I left a positive impression."

According to Maury Hanigan, CEO of Hanigan Consulting and MBA marketplace expert, an ideal candidate is focused, self-aware and *articulate*. Creating and articulating a strong statement with recruiters is the first step in landing your dream job.

Where can I use my positioning statement?

Positioning statements aren't exclusively for interviews and corporate receptions. They can be used anywhere and everywhere you are around other people. After all, anyone is a potential networking contact. Just be sure to tailor your positioning statement to the person with whom you are speaking and the particular situation.

Following is a list of Carlson School and other places you may use your positioning statement.

- Pre-interview gatherings
- At interviews to respond to the question "Tell me about yourself"
- When introducing yourself to company representatives over the phone
- When introducing yourself to person with whom you are engaging in an informational interview
- First Friday
- First Tuesday
- Graduate student lounge
- Classes
- Club sponsored networking events
- Second interview sessions (including receptions, meals, etc.)
- Professional organization meetings
- Clubs and organizations for which you have an interest in or affiliation with (home country organization or region/city, hobby groups, sports teams, religious or spiritual gatherings, etc.)
- The bus ride to and from school
- The grocery store, or waiting in line anywhere for that matter

Positioning Statement Development Guidelines

It will be helpful to practice your positioning statement out loud and with other people. Ask the people with whom you are practicing to provide specific feedback on what you did well as well as areas for improvement.

Your positioning statement is a way to introduce yourself professionally. These guidelines apply to all positioning statements:

- **Make it clear and concise.** Challenge yourself to edit the statement so you can present yourself in under a minute. It's best to develop a short (10-second) version for conversational introductions as well as a longer (1-minute) version for interviews.
- **Speak in the present tense.** Place both yourself and your profession in the present, i.e. "I am a marketing professional with three years' experience in the pharmaceutical industry."
- **State your interests clearly.** Companies look to hire individuals who are focused and know what they want. You may choose to express why you want to work in a specific functional area or why you want to work for the specific company. "I am interested in working for Company XYZ because it is a leader in wireless technology." "I am interested in brand management based on my experience in advertising and market research."
- **State your expertise and unique strengths.** Articulate those individual qualities that differentiate you from others in your field. You may emphasize a particularly deep (and

marketable) technical knowledge, an exceptional approach to problem solving, or some other specialty or focus. Taking the time to locate and verbalize the professional strengths you have developed will set you apart from the crowd. "I speak French, Arabic and English fluently and plan to use my language skills in international consulting projects." "I have managed projects involving Internet security. One resulted in an ISO 900x quality system that led to a national quality award." "I have experience in database design for the financial services industry."

- **Include names of organizations for which you have worked, honors or scholarships you received, schools attended, etc. if they serve to distinguish you.** "I am a Fulbright/Rhodes Scholar..." "I am a graduate of the top-ranked Chemical Engineering program at the University of Minnesota." "I worked with 3M in research…"
- **Summarize the types of organizations or environments in which you have employed your talents, such as Fortune 100 firms, large businesses, emerging companies, etc.** You may also mention other types of activities, such as teaching, participation on the board of a business or non-profit, or leadership in a professional association. "I have worked with large firms like Ernst & Young, as well as a small, family-owned business." "I really enjoy cross-functional team environments. At Wells Fargo I consulted with 66 different business units during a successful ERP system consolidation."
- **Keep it conversational**. A positioning statement is not a monologue. Instead, it is a way to engage in a conversation with someone regarding your professional self. Use your prepared positioning statements as a guideline, but be sure to listen to the other person and bring up certain areas appropriately to engage in a dialogue. Some people may find it helpful to put their positioning statement in bullet points, instead of writing out a script.
- **Be able to effectively communicate what you are seeking.** People love to help, but they need to know what you would like assistance with. For example, are you seeking to learn more about the company, functional areas, or other contacts with whom you should speak? Let the person you are talking with know how they can assist you.
- **Take any opportunity to use your positioning statement.** Any one is a potential networking contact. Use your positioning statement anywhere and everywhere and with anyone and everyone. Not only will this be helpful in honing your statement, but it could provide opportunities that you may not even be aware of.
- **Tailor your positioning statement to the person with whom you are talking and the situation.** People will be able to tell if you have a "canned" positioning statement and it will seem less genuine and interesting. Know what the person with whom you are talking is looking for and how they can help you (and vice versa) and frame your positioning statement accordingly.
- **Don't ramble on and on and on…** You want to be engaged in a meaningful conversation and leave a good impression with the person with whom you are talking, so keep your conversation focused and interesting. Know when to move on to another question, another person, etc. You may always ask a person for their business card and follow up with them for additional information or questions.

Sample Positioning Statements

The following are sample statements to help you develop your own brief description of yourself for potential employers. Remember that your positioning statement is an effective way to communicate

your brand. Always tailor it to the person with whom you are speaking and the situation as these examples demonstrate.

You are: A professional with a finance background, transitioning to a financial systems MIS position
Your audience is: an IT business development recruiter with Seagate
Based on my experience as a business systems manager at ExxonMobil, I am interested in business development at Seagate. I began my career in corporate finance and successfully transferred my strong analytical skills to the financial systems consulting arena. My focus has been in leading cross-functional multi-million dollar projects and employing technology to solve strategic business problems.

You are: A professional with an advertising background, seeking a position in brand management
Your audience is: A Kraft marketing manager you have phoned
With five years' experience in account management at Campbell Mithun, one of the largest regional ad agencies in the US, I am interested in a career in brand management. I have a background in consumer lifestyle market research, positioning, and consumer product launches, including the successful introduction of Purina Lite Paw Prints to the dog food market. I am currently president of the Carlson Marketing Network and I am focusing my studies in strategic management and marketing.

You are: A military professional transitioning into business in the private sector
Your audience is: A recruiter from 3M
With a solid base of progressive experience in a large military organization, I am interested in working as an operations analyst in a manufacturing company that values strong analytical skills and the ability to work both independently and as a key member of a team. As an MBA student I have had Six Sigma training and emphases in operations and MIS. I am also serving as president of the Carlson School Operations Club.

You are: A corporate finance professional with an interest in investment banking
Your audience is: A corporate recruiter from Lehman
I have more than 8 years of broad-based experience financing a wide variety of organizations. My greatest strength is identifying the strengths and weaknesses of business, and building the team necessary to design and deliver effective solutions to meet that client's financial needs. My experience at Citigroup gave me a real grasp of the ways in which financial institutions operate, and I know how to get things done. Nothing gives me more pleasure than making profitable deals that benefit all the parties involved.

You are: A technical engineer with five years' international experience, transitioning to a supply chain management position
Your audience is: A networking contact who works in operations at Boeing
I have four years experience as a sales and project engineer for General Electric's turbine division. I was most recently responsible for leading a cross-functional team of manufacturing, finance, systems, and admin representatives in the design of a Customer Relationship Management system, which is currently being implemented. Prior to that, I was the lead sales engineer servicing our largest customer, which accounted for 15% of our revenue. My MBA emphasis is Strategic Management and my undergrad engineering degree is from MIT. I'm looking for a position as an internal consultant specializing in business transformation and market development.

You are: An international student with a heavy academic background and two years' work experience
Your audience is: A financial services software firm
I have expertise in accounting and financial systems. I have been certified as a CPA in the US and have a master's degree in accounting and an undergraduate degree in finance. I am focusing on MIS here at Carlson because I believe my accounting and finance background combined with our top-rated MIS program enables me to be able to interact effectively with both finance and systems professionals. Also, I worked at a department store as its accounts payable administrator. I am particularly interested in helping corporate customers integrate software into their operations.

Positioning Statement Development Worksheet

This worksheet is designed to help you create the first draft of your positioning statement, an essential personal marketing tool.

List relevant companies, recognitions, awards or certifications that distinguish you

_____
_____
_____

List relevant school projects and work experiences and their results

_____
_____
_____

Complete the statement, "I really enjoy working in…" (*list types of organizations and industries)*

_____
_____
_____

Complete the statement, "I have focused in/on…" (*list key skills and capabilities*)

_____
_____
_____

I am interested in (*list functional area or company*)

_____
_____
_____