



“What Do You Do?”

I understand that many people struggle to answer this question in an interesting manner, let alone a compelling manner - and yet it comes up frequently in both social and business circles. It's a classic communication challenge. How can we effectively explain what we do to the person who asks the question? Or, at a higher level, how can we position ourselves so that the other person really appreciates what we do?

The difficulty of coming up with a suitable answer to the question is magnified when we consider:

- The different roles (and personality style) of each person
- The different scenarios where the question may arise
- The different types of people who may pose the question

I would suggest that it is not possible to come up with a single, tailored answer for you. The trick is to be flexible (and fluent) in your response so that your answer is right for you, the person and the occasion. I would like to share a model developed by Matt Church*, one of the world's leading experts on thought leadership. I have taken the liberty of adding some examples, using the actuarial profession as they have more problems in this regards than many other occupations.

As is evident from the model, your answer may vary in terms of both focus (on you, on your clients/employer or on the tasks that you perform) and the energy with which you deliver your response. Think about the situations that you have experienced being asked, “What do you do?” Look at the table and think about the type of answers that you normally provide.



Energy Level	Self (About Me)	It (About the Activity/Offer)	Them (About the Client/Outcome)
High	<u>Obsession</u> (eg “I love to solve financial problems”)	<u>Uniqueness</u> (eg “Actuaries use a unique blend of financial, statistical, demographic and modelling skills”)	<u>Purpose</u> (eg “We ensure that Australia’s financial institutions are safe and successful”)
Medium	<u>Category</u> (eg “Pricing Actuary”)	<u>Analogy</u> (eg “It’s like an MRI on your product”)	<u>Problems</u> (eg “We help you price your product, delivering both profit and solvency, in a dynamic world”)
Low	<u>History</u> (ie My background, CV, skills)	<u>Example</u> (ie A case study)	<u>Solutions</u> (ie What you do for clients/employers eg Profit-testing)

***Source: Matt Church – Ideas Volume 1 – www.mattchurch.com**

It would be instructive to consider the scenarios that might be applicable for each and the way that 2 or 3 of the nine options might be combined for optimum effect. Here are three different situations:

Job Interview

This is definitely about you so the 1st column is applicable. It is natural for people to start with History but if you leave it there, there is no way that you will stand out. Try working up the column, finishing with a passionate Obsession, which tells the interviewer why you love your career (and why you are the right person for the job).



Client Meeting

Let's say that you are meeting with someone, either inside or outside your company, and you are presenting your credentials with the aim of influencing them. The temptation is to start with the 1st column or the 2nd column. Resist the temptation! If you are seeking to influence them you have to position yourself from their perspective. Think about what problems they have and what a wonderful outcome they will experience by working with you.

Social Engagement

The passionate, high energy response may not be suitable for a dinner party or a BBQ. Practice some descriptions of what you in particular deliver, or what your company or occupation in general delivers, with the aim of helping the person understand. An Analogy or a Case study (the executive summary only!) may be far more effective than your standard definition.

Here is some homework.... Look back at the table and think about the type of answer that might have been more effective for you in a specific situation. Now think about you and play with some words that resonate strongly. Finally, have some fun trialling some different responses on real people.