

Perfecting an Elevator Speech

It's a familiar scene: You step onto the 8th floor elevator at a conference and a fellow attendee says hello and asks what you do. You have seven floors to explain it on the way down to the first presentation of the morning. Where do you even start?

More importantly, what if you suddenly found yourself on an elevator with a contracting officer, an elected official, or some other a potential government customer? Are you ready to quickly and professionally describe the *solutions* you represent and the *expertise* you can deliver?

Vendors who want to make a good first impression with their customers need to have what's called an Elevator Speech. Simply put, an Elevator Speech is what you say, in 30 seconds or less, to describe your expertise or that of your company.

An Elevator Speech is as essential as a business card. A good Elevator Speech should be detailed and explanatory, but it shouldn't bore your listener to tears by being too long. You need to be able to say who you are, what you do, what you are interested in doing, what makes you different from your competition and how you can be a resource to your listeners. If you do not have an Elevator Speech, people won't know what you really do.

Here's an example of an Elevator Speech that could use a little help: "I'm a small business owner and I run a flower shop."

Sure, it tells your listener what you do, but does it convey the action and the passion that you use every day in your small business? Is it memorable? Does it make you stick out in your listener's mind? Maybe the following would be better:

"I'm an entrepreneur and I own ABC Flowers, a flower and plant shop in Dallas, Texas, that specializes in fresh, native plants for area hotels and retail stores. We're the second oldest flower shop inside the city limits."

With just a few more words, you included the where, who and what that set you apart, and still kept it concise. It takes planning to make a good first impression. And first impressions are usually made on the basis of just a few words.

Follow these Steps to Perfect your Elevator Speech

Know Your Audience

Before writing any part of your Elevator Speech, research your audience. You will be much more likely to succeed if your Elevator Speech is clearly targeted at the individuals to whom you are speaking. Having a generic elevator pitch is almost certain to fail.

Know Yourself

Before you can convince anyone of your proposition you need to know exactly what it is. You need to define precisely what you are offering, what problems you can solve and what benefits you bring to a prospective contact.

To help you do this, answer the following questions:

1. What are the key strengths of your business?
2. What adjectives come to mind to describe your business?
3. What is it you are trying to sell or let others know about your business?
4. Why are you interested in the company or industry the person represents?

Outline Your Talk

Start an outline of your material using bullet points. You don't need to add any detail at this stage; simply write a few notes to help remind you of what you really want to say. They don't need to be complete sentences.

You can use the following questions to start your outline:

1. Who and what you are?
2. What you specialize in?
3. What you do?
4. Why you are the best at what you do?
5. What you want (a call to action)?
6. Keep it brief! Talk *solutions* that your company brings to the table.

Finalize Your Speech

Now that you have your outline of your material, you can finalize the speech. The key to doing this is to expand on the notes you made by writing out each section in full.

To help you do this, follow these guidelines:

1. Take each note you made and write a sentence about it.

2. Take each of the sentences and connect them together with additional phrases to make them flow.
3. Go through what you have written and change any long words or jargon into everyday language.
4. Go back through the re-written material and cut out unnecessary words.
5. As you review your current elevator speech, are you using words like is, am or do? If so, consider replacing them with more active verbs. Words like create, produce, sell, share, manage and design are much more colorful.
6. Finalize your speech by making sure it is no more than 90 words or 30 seconds long.

Practice! Practice! Practice!

It may sound silly, but a few rehearsals will help you to polish the speech so that your first impressions are lasting. Again, you will be surprised at the number of opportunities that will materialize in your normal business activity where you can put the elevator speech to use.

Sometimes, a few words are all you have a chance to say to a decision-maker — a government contracting official, for instance. Be prepared!

So before you pack your bags for that next conference or match-making event, consider perfecting your Elevator Speech so that it's memorable for your listeners and truly conveys your passion for your small business.

For assistance in perfecting your Elevator Speech, please contact the PTAC at SAP&DC at ptac@sapdc.org.

Sources: Georgia Tech PTAC, the National Federation of Independent Businesses, and Pepperdine University's Graziadio School of Business and Management