

HOW TO CRAFT AN 'ELEVATOR SPEECH' THAT HAS IMPACT

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Most people are familiar with an “elevator speech,” that 30-second introduction that positions you as a candidate (or business owner). The concept comes from the classic setup: If you got onto an elevator with the most important person to your career (the CEO, a potential customer or employer) what could you say in the 30 seconds it takes to get to your floor that would have the most impact?

Here are some tips for making your elevator speech memorable.

- First, remember that it should be brief. Thirty seconds is actually a long time to spend on a self-introduction, so you'll want to make it memorable. That means giving some deep thought to what you'd like the listener to know about you. The short list might include what you do, of course, but also who you are: “I'm a newcomer to Jacksonville who's passionate about college football and my work as a technical writer. I've been doing some independent projects while searching for my next job in software design and implementation.”
- The best elevator speech invites questions. It's the human connection equivalent of a click through — your listener cares enough to engage with you: “What kinds of projects have you worked on?” “Where did you move from?” “What college team do you follow?” For my very young readers, this is the start of an ancient art form called conversation. It may eventually make a comeback.
- If what you do is very technical or unfamiliar to your audience, put it in terms they can understand. Our technical writer may say, “I really enjoy my work because I'm the one who provides the user manuals for new software. When I do my job well, users get the most out of a new system or new features — they can focus on their work and feel competent more quickly.” (Notice the nice benefit statement of hiring the right writer for the job.)
- A great elevator pitch also includes a call to action. It could include your purpose statement: “I'm attending this meeting to connect with other professionals in the industry and get some insight into the local job market.” Or asking for help: “I'm here hoping I can find someone who can help me connect with local entrepreneurs, especially tech startups.” Or, inviting them to reach out to you: “I'd love to hear from someone who has applied to the graduate program at Jacksonville University. I'd like to know more about the courses and how the degree affected their career.”
- Learn how to pitch your voice so it's clear and clearly heard in a crowd. You should be able to tell by the body language in the room whether people are having trouble hearing you. If they can't understand what you say, your elevator speech was a waste of time and energy. On the other hand, a clear, pleasant voice can make you compelling.

Don't forget that a large percentage of your impact is non-verbal. People may forget what you said, but they'll remember how confident, intelligent and approachable you seemed. Your first impression is based on how relaxed you seem, your eye contact and your smile. If these factors need work, practice with a partner or in front of a mirror until you look and feel confident. You never know when you'll need to pull out your elevator speech.

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