

Developing You Pitch / Elevator Speech

You're in the elevator with the hiring manager of Dream-Job Corporation. As the door slides shut, you feel a combination of adrenaline and slight nausea: you've got 15 seconds, if that, to communicate your value as a potential employee in a compelling way — just 15 seconds to cram in a whole resume's worth of work and accomplishments and late nights and successes. There's so much you want to say, but your message has got to be crisp, tailored, to-the-point. Handle this one right, and you'll be the newest member of the Dream-Job team. What are you supposed to say?

What is an Elevator Speech?

- A quick way to sell yourself when making introductions
- Sets the stage for why someone would be interested in learning more about you
- Can be used in a variety of settings
 - Professional Conferences
 - Career Fairs
 - Informational Interview Requests
 - Informal Social Events
 - Graduate School Visits
- Goal is for the elevator speech to lead into further conversation
 - This could happen on the spot if there is time or in the future with a business card exchange and follow up email or phone call.

Crafting your Elevator Speech:

- Who you are plus a credential
 - “Hi, I’m Melanie Smith, and I’m a Sophomore Electrical Technology student at Iowa Central Community College.”
- A specific objective
 - “I have a specific interest in ...”
- How you have demonstrated your interest
 - “This summer I am seeking an internship with a firm in the manufacturing sector.”
- Follow up with a statement or question
 - “I attended your presentation today and really enjoyed listening to your thoughts on...”
 - “I see that you work at ABC Company. Can you tell me more about your position?”

Here are the five key things to know and do in order to make your elevator speech successful:

Practice, practice, practice. Very few people have the oratorical power to make compelling 15-second speech about their entire professional lives on demand and under pressure. Practice your speech 100 times — literally. Know it, get comfortable with it, be able to tilt it effectively for a different audience. Practice your body language with it: how will you give the speech differently sitting down vs. while walking down a hall? How will it be different over the phone vs. in person?

Focus on impact. 60 Minutes aired a segment set at a job fair. One of the interviewees, a laid-off Wall Street executive assistant, looked straight into the camera and said, with total conviction, "I can make any boss shine." The commentator wanted to hire her on the spot. Who doesn't want to shine? Describing the impact you've had, and can continue to have, is much more compelling than talking about your number of years of experience.

Share your successes. A lot of us have been taught — by parents, teachers, or team-oriented corporate environments — not to toot our own horns, and to use "we" instead of "I". Elevator speeches are all about "I". You've got to get comfortable with bragging about your own individual contributions and successes (in a graceful way).

Be slow and steady. Whether out of nervousness or a desire to cram in a lot of information, people giving elevator speeches tend to talk at breakneck pace — which is extremely off-putting to potential employers. Speak at a pace that shows you are calm and confident. You want them to think of you as thoughtful and deliberate.

See the whole world as an elevator. Too many people looking for jobs save their elevator speeches for job fairs and interviews. Remember the first rule of sales: ABC (Always Be Closing). Give your elevator speech to everyone — at family gatherings, in the waiting room of the dentist, at student organization networking events. You never know where the next job is coming from.

Dos and Don'ts:

Do:

- Be warm, enthusiastic, and genuine
- Show passion and energy
- Watch your audience and maintain good, natural eye contact
- Speak in a friendly voice

Don't:

- Be verbose – edit down
- Use acronyms and jargon
- Overdo detail but provide the most compelling
- Forget your audience is generally a busy person with lots on his/her mind