

# THE ELEVATOR SPEECH

Take advantage of this essential tool for marketing yourself.

By Christine Clapp, DTM

**P**erhaps you've heard that you should have a minute-long "elevator speech" ready in case you ever hop on an elevator and serendipitously need to introduce yourself. Maybe you're traveling up 30 floors with the CEO of a company for which you've always wanted to work, or with the key investor you've been pursuing for your new business venture. Have you considered how you'd introduce yourself if you ever have such a once-in-a-lifetime meeting? Or

Your elevator speech truly is an essential tool for marketing yourself.

Begin crafting your elevator speech as you would a formal speech. Prepare strategically, rehearse thoroughly, ask your Toastmasters mentor for feedback and rework material if it is not achieving the results you want. This doesn't mean your elevator speech should be scripted, stiff or unchanging. On the contrary, make sure it is conversational and can be adapted to fit the situation you're in. Bear the

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do you assume you'll never encounter that sort of situation, so you have no need for an elevator speech?

There's really no predicting whether you'll ever pitch yourself in an *elevator*, but you will undoubtedly need to introduce yourself at networking events, conferences, social functions and job interviews. When asked "Tell me about yourself," or "What do you do?" — it's best to introduce yourself strategically. If you don't, you're missing a chance to grow professionally and personally.

Just because you're introducing yourself in a conversational or small-group setting doesn't mean you should wing it. In fact, you should prepare and rehearse your brief elevator speech to an audience of *one* with as much care as you would a conference keynote to an audience of a *thousand*.

following three aspects in mind, and you'll always be prepared.

**1. Describe yourself as a solution to a problem.** The most important part of your elevator speech is the first sentence. When you don't have much time, use this sentence as a condensed version of your elevator speech. When you have a minute or two for your full-length version, the first sentence will determine if your audience will continue listening or tune you out.

For that important first sentence, make sure you describe yourself as a solution to a problem faced by your clients, customers or business associates. Listeners don't necessarily care what your job title is or how your industry describes the work you do. Listeners want to know *how you can help them*.

"I now introduce myself as a person who provides solutions for individuals experiencing a variety of speech and language disorders," says Raleen A. Miller, a speech-language pathologist at Metropolitan Speech Pathology Group in Washington, D.C., and a member of The George Washington University Toastmasters club. When meeting prospective clients, Miller learned to talk about what problems she solves, rather than what she does. "Yes, I do provide direct therapy as a speech-language pathologist," she says, "but that's not the first thing I talk about."

When crafting the first line of your elevator speech, put yourself in your audience's shoes and answer the age-old question, "What's in it for me?" Get to the bottom line in plain terms to ensure listeners engage with you and that their eyes don't glaze over as you recite your official title, certifications or other jargon.

**2. Tell an anecdote.** After you describe how you solve a problem, tell a short story to explain your motivation for doing what you do. This anecdote should be a "signature story" — one that reveals the *Aha!* moment when you first realized you wanted to do what you do, or provides an example that shows how exceptional you are at your craft.

Santi Bhagat is the founder and president of Physician-Parent Caregivers (PPC), a nonprofit organization that advocates for quality healthcare for children and young adults with



## TRAITS VS. SKILLS

When pitching yourself, it is important to describe yourself effectively. Employers are most interested in a job candidate's transferable skills. Many people confuse "skills" with "traits" and this can pose a problem during an interview.

**Traits are characteristic of one's personality.  
Skills are developed abilities.**

Traits, although important, do not represent what you can and cannot do on a day-to-day basis. They make you different from other people, but they do not set you apart during tests of aptitude. Traits can still be used to market oneself in an interview and are a positive thing to mention, but don't dwell on how punctual, energetic and honest you are. These are things to prove once you have the job.

Skills, on the other hand, help build a connection between what you have to offer and the employer's needs. Skills are developed with knowledge and experience, and are transferable to novel situations. In a short interview, you want to strengthen your message by focusing on your skills to describe how you can help accomplish goals.

While you sit down to create your elevator speech, take another moment and list your skills. Notice that the following skills all emphasize action toward a goal:

- ▶ Leading
- ▶ Presenting
- ▶ Training
- ▶ Creating
- ▶ Organizing
- ▶ Developing

chronic conditions and disabilities. Bhagat admits that "as a physician, my natural inclination is to speak in clinical mode, even when I'm talking about the experience of my daughter's chronic illness that spurred the creation of PPC.

"I now understand the power of storytelling and weave my daughter's story into my personal introduction and PPC's mission for change in health policy and medicine," Bhagat says. "Too often, we think numbers and data make the case for our listeners, but it's really the image of a real person that makes them care."

That personal story you share will help establish a connection and build rapport with listeners. People at networking events don't always remember a name, but they can usually recount

an interesting narrative. People enjoy listening to stories because they are entertaining and more memorable than highlights from a resume.


Remember, your *entire* elevator speech is just one to two minutes long, so your anecdote must be brief. Your story should have a few specific details to make it interesting and should include vivid language that piques your listener's curiosity.

**3. Start a dialogue.** Finally, conclude with an open-ended question — one that can't be answered with a simple "yes" or "no." You need to learn about the person you just met, because the ultimate goal of your elevator speech is to start a dialogue. Use this opportunity to let your ears do some of the work.

Carolyn Semedo is a communications and marketing professional who is actively seeking employment in the Washington, D.C. area. She understands the ultimate goal of an elevator speech: "Closing with a question draws the listener in, creating a dialogue that can serve as the foundation for a deeper conversation and, eventually, a relationship."

This is a realistic expectation for an elevator speech. Though you likely won't land a job or close a sale after giving your brief introduction, it is feasible to make a connection that leads to further conversation and collaboration.

The question you ask at the end of your introduction can be as simple as, "And what is it that you do?" Or, depending on the occasion, you can make it more specific to your field of work or the type of person you are networking with. Above all else, your question must show you are interested in learning more about the person you're meeting.

The content of a memorable elevator speech should be brief and should position you as a solution to a problem. It should share a personal anecdote that explains why you do what you do, and transform your introduction from a monologue to a dialogue. Make sure you prepare, rehearse and regularly revise your elevator speech to effectively market yourself and capitalize on opportunities that come your way — whether you're in an elevator, or not! 

**Christine Clapp, DTM**, is a member of the Toastmasters United States Senate club in Washington, D.C. As president of *Spoken with Authority*, she develops the voice of experts who want to broaden their impact. Her new iTunes app is called *Master Public Speaking for All Occasions*. Contact her at [christine@spokenwithauthority.com](mailto:christine@spokenwithauthority.com).