

The 30 Second Elevator Speech

Elevator pitches will always be a necessary evil of the job hunt. We can change the name, eliminate the elevator, and avoid the awkward intros – but that, “So tell me about yourself/what do you do?/who are you?” question is inevitable, and we know it. Though everyone has different ideas of what makes a great elevator pitch, when we get back to basics we realize that there are only three true rules to consider:

1. It should be 30 seconds or less.
2. Your skill (or how you benefit a potential employer) should be clear.
3. There should be a goal (or ask).

Everything else is up to you.

Narrowed the elevator pitch down to four key pieces that you can customize, personalize, and play with to fit all your networking and new job searching needs.

Question 1: What do you do...well? (Skills)

What you do is the foundation of any elevator pitch. While there’s no need to delve into specific job jargon, you need to be able to identify and articulate (for yourself and a potential employer) what you can deliver. Consider these:

- Your professional accomplishments (awards, recognitions, certifications, etc).
- What’s the common thread in all your jobs? Take a look at your transferable skills and identify the one or two where you really excel.
- Focus on your essential skill set, what ability have you continued to strengthen in every role?
- Still in school? Use your major and assess your other interests. What clubs are you in? Who do you admire? What’s your favorite subject?

Have a clear skill set but looking for new ways to talk about it? Try these:

- Adept at...
- Proficient in...
- Accomplished...
- Prowess...
- Dexterity...
- Expertise in...
- Savvy...

Question 2: What is your greatest strength in this area OR the best compliment you've ever received about your skill? (Confidence)

If you say that your skill set is communications no one is going to doubt you. However, if you say that your skill set is communications and you have “a knack for persuasive storytelling” then an employer has a clearer understanding of your value. Your concise and clear understanding of your abilities will not only lead others to believe in your abilities but also help employers more readily identify how you fit into the bigger picture of your department, field, or industry.

Not sure what your strength in a particular area is? Think about some of the feedback you've received.

Use testimonials. Also consider:

- Where are you most assured?
- The opportunity to do ____ (fill it in) is what really drew you to your current role. (Hint: Look at job descriptions that really excite you and ask yourself why.)
- This is also a space for the interpersonal – perhaps you are an amazing team player because you have a knack for seeing both sides of an argument – feel free to include that here as well!
- Check out this Forbes article on finding your workplace strength – there are four key types (envision, design, build, operate) and at the end of each type there are outlined strengths.

Looking for different ways to talk about your strengths? Try:

- Have a knack for...
- Talented at..
- Effective
- Penchant for...

Question 3: What would you like to do? (Goal)

People need to know how to help you. Really consider what result you want – is it a job? Is it to learn a new skill set? Is it to pick someone's brain about best practices in your field? If you're afraid to make the ask, remember that what you're seeking is also seeking you. Your elevator pitch positions you as a solution, and open positions mean problems that hiring managers need solved. So go ahead, make the ask – remember there's a win-win.

Try framing your aspirations like this:

- Gain exposure or credibility in the industry
- Hoping to find a role in...
- Suggestions as to how I can...
- Opportunities for me to develop...
- Looking to write for...
- Insight on how I can apply...

Question 4: What's your "why?" (Motivation)

Simon Sinek, Leadership Expert, helps people find the why in everything they do...and that's important because it's the why that keeps us inspired and motivates us to take action. Studies have shown that decision making, although a complex process, is really rooted in emotion. (That's right logic *and* emotion and not in opposition!)

Your emotions support your decision-making abilities. Use this knowledge to demonstrate that your reasons for your goal and your ask aren't just about the money. Focus on the intrinsic motivators that really keep you moving ahead. Ask yourself:

- Who do I want to help or inspire?
- Who benefits from my work?
- Why do I enjoy the work I am doing?
- Or try these four questions from Forbes.

Also try using words like:

- Because...
- On behalf of...
- I owe it to...
- I'm inspired by...
- I want to inspire..
- I believe...

How to put it all together

You're at a workshop and you meet Martha, a senior in college. You ask her what she does and she says...

I'm currently studying education at [insert college]. One of my greatest strengths is my ability to make the conceptual practical and I'm interested in securing an entry-level role at a nonprofit that allows me to teach and develop curriculum. Because nonprofit programs and fellowships were a key part of my development, it's important for me to pay it forward and help student develop to their highest potential.

You're on the subway and you are sitting next to James. You ask him what he does and he says...

I'm currently working as Human Resources Manager at [insert company]. My supervisors frequently commend me for being able to weigh and consider multiple perspectives and negotiate conflicting perspectives. I'm looking for suggestions/advice on how I can further cultivate my expertise in this field because my ultimate aim is to help organizations develop more ethical and inclusive workplace cultures.

You're at a personal branding conference and you bump into Katie. You ask her what she does, and she says...

I'm a communications professional with a knack for persuasive storytelling. Considering my colleagues often complemented me for my thoughtful and engaging presentations, I'm looking for insight as to how I can best position myself for a role in production or videography at social impact start-up. Because I'm inspired by documentaries, I want to help companies express their missions in compelling and relatable ways in the age of social media.

As you exit an entrepreneurial conference you meet Sonia. You ask her what she does, and she says...

My core skill sets are civil engineering and psychology. I'm endlessly curious and all my friends, family, and colleagues look to me for answers on everything from mood swings to mindcraft. As I've always been exceptionally passionate about social issues, I'm looking to write for publications/websites focused on climate change so that I can create content and campaigns urging others to take action and increase sustainability future generations.