

Preparing Your Elevator Speech, By Dale Kurow

What's an elevator speech, and how do you get one?

What Is It?

An elevator speech is a short (15-30 second, 150 word) sound bite that succinctly and memorably introduces you. It spotlights your uniqueness. It focuses on the benefits you provide. And it is delivered effortlessly.

Elevator speeches are intended to prepare you for very brief, chance encounters in an elevator. But elevator speeches are not just for elevators! You should use it whenever you want to introduce yourself to a new contact. That could be in the supermarket, waiting in line at an ATM or when you get your morning latte.

So, who better than you to describe with passion, precision and persuasiveness what you do? A great elevator speech makes a lasting first impression, showcases your professionalism and allows you to position yourself.

And if you want to network successfully, you need an elevator speech!

How to Prepare an Elevator Speech, or What's My Line?

First, and most important, think in terms of the **benefits** your clients or customers derive from your services.

Trust me, no one is going to be riveted if you say:

"Hi, my name is Stanley Manly, and I'm a public relations executive with twenty years of experience."

Or:

"Hi, I'm Sally Hopeful, and I'm an executive recruiter.

Two big yawns.

What's In It for Me?

Do you recall that old radio station, WII-FM: What's In It For Me?!

If you remember that people are always more interested in how you can help them, you're on the right track. Keep that top of mind when composing your speech.

Here's how to improve the two examples mentioned above:

"Hi, my name is Stanley Manly, and I help inventors tell the world about their inventions."

"Hi, I'm Sally Hopeful. I partner with companies that need to find talented people to help their business growth and become more profitable."

Now, you've got my attention!

Let's use my elevator speech before and after as an example:

Here's my before version (and I wondered why people looked at me with a frozen smile!):

"Hi, I'm Dale Kurow, and I'm a career and executive coach. I hold a Master's Degree in Career Counseling and have been trained by a master level coach. (Who cares!) I've been an HR director for a multinational cosmetic company, run a PR agency and taught college-level business courses. (So what!) I believe that coaching can be the catalyst to change your life. (Are you asleep yet?)

See how that was all about me, me, me?

Now for the revised version:

"Hi, I'm Dale Kurow, and I help people become more successful at their work. For example, I've helped a client change jobs with a 40% salary increase, I've helped a client develop the skills to deal with a difficult boss, and I've helped a manager devise new ways to keep her staff motivated."

Here are a few more examples:

I know an Avon representative who says:

"I help women look beautiful."

Or a business coach that says:

"I help you get more clients than you know what to do with."

And here's my favorite, one that is used by an IRS agent:

"I'm a government fund-raiser."

Action Steps

So, here's what you need to do to craft your elevator speech.

First, write down the "deliverables" -- the services or features that you provide. Then, think in terms of the benefits that your clients or employer could derive from these services. You could use several successful client outcomes, as I did.

Once you've got that written, create an opening sentence that will grab the listener's attention, as our Avon representative did above. The best openers leave the listener

wanting more information. And you do not have to include your title, especially if you think it has a negative connotation (an IRS agent, for example).

Finally, your elevator speech must roll off your tongue with ease. Practice your speech in front of the mirror and with friends. Record it on your answering machine, and listen to it. Do you sound confident? Sincere? Is it engaging? Tweak accordingly. Then, take it on the road!

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