

4.4.8: Elevator Speech

Learning Objectives

1. Discuss the basic parts of an elevator speech.
2. Create an effective elevator speech.

An elevator speech is to oral communication what a Twitter message (limited to 280 characters) is to written communication. It has to engage and interest the listener, inform and/or persuade, and be memorable (Howell, L., 2006). An elevator speech is a presentation that persuades the listener in less than thirty seconds, or around a hundred words. It takes its name from the idea that in a short elevator ride (of perhaps ten floors), carefully chosen words can make a difference. In addition to actual conversations taking place during elevator rides, other common examples include the following:

- An entrepreneur making a brief presentation to a venture capitalist or investor
- A conversation at the water cooler
- Comments during intermission at a basketball game
- A conversation as you stroll across the parking lot

Creating an Elevator Speech

An elevator speech does not have to be a formal event, though it can be. An elevator speech is not a full sales pitch and should not get bloated with too much information. The idea is not to rattle off as much information as possible in a short time, nor to present a “canned” thirty-second advertising message, but rather to give a relaxed and genuine “nutshell” summary of one main idea. The speech can be generic and nonspecific to the audience or listener, but the more you know about your audience, the better. When you tailor your message to that audience, you zero in on your target and increase your effectiveness (Albertson, E., 2008). The emphasis is on brevity, but a good elevator speech will address several key questions:

1. What is the topic, product or service?
2. Who are you?
3. Who is the target market? (if applicable)
4. What is the revenue model? (if applicable)
5. What or who is the competition and what are your advantages?

Table 4.4.8.1 adapts the five parts of a speech to the format of the elevator speech.

Table 4.4.8.1 Parts of an Elevator Speech

Speech Component	Adapted to Elevator Speech
Attention Statement	Hook + information about you
Introduction	What you offer
Body	Benefits; what's in it for the listener
Conclusion	Example that sums it up
Residual Message	Call for action

Example:

1. How are you doing?
2. Great! Glad you asked. I'm with (X Company) and we just received this new (product x)—it is amazing. It beats the competition hands down for a third of the price. Smaller, faster, and less expensive make it a winner. It's already a sales leader. Hey, if you know anyone who might be interested, call me! (Hands business card to the listener as visual aid)

Key Takeaway

You often don't know when opportunity to inform or persuade will present itself, but with an elevator speech, you are prepared!

Exercises

1. Pick a product or service and prepare an elevator speech (less than a hundred words, no more than thirty seconds). Rehearse the draft out loud to see how it sounds and post or present it in class.
2. Find an example of an elevator speech online (YouTube, for example) and review it. Post the link and a brief summary of strengths and weaknesses. Share and compare with classmates.
3. Prepare an elevator speech (no more than thirty seconds) and present to the class.

References

Albertson, E. (2008). *How to open doors with a brilliant elevator speech*. New Providence, NJ: R. R. Bowker.

Howell, L. (2006). *Give your elevator speech a lift*. Bothell, WA: Publishers Network.

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