

The Elevator Speech is the Swiss Army Knife of Job-Search Tools

by Katharine Hansen

http://www.quintcareers.com/job-search_elevator_speech.html

By now the Elevator Speech is a fairly well-known tool, not only for job-seekers but for organizations and individuals with products and services to sell. Authors of numerous Internet articles on the Elevator Speech offer speculations on the origin of the term -- ranging from the notion that we often run into important people in elevators to the more common explanation that the Elevator Speech is a clear, concise bit of communication that can be delivered in the time it takes folks to ride from the top to the bottom of a building in an elevator.

Whatever the exact origin, the Elevator Speech is an exceptionally useful and versatile tool in numerous situations:

- Events designed specifically for networking.
- The casual networking opportunities we encounter nearly every day -- the kids' soccer games, plane flights, waiting in line to buy tickets, and on and on.
- Career or job fairs.
- Cold calls to employers.
- Cold calls to absent employers: Rita Fisher of [Career Change Resumes](#) suggests that leaving your Elevator Speech in the form of a voicemail message virtually guarantees that the employer will call back. Hint: Assuming your speech is sufficiently compelling, call after hours when you know for sure you will get the employer's voicemail.
- Opportunities within your own company to talk with higher-up honchos, let them know you're doing a great job, and position you for promotion.
- Job interviews, where the Elevator Speech can provide the answer to at least two common interview queries: "Tell me about yourself" and "Why should I hire you?"

Wide variation exists among experts as to the ideal length of an Elevator Speech. Some authors say as few as 15 seconds; others say up to three minutes. There's no reason, however, that you can't employ both short and long versions. Different situations, after all, may well call for diverse approaches.

In my book, [A Foot in the Door: Networking Your Way into the Hidden Job Market](#), I describe the Sound Bite and the Commercial. The Sound Bite is equivalent to, let's say, an Elevator Speech for a low-rise building or a building with a very fast elevator.

It's a very short introduction of yourself used in situations where you are meeting a lot of people and probably not spending a great deal of time with any one of them. Events specifically designed for networking were made for the Sound Bite, which lasts about 15-30 seconds and may or may not be the prelude to a lengthier conversation. The trick is to make your Sound Bite so intriguing that people will want to spend more time talking with you. The Sound Bite also might be incorporated into an initial phone conversation with a prospective new member of your network.

At its most basic level, the Sound Bite's structure is:

Hi, my name is _____. I'm in the _____ field, and I'm looking to _____.

The last blank would be filled in with your current career aspiration, whether it is to stay within your field and move up or move into a different career.

A college student or new graduate might add the following to the basic structure.

Hi, my name is _____. I will be graduating/I just graduated from _____ with a degree in _____. I'm looking to _____.

You can stick with the Sound Bite's basic structure and see where it takes you. It may not take you far, however, because it lacks two things: a "hook" and a request for action.

Beware of a Sound Bite/Elevator Speech that inspires the thought "so what?" in the listener, as the above examples might.

If, however, you add an element of intrigue -- a "hook" -- by incorporating your Unique Selling Proposition, the ensuing conversation now has considerable potential. Let's look, for example, at how a conversation might go that starts with an intriguing Sound Bite:

Networker #1: Hi, my name is Carmen Southwick. I make dreams come true.

Networker #2: How do you do that?

Networker #1: I'm a wedding planner. I plan dream weddings for couples. I've been working for myself, but I'd like to get in with one of the big resorts that hosts weddings.

Let's look at another example:

Networker #1: Hi, my name is Ned Peters. I'm a warm-and-fuzzy man.

Networker #2: How so?

Networker #1: I manage a pet store and love to watch children's eyes light up when I put a little animal in their hands. I'm training to use pet therapy in hospitals and nursing homes and hope to break into that field.

And one more:

Networker #1: Hi, my name is Betty Joiner. I'm responsible for this country's future.

Networker #2: This I've got to hear about.

Networker #1: I'm a teacher! I love shaping the minds of the next generation, but I'm also interested in getting into corporate training.

The concern, of course, with the intriguing sound bite is that you'll sound corny or hokey. And, in fact, chances are you will. I'll admit that when I first researched these sound bites/elevator speeches, I found them very corny. But they work by hooking your conversation partner into finding out more about you.

You just have to decide whether or not you're comfortable with incorporating an intriguing line into your Sound Bite. If not, go for a more basic Sound Bite/Elevator Speech. One way to test the effect is to try both approaches out on members of your inner circle.

Even the intriguing Sound Bites/Elevator Speeches above lack an important element -- a request for action. Here are some action items that can be appended in various situations:

At a career fair: "I'd like to take your business card, as well as leave my [networking card](#) and resume. Would it be possible for me to get a spot on your company's interview schedule?"

In a networking situation: "What advice do you have for me? Can you suggest any employers I should be contacting?"

Cold-calling an employer: "When can we set up a meeting to discuss how I can help your company?"

Telephone or e-mail situations: "May I send you my resume?" (For in-person situations, you should always have resumes handy.)

The Commercial, a.k.a, Elevator Speech for a high-rise building or slow elevator, is a longer version of the Sound Bite and can be used in networking situations in which you have more time to talk about yourself, such as when you are visiting in the office of a prospective member of your network or having lunch with a contact. It can be a great job-interview response to "Tell me about yourself" or "Why should I hire you?"

It's also an effective response when you're conducting an informational interview and the interviewee turns the tables and starts asking questions about you. The Commercial can piggyback on top of the Sound Bite; you start out with the Sound Bite, and your conversation partner asks you to tell more about yourself, so you segue into the Commercial. This introduction is typically one to three minutes long and contains more about your background, qualifications, and skills than the Sound Bite does.

Obviously, you don't want your Commercial to sound memorized. But you are, after all, talking about yourself, so the material is not hard to remember. It helps to write it out first -- outline form is fine; then read it over a few times, and practice saying it without reading or memorizing it. Practice saying it in front of friends and members of your network, too. It's not a big deal if you forget a detail, as long as you remember the main points you want to get across. Here are a couple of samples, which range from about 200-300 words:

Hi, my name is Michaela Shaw. I've had many years of experience in the electronics industry. During this time, I was drawn to the field of information systems. I enjoyed the challenge and new technologies that I learned while working with the company systems administrator in my job as a database controller. I loved receiving and implementing the system-management training I gained while working with the Hewlett Packard board test system. The spark ignited, and I began to focus my efforts on obtaining additional training in computer information systems. I am achievement and detail oriented. I work extremely well in a team environment and have been a team leader on several of my projects. I further developed my communications skills, which were extremely important in my past work experience, throughout my academic career. I have worked with the latest technologies in my classes. For example, I helped design a database interface application in Visual Basic for one of my school's programs. When assigned a project, I possess the skills to see it through to top-notch completion. I am prepared to make a significant contribution in the next step in my career.

Hi, my name is Mateo Santiago. My background to date has centered around preparing myself to be the most well-rounded marketing professional possible. I have specifically prepared myself for a career in marketing by taking competitive undergraduate classes and by gaining invaluable real-world experience. To improve my written communication skills, I completed four upper-division English classes in addition to the two core classes required of business majors. Since many Texas businesses today work with people of Hispanic origin, I chose to enhance my desirability and versatility as a potential employee by acquiring a Spanish minor. I have also prepared myself to transition into the work force through real-world experience involving travel abroad, internships, and entrepreneurial opportunities. While interning with a private organization in Ecuador this past summer, I developed a 15-page marketing plan composed in Spanish that recommended more effective ways in which this company could promote its services. I also traveled abroad on two other occasions in which I researched the indigenous culture of the Mayan Indians in Todos Santos, Guatemala, and participated in a total language immersion program in San Jose, Costa Rica. In addition to my travel and internship experience, I also obtained considerable professional sales training as a result of my own entrepreneurial pursuits.

During this past summer, I telemarketed for Riella Tire Supply of West Texas, a work experience that prompted me to develop conflict-resolution and personal-selling skills. Furthermore, I have established and maintained two businesses -- Santiago Lawn Service and Full Throttle Auto Detailing, which exposed me to valuable real-world experience with cold door-to-door sales calls and relationship selling. As you can see from my academic and extracurricular backgrounds, I have unconditionally committed myself to succeed as a marketing professional.

Fantastic Formulas for Composing Elevator Speeches

by Katharine Hansen

http://www.quintcareers.com/writing_elevator_speeches.html

Be sure to read our articles [The Elevator Speech is the Swiss Army Knife of Job-Search Tools](#) and [Elevator Speech Do's and Don'ts](#).

While many Elevator Speeches are written by sales reps to pitch products and services, the formulas from which the speeches derive can be easily adapted to situations in which the product is you, the job-seeker. This roundup of formulas suggested by experts should provide food for thought for the method that works best for *you* in planning and outlining your Elevator Speech.

For example, [Certified Professional Virtual Assistant Jean Hanson](#) suggests this formula:

1. Who am I? (introduce yourself)
2. What business am I in?
3. What group of people do I service? (be specific -- do you have a niche?)
4. What is my USP (Unique Selling Proposition)? What makes me different from the competition?
5. What benefits do my customers derive from my services?

Here's how it could be adapted for a job-seeker:

1. Who am I? (introduce yourself) -- **No change**
2. What business am I in? -- **What field or industry am I in?**
3. What group of people do I service? (be specific -- do you have a niche?) -- **What position am I in? In what capacity do I serve?**
4. What is my USP (Unique Selling Proposition)? What makes me different from the competition? -- **No change**
5. What benefits do my customers derive from my services? -- **What benefits can employers derive from skills, based on my proven accomplishments?**

Hanson says that in a selling situation, the listener's unspoken question is "Why should I do business with you?" -- **Similarly, in a job-hunting situation, the listener's tacit question may be "Why should I (or any employer) hire you?"**

Next is a variation on Hanson's formula adapted from [Randy W. Dipner Meeting the Challenge, Inc.](#), along with our illustration (**in boldface**) of how it can be adapted for a job-seeker:

List target customers. Group them and ultimately define THE customer. -- **List target employers. Group them and ultimately define THE employer.**

Define the need or opportunity. That is, what critical issue does the customer face? -- **What need or issue does the employer face?**

Name the product or service or concept. -- **Introduce yourself.**

Place the product, service, or concept into a generally understood category. -- **Identify yourself in terms of a job function or contribution. What do you do?**

List the benefits -- not the features -- of the product, service, or concept provides to the customer. Group or prioritize the benefits to identify the single benefit that is the most compelling reason for the customer to buy the product, service, or concept. To the maximum extent possible, the benefit

should be quantified. -- **List the benefits -- not the features -- that you provide to the employer. Group or prioritize the benefits to identify the single benefit that is the most compelling reason for the employer to hire you. To the maximum extent possible, the benefit should be quantified.**

Develop a statement of the primary differentiation of the product, service, or concept. The differentiation is the single most important thing that sets your product, service, or concept apart from the competition or state of the art. -- **Develop a statement of the primary differentiation of yourself. The differentiation is the single most important thing that sets you apart from the competition.**

[Tony Jeary](#), author of *Life Is A Series Of Presentations*, offers this Elevator Speech formula:

- Define your audience universe.
- Define your content or subject matter.
- Define your objective.
- Define your desired image or style.
- Define your key message.

A formula that probably has more components than the average job-seeker will want to use is offered by the UK-based [Adding Value Masterclass](#) and adapted here:

- Pain -- Paint a graphic picture of the "pain" or problems that the employer is experiencing.
- Credibility -- Your qualifications for solving the problem.
- Solution -- Specifically hint at how you can provide a solution (but don't give away the farm before you have the job).
- Gain -- Explain the benefits the employer will experience.
- Impact -- illustrate the difference those benefits will make in the organization.
- Emotion -- Describe how the benefits will make the employer feel.
- Prove -- Provide evidence that support your claims through examples or stories.
- Money -- Job-seekers should probably skip this step.
- Risk -- Remove any remaining doubts they may have by removing the risk.
- Close -- Reiterate the key points and ask for an interview or other appropriate next step.

Author, speaker, and consultant [Marisa D'Vari](#) suggests starting the Elevator Speech process by writing down three key points about your product (you, in this case) and discussing how these points will benefit the listener.

[The business school at Pepperdine University](#) suggests knowing your audience and knowing yourself, including key strengths, adjectives that describe you, a description of what you are trying to let others know about you, and a statement of your interest in the company or industry the person represents. Armed with that knowledge, the job-seeker can then outline the Elevator Speech using these questions:

1. Who am I?
2. What do I offer?
3. What problem is solved?
4. What are the main contributions I can make?
5. What should the listener do as a result of hearing this?

The School of Management at George Mason University offers some particularly good [Elevator Speech examples](#) for college students. The College of Liberal Arts at the University of Texas at

Austin provides an [elevator speech formula](#), adapted from career author Donald Asher, that's especially good for college students in networking situations.

You'll notice that one thing nearly all the experts have in common is their espousal of the importance of stressing your benefit to the listener and touching on how you're better than the competition. This principle encompasses many names -- Unique Selling Proposition, value proposition, benefit statement, competitive advantage, deliverables, differentiation -- but the bottom line is the same. What can you bring to the employer, and how can you do it better than anyone else?