

Creating a 30-Second Elevator Speech

by Jan Cannon

Can you state your job search objectives in 5-6 sentences? If not, here's help.

An elevator speech is one of two essential job search tools (business cards are the other). An elevator speech tells who you are, what you've done, what you want to do and how you can be a valuable asset -- in 30 seconds. It's just like a commercial -- about you.

Thirty seconds is a much longer time than most people realize. It's long enough to tell a paragraph's worth of information about yourself. But what should you say? And to whom?

The Audience for an Elevator Speech

Before you say anything, know whom you'll be talking with. Your information will be targeted and more useful to the listener. A generic elevator speech is almost guaranteed to be useless.

Research a company to find out what their problems are and then craft a sentence in your opening to show how you've solved similar problems or how your skills can solve this problem. Tell a success story.

Everyone wants to hire problem-solvers, so showing how you could do that makes you someone to talk further with -- perhaps in a job interview.

Think of the numerous places you can use your 30-second commercial:

- Networking events
- Job fairs
- Voicemail messages
- Unexpected networking opportunities: a party, the sidelines at a child's soccer game, political event, etc.
- Information interviews

What to Include in an Elevator Speech

Don't blow your chance to make a good impression. This isn't the time to present a heavy sales pitch. Instead, make your presentation a compelling "commercial" that tells a little about you as a person as well as what you do.

Begin with a short sentence summary of what you do: "I'm in sales training." Or how you solve problems: "I help companies reach their target customers."

If you use the first approach, add the sentence, "And what do you do?" Being a good listener helps develop rapport and gives you clues about challenges or problems. You can then tell your story, showing your expertise in solving just those types of problems.

The second approach usually will get the response, "How do you do that?" You can then tell your story. Either way the purpose is to continue the conversation long enough for you to tell something about what you do and the kind of job you're looking for.

Practice Makes Perfect

Take the time to craft a good 30-second elevator speech. Write and rewrite it until you like it. Then memorize it. You want to be able to talk about your self in any situation, no matter when or how it arises. If you're prepared, you'll look more professional and you'll know just what to say without stammering or hesitating.

If the first attempts don't give you the results you want, change your speech. The purpose is to get people interested in you and your talents. Write and memorize a great 30-second elevator speech to help make that happen.