

Developing Your 30-Second Elevator Speech

When you are looking for a job, it is important to develop an “elevator speech” about yourself. This is a short statement that summarizes who you are, what you do, what you are seeking and what you can offer an employer.¹ It is called a “30-second elevator speech” because you should be able to tell it to another person between floors on an elevator. It is important to have in an interview or at a job fair when asked, “tell me about yourself.” You should also be prepared to reel off your speech at any networking opportunity.

Developing an elevator speech isn’t easy. You have 5, 10, sometimes 20+ years of experience to encapsulate in a short amount of time. It is, however, critical to get it right and to practice it. If not, you will come across awkwardly and seem uncomfortable with yourself — just the opposite of what you want. Here are a few tips to help you:

1. Clarify your job target.

Narrow your focus. If you can’t tell somebody succinctly what you have been doing or want to do in the future, you can’t expect them to figure it out on their own.

2. Tailor your experience and skills.

If you have experience or training in an area you are targeting, be sure to say so. If addressing employers, make sure they know how you will help them solve problems. Every employer is tuned to WIIFM—What’s In It For Me? Your speech should give them information that helps capture their interest.

3. Make it relevant.

When an interviewer asks you to talk about yourself, don’t start at your birth or your high school. Make your pitch relevant to the job for which you are applying, to the skills they are looking to hire, to the company that could be your next employer.

4. Write it down then edit mercilessly.

Write down everything you want a prospective employer to know about your skills, accomplishments and work experiences that are relevant to your target position. Then edit out everything that isn’t truly relevant. Edit it and then edit it again. Make it succinct but impactful.

5. Consider including what motivates you about your work.

Why have you been in this business for 5, 10, 15 years? What excites you about the industry or occupation? If you show your passion for what you are doing, it will come out in your voice and make you more confident. It will also make you stand out. When people have a passion for the job, they work harder and perform better.

6. Know your audience. Eliminate industry jargon, in most cases.

Your elevator speech should work on anyone. If the audience knows the industry, then use words that show your experience. However, other may not know that terminology. If appropriate, do away with jargon and acronyms the average person might not understand. You want to interest the listeners so when you know who they are, tailor your speech accordingly.

7. Craft it in a professional voice but make it conversational.

Writing can be more formal than speaking. If you are not comfortable saying the words, then rework it. It should be something you can say easily, not tripping over the words as you speak them. It should also be in your own voice so it will sound genuine when you say it.

8. Say it out loud again, again and again.

Practice saying your speech out loud and in front of a mirror. Then practice it again and again until you are comfortable with it. After all, you’ll have to speak it aloud eventually.

¹Callamer, Nancy. “The Perfect Elevator Pitch To Land A Job.” Forbes.com. <http://www.forbes.com/sites/nextavenue/2013/02/04/the-perfect-elevator-pitch-to-land-a-job/> February 4, 2013.