30 seconds to make an impression

One of the secrets to successful networking is having a well-honed, 30-second speech that introduces yourself and encourages conversation by drawing in your listener and sparking their interest. This is called an “elevator speech,” a term that refers to the amount of time you have to make a pitch about yourself – about the length of a typical elevator ride.

This isn’t just for use when you’re job hunting. It’s an ice-breaker at any kind of networking event whether online or in person. When you get it right, it can lead to a longer conversation by intriguing people and enticing them to ask questions.

A really good elevator pitch does all of the following: introduces you; summarizes what makes you unique; explains your goal; and engages your listener with a question or call to action. It is a very short, compelling story that you tell to make a good first impression. It’s also the perfect answer to the question, “So, tell me about yourself?”

The essential ingredients of a good elevator speech are:

- Your name
- What defines your work and how your skills can benefit a potential employer
- Your goal for your next career move
- What you’d like to talk about with the potential employer

Crafting your elevator speech

Shorter speeches are harder to draft than longer ones, since you have so little time to say what you want. Here are a few steps to craft your epic elevator speech.

- Take 5 - 10 minutes to write down everything you want to say in your 30-second speech. Bragging is allowed. Include everything you would like people to know.
- Review what you wrote down. Make sure you’ve covered all four of the essential ingredients above.
- Pare down your list. Decide what’s important to keep, what would be nice to keep and what can be deleted.
- Write your speech in language that will feel natural for you when you’re speaking.
- Use a stopwatch to time yourself reading the speech in order to pare it down to 30 seconds or less.
Need some inspiration? Here are two examples of elevator speeches to get you started:

Hi, I'm Deb Stevenson. I'm passionate about preventive care, and I make opportunities to educate pet owners on the best care possible for their companions, so they can enjoy each other for many healthy years. I've just graduated with the Purdue CVM Class of 2019, and I have a certificate in preventive care from Partners for Healthy Pets. I'm interested in joining a companion-animal practice where I can support the focus on wellness and preventive care. Can you tell me what it's like to work for __________?

I'm Timothy Arbuckle, and I'm really excited to learn about your organization. I'm a board-certified surgeon who loves interacting with pet owners, and I have a deep commitment to the human-animal bond. I work in a small surgical practice, where I address health issues efficiently, to reunite pets and owners as quickly as possible to preserve the bond between them. I'm considering changing jobs and would like to connect with like-minded people who work together for the best possible outcomes, which will help the business grow and thrive. I'd love to talk with you about opportunities in your organization.

These are just examples to help you think through how to pack a lot of information into a very short speech. To be successful, you'll want to take time to craft your own script. Don't just copy or adapt these samples.

It's important in writing your elevator speech to demonstrate what sets you apart from other possible candidates. Define what it is that you love, and state your passion within your current or desired role. This is your personal brand, and it sets the tone for how potential employers will define and remember you.

**Practice, Practice, Practice**

Now that you've written an awesome elevator speech that will help you start conversations, there's one very important step left before you're ready to deploy it at a networking event: Practice it over and over, so it sounds natural and you are at ease delivering it from memory. After all, you're not going to want to refer to a cue card when you're meeting potential employers or other new connections. While 30 seconds might seem like a very short speech, it can seem a lot longer if you're nervous when you start talking.

Start by practicing it alone if you'd like, and refine your speech if something feels uncomfortable as you're saying it. Then graduate to sharing with friends and family. Practice as often as you can – with anyone willing to listen, and especially with those you feel will give honest and helpful feedback. Confidence is key, and this is how you gain confidence. Ask for input not just on what you're saying, but also on your delivery, intonation and body language.

Your polished elevator speech will be well worth the effort you're putting into perfecting it. It will help you get conversations started at networking events and job fairs so you can gather the information you're looking for and make a good impression on participating employers. It also will help you relax and enjoy yourself.