



Elevate your Intro
Memorable Self Introductions
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We belong to a California networking group of over 1,400 professionals called ProVisors. When the economy went south in 2008, membership in this organization didn't decline, it skyrocketed. With an annual fee of \$1,200 this is surprising, until you consider the potential business opportunities for members.

However, simply attending the monthly meetings does not necessarily result in referrals or new business. There is always the need for professionals to express what separates them from others in their field, and to persuade listeners how these differentiators provide benefit to clients.

At the meetings, individuals stand and introduce themselves. Another term for these brief introductions is *elevator speeches*-- which can be memorable and effective, or boring and a waste of time.* When professionals recite a menu of services, or feature the history and reputation of their firm, this generic format and the elevator speech is quickly forgotten.

But speaking *can* be a very effective way of developing strategic alliances and generating referrals. The common axiom is that we do business with people we know, like and trust. So rather than ticking off a list of services, we recommend professionals share what they are passionate about, be specific about their process and reveal precisely how they serve their clients. The goal is to connect with your audience by revealing who you are, your perspective and what is important to you. Although it sounds like a tall order in only a couple of minutes, this can be accomplished in a well crafted elevator speech.

The first step is to consider your intention. Intention is the driving force behind every successful presentation, no matter how brief. Pick one intention and make it active. We often hear clients say their intention is to educate or inform their audience of their services. As we say in our book, *Own the Room: Business Presentations that Persuade, Engage and Get Results* "if you educate people, you get them to think, but if you persuade them, you get them to act."

Your job is to persuade your audience how your services will benefit them—or their clients. One example of a strong intention for an elevator speech is "I will convince you that our services are critical to the success of your business." With this intention, you still deliver substantive information, but your words will be laser-focused in hitting their target.

Choose one intention and make sure it is not only active, but achievable. For example, it is unrealistic to have an intention that everyone in the room will come up and ask for your business card. But with a targeted elevator speech, having two or three people ask you for your card or request a meeting is quite achievable.

Sometimes clients will express resistance that by delivering only *one* message or focusing on *one* service, how will the audience know the full extent of their capabilities? Know that over time, you will have multiple opportunities to describe what you do. But whenever you deliver an elevator speech; go deep, not wide. This way, listeners will absorb the one thing you do well, which is a great way to gain trust and further understanding. Once trust is established, a listener can (and will) come up and talk to you about your other services.

When deciding on which example to relate in your elevator speech, be self-serving. What kind of work do you want more of? Years ago, Eloqui was primarily considered 'speaker coaches'. But most of our business comes from group training and preparing pitch teams. We shifted our elevator speeches from describing one-on-one coaching, to success stories featuring companies that brought us in to train their sales teams, or hired us before a major competition.

After you determine your intention and example, construct the actual elevator speech, keeping in mind that 30 seconds to 2 minutes is an appropriate timeframe. Grab our attention right away with your opening line. Rather than beginning with used-up phrases like "thank you for having me", "good morning", or "I'd like to tell you a story", dive off a cliff and deliver an opening that makes us want to hear more. (Examples of powerful openings can be found in chapter three and five of *Own the Room*).

When searching for how to begin, reference a news item from the headlines, reveal something about yourself that we wouldn't expect, share your perspective, or ask a question that makes us think. Use specifics, rather than generalities, and paint a picture. If we can visualize your words, we are engaged. If you speak in generalities or we've heard it before, our attention wanders.

Once you've delivered your opening, link it to your process or how you solved the problem for your client. One common mistake is to begin with such a colorful opening that *it* becomes the focus of the elevator speech, instead of the next section, where you describe your process. If you were to map out, or graph this structure, it would look like: Open (to grab our attention), Transition, Body of content (your business, services and/or methodology), Close.

Be careful not to diminish the section regarding what you do, because you believe the audience isn't interested; you have done your job for so many years that it sounds rote;

or you use insider shorthand and jargon. When you vividly describe your process, you become memorable and we picture you solving a client's problem.

However, the flip side can also be a danger. Don't go into so much detail when describing your work, that you lose the pacing and momentum of your elevator speech. To keep the audience engaged during this substantive section, include your differentiators, use active verbs, and add your authentic enjoyment of the process.

Prior to the close, you *can* add a tag line, which mentions the other services you or your firm provides. So, for example with Eloqui, if we had just completed a story about coaching an architectural firm that won a major contract, we could say "in addition to preparing pitch teams for beauty contests, we also deliver keynote speeches, coach individuals, and train sales teams to improve their hit rate."

Finish your elevator speech with your name and company. We are frequently asked why we don't recommend opening with these crucial identifiers. Speakers have about a 30 second honeymoon period, when they capture our attention or the listener determines they're not worth listening to. Since there is nothing novel or surprising about your name or the name of your firm, why start at a disadvantage?

The other potential negative of putting your name and company at the beginning is the association an audience might have with someone in your line of work. Another consideration is what if they don't have a need for your services. When you deliver a compelling elevator speech, *regardless* of previous associations, you have the opportunity to win us over and change our opinion.

We also know from cognitive science that the opening of any presentation sets the tone and provides the frame, but the *ending* is what we remember most. By putting your name and company at the end of your elevator speech, you are encouraging us to place these important details into long term memory.

Once you have an overall structure for your elevator speech, rehearse it. "Winging" it is a recipe for disaster. Initially, you will probably include too much information, or new thoughts will come to you as you say your speech out loud. It's all part of the creative process. Rehearsals are where you test out what to include, and what can be eliminated. By the second or third pass, only the most important elements remain.

But here's an insight from the world of performing. Every good actor knows that after reciting their lines a few times, the mind locks the "script" into memory and the delivery may sound canned and over-rehearsed. To offset this condition, change the wording or phrasing each time you rehearse your elevator speech. This will allow you to remember the structure and sense of the content, but not memorize it word for word. Your elevator speech will always sound fresh to the audience, and more importantly, you have a road

map for where you're going-- but not to the extent that if you forget one word, you will be unable to continue. There is one exception. Since the greatest anxiety is exhibited during the first minute or two, know your opening line cold.

The actual delivery of your elevator speech should be similar to having a conversation across a dining room table. Many of us were taught that to be taken seriously in business, we need to be more formal, rigid and official in our posture and language. In actuality, the reverse is true. When a professional has an easygoing, relaxed demeanor, they exhibit true confidence and approachability. When you make eye contact around the room, we all feel included. And when you vary the pacing and timing of your delivery, we like and trust you sooner.

Many of us have anxiety whenever we present, whether to an audience of our peers or strangers. One way to offset this anxiety is to speak about events from your own experience. Mentally place yourself back in time and remember what it felt like. Then paint a word picture. Be specific instead of general. Don't strive to be polished, but a bit rough around the edges. You want to demonstrate that you are immediate, present and doing your best to connect with us and make sure we understand what it was like. And don't forget to breathe!

After the meeting is an essential time to gather feedback. Ask trusted colleagues what they thought, for their *impression* of how you described your services, and what specifically they remembered. Also, listen carefully to the questions or comments of individuals who you meet for the first time. Then take all this information and carefully consider what to incorporate and do differently next time.

In all our years of coaching and training, we've never met a professional who could extemporaneously deliver an elevator speech that was succinct, colorful and serve as a business magnet. To achieve mastery requires commitment, training, rehearsal and experience. Begin by taking advantage of every opportunity. Start with low ante environments. Be creative with your elevator speeches. Watch other speakers to see what you like and don't like. But don't pattern yourself after anyone else. The more unique and authentic you are, the more people will be drawn to you. And to thrive in this fiercely competitive marketplace, speaking is the best way to be seen as the "go to" person in your field. The crafting and delivery of your elevator speech is the critical entry point. It is your Silver Bullet.

*Elevator speeches are not exclusive to networking meetings. They are also valuable when pitching a potential new client, or at social functions.

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