

“WHAT DO YOU DO? (Aaaaaaah!)”

How to Craft a Memorable Elevator Speech

by Brian Walter



No matter what company, division or department you work for, no matter what your title or position, *you are all in sales* when someone asks you the most important, awkward, open-ended question you EVER receive in your professional life...

“What do you do?”

The reality is...at the moment you're asked this question... you represent *your entire company*. And what comes out of your mouth next will determine if you position your company well or come across as something more akin to a babbling idiot.

Now...let's put this whole thing in context. Your Elevator Speech is what you say when you're just talking with people...in *informal* situations. It's called an Elevator Speech because it's an answer short enough to be said *between* floors on an elevator ride, before one of you gets off. Here's how I define Elevator Speech:

“An Elevator Speech is a progressively-revealed *conversational* answer to the question (What do you do?) that you deliver in such a way that people want you to *keep* talking.”

Let's break each part of that definition down.

“Progressively-Revealed”

Most people we've surveyed, and the majority of marketing books, say your Elevator Speech should be between 15-30 seconds. Yeah...*try that one yourself*. Pull out a stop watch or even just look at the second hand on your watch or a clock. Ask yourself “So, what do you do” in a perky enthusiastic way. And then start going “blah-blah-blah-blah-blah.” This simulates your answer to the question lengthwise, without distracting you about the actual content itself. You'll find that you REALLY only have about three seconds until you are boring yourself.

But now you're thinking... “There's no way I can give my entire Elevator Speech in three seconds.” And you're right...assuming you were giving the *entire* thing at one time. But you're not.

“Conversational Answer”

What does conversational answer mean? It means you talk like normal people, not like the Wall Street Journal. If you just spout platitudes and business-speak in an informal situation...people will think you are a *freak*. Instead, just use words that sound normal coming out of your mouth!

“That you deliver in such a way that people want you to keep talking”

This part of the Elevator Speech definition is one of the most critical. After you say one line you look for the other person you’re talking with to show if they’re interested in what you just said. How do they do that? With the Scooby Doo Response. Baaaaaah?

Scooby Doo Response

You know you’ve got someone hooked when they cock their head or raise an eyebrow. Or grunt out a “Huh...what, hmm...grrr.” Getting that kind of non-verbal reaction means they’ve hit you the ping pong ball again. It’s permission for you to *keep talking*.

Now, your answer may not seem very cool. But remember, someone asked you what you did because they *already* found you interesting. So, don’t **STOP** being interesting when you talk about what you do.

We’ll show you how all this works together with an elevator speech for a *completely invented*, automatic defibrillator company we’re calling HeartMax Technologies...which you gotta admit is a tougher sell conversationally than your company.

“So, what do you do?”

“I’m in the human jumper cable business.”

Bam! Short and intriguing. That’s your Scooby-Do line. You’ve got them hooked. And the person you’re talking to is going to go...Baaaaaaaaah? Why? Because *human jumper cable business* sounds reeeally interesting.

It would be **impossible** for someone to actually stop listening to you right now. They **HAVE** to know more. So, they **WILL** give you the Scooby-Doo response or even ask you what that means. Verbal ping pong. After you get the Scooby Doo grunt or nod, you jump to a short pay-off line. Notice how conversational it is.

“I work for HeartMax Technology...it’s my job to get our automatic defibrillator units, like those paddle things on ER, into companies and schools.”

Now they're starting to get the picture of what your company does. They're thinking, "Oh, so **that's** what he meant by human jumper cables." At this point they may say something or they'll give you more head nodding. That's permission for you to say another line...with a customer benefit.

"So normal *non-medical* people, like you and me, can actually save the lives of our co-workers and kids."

At this point, most people will go, "Oh" or give you the NFC (*New York Face*). The NFC means...that's enough, you're done. But *sometimes* they'll be hooked and want more of the details. With those people, you jump in with a compelling real world story from your job or company starting with the three power words, "Now for example..."

And once you're into a story...your Elevator Speech is over. Now you're having what behavioral scientists call...a conversation.

Practice, Practice, Practice

If you write out your Elevator Speech following these principles, and practice it in real world situations, it will become second nature to you. And in fact you will LOOK FORWARD to getting asked "What do you do?" And your company will benefit as people will want you to keep talking!

