

“Elevator pitch”

The ‘elevator pitch’ has a very particular purpose. The phrase originated in the US and noone in the UK has found an equivalent. The idea is that you get into a lift (elevator) only to find that inside is the very person whom you need to persuade to help you and your business. What do you say in the thirty seconds or so that you have this person’s undivided attention before the lift does open and he or she walks out of your life forever?

There are two answers to this question: the conventional one and the more useful one.

Conventional answer

The conventional answer says that you have to get across the following:

- your name
- your company name
- what your business does
- the help you need
- why he/she should provide it, ie the benefit to them
- anything else that might be persuasive.

It is certainly an excellent exercise to be able to do all this in thirty seconds. It really forces one to think in a clear and focussed way about the business, and think very hard about what are the most important twenty words you can say about it. You’re likely to be using some of the ideas generated by the handout on the purpose and outcomes of your business.

Unconventional answer

The first problem with the conventional response to this task is that it is difficult to do well (ie in a way that will deliver the intended outcome). The second problem is that it produces a closed communication. It is a lecture, a speech – albeit a short one – and, at the end, the other person is completely entitled to say nothing and leave. Or they can say ‘no’ and leave.

To resolve these problems, I suggest you use the hypothetical thirty seconds to say one thing. One thing so compelling it more or less forces the other person to say “that’s interesting – tell me more”. At this point, he or she has given you permission to talk for as long as you reasonably need: it could be outside the lift, or, better, it could be in their office later.

In other words, when you have very little time to ask for help, say something that results in the other person inviting you to say more (even if at a later date in a one to one meeting). This avoids the problem of too little time (and sounding rushed) – but, even more importantly, it also has an emotional intelligence perspective. This is that, if the subsequent discussion is at the other person’s request, he or she is going to be far more motivated to be interested, the conversation will go better, and your outcome is more likely to be achieved. This is an example of a golden rule in networking (and indeed in getting clients):

Attract people to you as much as you can – rather than pushing yourself onto them.

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