

How to...

Develop an Elevator Speech

What is an elevator speech?

Imagine by pure providence, you find yourself alone on an elevator with a famous philanthropist. This philanthropist is extremely gregarious and is well known for taking a personal interest in charitable causes that strike a chord. It's a chance of a lifetime for your nonprofit and you have only this elevator ride to tell a compelling and motivating story about your cause.

While you will likely never find yourself in this situation, you will be called on many times to introduce your organization in about as much time as a typical elevator ride. That's your elevator speech and it's one of the few things you should memorize because you will be called on time and again to give it in a range of situations, from social gatherings to formal engagements.

It's important to tailor your Elevator Speech to specific audiences too, so you probably want to have several versions of your elevator speech stored in your head. Here's how to prepare an elevator speech.

Step 1 Who are you trying to reach?

Think about your target audience when you prepare your speech. Think about your message in terms of your listeners, so that you speak in language that makes sense and resonates with them. You may not always know your target audience so it's important to have a general elevator speech prepared for this situation too.

Examples:

1. Parents of teens
2. Business owners in a community
3. Opera lovers

Step 2 What is their pain?

Their problem or pain will differ depending on the target audience. Having a good understanding of your target audience will help you pinpoint their pain.

Examples:

1. Parents of teens – fear that their child will be involved with alcohol and driving
2. Business owners – the economic viability of the community
3. Opera lovers – the nearest opera performances are 3 hours away

Step 3 What is your solution?

Once you pinpoint the pain, it's easy for you to articulate the solution that you are going to present. Again, present your solution in the context of your target audience and your understanding of their problem or pain.

Examples:

1. Audience - parents of teens
Problem - drunk driving among teens
Solution - the MADD Youth in Action Program
2. Audience - business owners
Problem - local economy, deteriorating parks

Solution - a park maintenance and refurbishment program sponsored jointly by a business and community partnership

3. Audience - opera lovers

Problem - no nearby performances

Solution - the ability to attract talent with your weekend “Sing and Stay” program.

Step 4 What benefit do you deliver?

Your benefits flow directly from your problems and solutions. For example, if the problem is *financial literacy among immigrants*, the solution is *an evening adult learning program* and the benefit might be *high percent of graduates are able to establish a credit record*.

Examples:

1. Reduced incidence or teen mortality due to drunk driving, not just with drivers but with passengers too.
2. Preservation of the attractiveness of the community as a place to live.
3. The opportunity to enjoy opera more frequently.

Step 5 What is special or unique about you?

Think about aspects of your organization that make you special. Your uniqueness adds character to your speech.

Examples:

1. The Youth in Action program is a holistic approach to a very complex problem. It involves many aspects of the community in addressing this serious problem.
2. Rather than just asking everyone for money, we came up with a novel, creative approach that we think has tremendous potential to address our problem.
3. Our program is a win-win. When talent stays in our hotels and eats in our restaurants it attracts visitors not just to the performances but to those venues too.

Step 6 Where is your passion?

Your elevator speech will be much more interesting if you add your passion to it. Why are you involved with this nonprofit? What's the source of your fire? Is it something you read or learned about, a personal experience, the experience of a relative or close friend? Adding the passion can be the most convincing factor of your story.

Examples:

1. My daughter nearly lost her life last year because she got into a car with a drunk driver. I had to get involved and do something about it.
2. My family has lived in this community for six generations. It just seems natural to step up to the plate when things get tough.
3. I developed my love for opera in college. My Italian professor played opera with the intention of creating a greater love for the language but for me, it happened the other way around. The language created a love for the music.

Step 7 Is there a helpful metaphor?

You don't have to have a metaphor but use one if it's helpful.

Examples:

- A. We're like the Red Cross on a really local level.

- B. We're like a Designer Thrift Shop except we're only for at-risk girls and report cards are our currency.
- C. We're like a Hide and Seek game except instead of finding people, the kids are given clues to go find things that occur in nature.

Step 8 Put it all together.

Examples of Elevator Speeches

1. Parent to PTO

As many of you know, my daughter survived a horrific accident involving a drunk teen driver last year. Sadly, the statistics remain one in three of our children will be involved in a drunk driving crash during his or her lifetime. There IS something we can do about it and that is to get The MADD Youth in Action Program into our schools and community. It gives students the tools to NOT get in the car with a drunk teen driver (which was my daughter's challenge). The Youth in Action Program follows a formal multidisciplinary approach to a very complex problem and it has proven results.

2. Board Member to Business Colleague

I'm calling you because you care about keeping our community both a good place to live and to do business. As you know, I'm on the board of the Preservation Society. Due to a budgetary crunch, the upkeep of our parks and monuments is seriously deteriorating. I am very concerned, not just for the aesthetics and quality of life of our community but for the sake of our businesses. We have a plan at the Preservation Society and we need to mobilize quickly and decisively. We're getting started with a meeting at the Society on Tuesday evening at 5:30 and I'm asking you to come and listen to what we have to say. I think you'll find it very good for your business.

3. Executive Director to Potential Benefactor

I was so excited to learn we share a love for opera. As you know, our beautiful community offers so much in the way of recreation and relaxation. That's why our Sing and Stay program has been so successful. The artists who have joined us so far have told us it's a delightful break from the bustle of cities and airports and I understand our hospitality is starting to develop a bit of a reputation. We have an outstanding program lined up for next year and your contribution will allow us to close the gap and firm up the program. Won't it be a delight to have these performers performing and living right in our community? Let me show you what we have planned.

4. Executive Director to a stranger at a social gathering

Our organization provides health services to newly immigrated families until they are settled into the community. Many of the families come from the worst situations imaginable; some of them have even seen members of their own families murdered. They arrive in our country not knowing the language or the customs and they have nowhere to turn. Our case workers – most of whom were refugees at one time - connect them to our organization. Through screening, vaccinations and check-ups, we provide health services at a fraction of the cost of emergency room services. We're funded by the government, (taxpayer dollars), private contributions and our surprisingly successful thrift store. I got involved in this because my parents immigrated to this country when I was just a child and we nearly lost my baby sister in the first month we were here; my parents had no idea how sick she was until it was almost too late.