

7 Steps to Deliver Your Best Elevator Pitch

Evan Taylor, US News & World Report



You might have ended up here for one of three reasons: You don't know what an elevator pitch is but know you need one, you have an elevator pitch that needs some work or you tried an elevator pitch and received a response that wasn't so positive. No matter what brought you, follow these steps to write your best elevator pitch today.

1. Know and define your purpose. Chris Westfall, the 2011 national elevator pitch competition champion and author of "The New Elevator Pitch," says "an elevator pitch or speech is the best way to start off a persuasive conversation." You could be trying to convince someone to invest in your idea or consider you for a job, but your aim should be to get the listener to keep listening. "You are trying to garner someone's interest to continue the conversation. You really want to build a sense of intrigue so people want to know more," says Stephanie Burns, founder of Chic CEO, an online resource for female entrepreneurs. Whether you are trying to fundraise, find clients or just introduce yourself, elevator pitches must be tailored to the listener and environment. "You want to create multiple elevator pitches for the audience you're talking to," Burns says. "Between networking and meeting with investors, the beginning of your pitch may be the same, but the end may be different."

2. Start the writing process. Now that you understand an elevator pitch, you have to put it together. Its anatomy can be simple or complicated, depending on your audience. Westfall suggests that you include

something surprising – but surprising in a good way – counterintuitive and/or innovative to set yourself apart from an inauthentic sales pitch. Burns adds: "Clearly state what you do, know who you are targeting, the problem you are solving and include a hook that is intriguing."

3. Form a clear introduction. Practice one that's no longer than two concise sentences in which you introduce yourself and explain what you do. Burns warns not to make this common mistake: "Avoid being vague in what you do and how you can help them." Westfall says some people have difficulty being concise. So if you're a doctor, don't go into detail about your surgical procedures, and if you're a lawyer, don't start rattling off all the cases you've won. "Stop looking at yourself and reciting your LinkedIn profile. You have to demonstrate that you have done your homework," he advises. You're there to start a conversation – not chase your subject away.

4. Tell a story. Telling your story is the quickest and easiest way to differentiate yourself from everyone else your subject has talked to. According to Westfall, you should use your story to tell your history and accomplishments. "The story is the meaning factor and gets the listener to ask, 'Tell me more.'" Use the basic principles of storytelling by discussing a challenge you faced, how you solved it and what you learned.

5. Answer why and consider the solution you can provide. If your pitch or speech is ineffective, people will think, "So what?" and wonder, "What does that have to do with me?" Consider whom you are talking to and your setting. "You will have a different pitch with your boss than the board of directors, and a different message delivered to your team as opposed to the C-suite," Westfall says. "If you don't phrase your accomplishments and goals in context, it's not phrased for the listener."

Westfall adds that you have to walk the line of authenticity. You can say something like, "Because of this, I believe I might be able to do this." But it can be too aggressive to assert that you can fix or solve someone's problem tomorrow.

6. Hook your listener. Adults have short attention spans, so you have to hook them like a fisherman hooks a fresh catch. Burns calls this the "wow factor," or in other words, something that leads the conversation. Westfall suggests you avoid slogans and sales pitches. "You want to show you thought this through, but you don't want it to sound rehearsed," he says.

7. Leave a call to action. Your call to action should be tailored to your listener and purpose. If you're at a networking event, you may want to schedule a coffee meeting. If you meet a potential investor, you may want to schedule a follow-up to share your budget details. "Your call to action is a logical next step. It should be easy to say yes," Westfall says.

After You've Written the Pitch

Practice, practice, practice, and make revisions based on the feedback you receive. Burns says some of the biggest mistakes are "not answering the questions of who, what, when, where and why, crafting a pitch once and not modifying it, and not paying attention to the feedback." She says your pitch should evolve over time, and if a subject's eyes glaze over or they walk away, your pitch needs work.