

Create an Elevator Speech

An elevator speech is a concise, easily articulated description of your organization. The term comes from the need to communicate a message in the time it takes to ride an elevator.

Developing an elevator speech drives an organization to consider the best way to communicate key information. In a minute or two you want to introduce yourself, describe the organization and grab the attention of the listener.

What is an Elevator Speech?

The speech should be easy to memorize --- just four or five sentences. It will come in handy at receptions, meetings or chance encounters with lawmakers, regulators, news media and prospects. You'll use it to turn a moment of silence into an opportunity to communicate an important message.

You never know who cares or who is listening. Your presentation may simply inform a stakeholder, pique someone's interest, or result in action. What's nice about the elevator speech is its brevity. It doesn't waste anyone's time, it has potential to help the organization and it positions you as a spokesperson.

Elements

Introduce yourself and your role in the organization. Maybe you're an officer, employee or volunteer. As a representative, you're expected to communicate a clear message. Then identify the name of the organization; don't assume everyone knows the acronym.

Now work in the organization's purpose, also known as the *mission statement*. You can paraphrase it. For example, "the organization is the only one in the state that fosters healthcare and insurance for needy children and families." If possible, include how the organization has been the *solution* to a problem. For example, "We help children get the insurance they cannot afford."

Segue from the purpose to goals. You might say, "We are the primary organization offering scientific research and education for the benefit of consumers and practitioners." Or, "we are the state's leading advocate for oral healthcare."



Support Data

Integrate data. For instance the age of the organization: “We’ve been doing this since we were founded in 1935.” Or, “For 75 years we have been the leading advocate.”

Numbers position you as an expert. For example, “There are 1,500 registered professionals and our organization represents 80 percent of them,” or “we have helped more than 1,000 families this year.”

If your organization has identified its economic impact, use that data. “The organization has saved the state millions of dollars.” “Our members employ nearly 10,000 workers.”

The Close

While you have someone’s attention, it’s a good time to ask for help. You might close with how that person can be involved or get more information.

Finally, it is important to speak with *passion*. *Practice* communicating your short presentation for comfort and enthusiasm.

Sample

“Hello Congressman, I am John Doe, a volunteer for the XYZ organization. Our mission is to represent the interests of our profession by offering education and networking opportunities.”

“We were founded in 1925 and are the primary resource of industry data and enforcing a code of ethics. We represent nearly every practitioner in the state. Through our consumer assistance program, we have saved the government more than \$50,000. You might want to get more information or get involved. Here’s my card and I’ve written the organization’s website on the back.”

Many organizations develop the framework for an elevator speech and then give volunteers freedom to craft what they are comfortable presenting.

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Note: Bob Harris, CAE, offers free governance and management tools for nonprofit organizations at www.nonprofitcenter.com. He can be contacted at bob@rchcae.com.

Precautions

- **Don’t** anticipate an immediate benefit or response. You are building a relationship --- not asking for favors or immediate action.
- **Don’t** focus on yourself. Let the listener know you are presenting information that may be of interest or benefit to them.
- **Don’t** compare and contrast to other organizations. Present a positive image without degrading others. Listeners will form their own judgements.
- **Don’t** rely on acronyms and insider jargon.
- **Don’t** get distracted. Deliver a crisp, concise message. If it doesn’t go well the first time, you’ll have opportunities to practice and improve.