

Your elevator pitch needs an elevator pitch

Ah, the elevator pitch. A favorite tool of the networking masses. A rite of passage of sorts. You've heard the scenario: you step into an elevator and go up one floor. The elevator doors open and in walks the client of your dreams. They start some small talk and ask, "What do you do?" and you've got the rest of the elevator ride to respond. How do you answer that in 20 seconds in such a way that gets them interested? The answer is simple. You need an elevator pitch for your elevator pitch.

Today, you're getting both my word-for-word elevator pitch, my elevator pitch's elevator pitch, and the secrets behind what makes it all so effective. It all starts when someone asks me...

"What do you do?"

"You mean, in addition to being an international bodybuilding champion?" (I'm 5'10" and a buck thirty-five, soaking wet. When I step on ants, they live. It's painfully obvious that I'm not an international bodybuilding champion.)

Usually, they laugh. Usually, I laugh too. Then I continue...

"Well, you know how email and texting and social media have pretty much taken over how we communicate?"

"Yes."

"We're more connected than ever, but yet...more disconnected than ever. So I teach managers the secrets of true connection in a way that gets immediate results."

"How do you do that?" (or "What do you mean?" or "What kind of results?")

"Well, here's an example. A company hired me because their management staff wasn't connecting with their employees. It wasn't their fault, they've just never been taught the right way to do it, right? So I went to their management retreat, taught everyone my 4-part formula, and now morale is up and productivity is up 38%. That's why I'm constantly on the lookout for managers who don't know the formula. They're easy enough to spot. They don't feel like managers, they feel like babysitters. They say things like, 'This job would be so easy if it weren't for the people.' And they don't have enough time to deal with all that people stuff *and* get their own job done so they can make the kind of money they deserve and have the kind of time and lifestyle that they don't even realize they've been missing out on. So when you ask me what I do, I give managers their lives back. Life is too short for two out of every three Americans to hate their jobs. I get the feeling you know people like that though, right?"

Now obviously, this elevator pitch is a lot longer than 20 seconds. But here's why I don't buy the "20 second" rule.

When people ask "What do you do?" they're just making polite conversation. With rare exceptions, they don't really care. If you can't make them care, then 20 seconds of their attention is generous. But if you do pique their interest, they'll hold the elevator door and listen to you all day long. So don't try to cram everything into 20 seconds. Instead, the best use of that first grace period is to make a bid for an attention extension. Now that you've seen how I do it, here's how it works:

Start with a verbal slap. First things first. You've got to break their expectations. Most people answer the "What do you do" question with a single, predictable sentence: "I am an architect." But

the human brain only pays attention to interesting things. If you want to be interesting, you need to stand out. Giving them a verbal slap in the face helps break the patterned thought process that made them ask the question in the first place. Patterns, by their very nature, don't contain anything that stands out. Pattern thinking is why there is almost a zero chance they will remember you.

To “wake them up” you probably won't be able to use my self-deprecating, bodybuilding joke. That's the point. You've got to say something DIFFERENT – something authentic. Something so totally “you” that they are forced to realize that you are a unique human and not just another “normal” interaction that their robot brain can coast them through. I'd write this for you if I could, but I can't. Nobody can.

Then ask a problem question. Once you've verbally shaken them awake, your next goal is to pose a problem that you suspect they will identify with. This *must* be spoken as a question. Questions have always been, and always will be, far more engaging than statements. The problem question from my elevator pitch is, “Do you know how email, texting, and social media have kind of taken over how we communicate?”

Some respond with a simple “yes” and some launch into a diatribe about how awful modern technology is. That's okay, I let them talk. Either way, I'm aligning myself with them against a common enemy. This is one of the most powerful rapport-building strategies there is, besides maybe shared laughter. However, if there is any doubt that I've just made a new BFF, I throw in one last rapport builder...

Go to the noddable. A noddable is an inspirational or wise quote that is so catchy and agreeable, it gets just about everyone nodding. People will agree with these so strongly that they may even let an audible, “Mmm!” or an “Amen!” escape their lips. If you want to know if your statement is a noddable, post it as a text image or “meme” on Facebook and see if it produces a response on the like and share buttons, or if the comments below it end with “#truth”.

My noddable is: “We're more connected than ever, but yet...more disconnected than ever.” (I know...*deep*.) For additional rapport points, try this advanced technique: pause after the word “yet.” This allows your listener's own brain to fill in the punchline even before you say it. When they do that, they have ownership of the quote and a small part of them is convinced that they thought of it themselves. Then when you say aloud what they're thinking, it creates a moment of “great minds think alike” bonding.

So at this point, I've already broken their expectations and built some strong rapport very quickly – and I still haven't even answered their question. That's coming next. Kind of.

Finish with the curiosity statement. This is where you pretend to answer the “what do you do?” question. However, your answer will only want to make them ask another question. Here's the simple formula for a good curiosity statement:

“I help/teach _____ (ideal client) to _____ (feature) so they can _____ (benefit).”

Mine was, “I teach managers the secrets of true connection in a way that gets immediate results.” This is so much more powerful than “I'm a speaker and author.” Also, the intriguing vagueness of “secrets” and “results” almost forces them to ask some kind of follow-up question. The hard work is done. Now that rapport and curiosity have been built up, you can deliver your true elevator pitch and make it almost as long as you want.

What about that actual elevator pitch? Even though the heart of this article is really about the elevator pitch *before* the elevator pitch, below is included a brief overview of the thinking behind my actual pitch too. It's not perfect, but it has served me very well.

The first thing you'll notice is that mine is long. It's at least twice as long as the 20 second so-called "limit." It starts with a true, results-based story of an individual or company I was able to help in a measurable way. It's peppered with persuasive language and what I call "hidden salesmanship." Then it mentions exactly who I'm "on the lookout" for. "They're usually easy enough to spot because..." then I insert three pain points that my target market will identify with. All the while I'm building my level of enthusiasm and using rhythm, tone, and body language to do the exact opposite of a "verbal slap" – I'm putting them back into patterned behavior. Only this time, it's a pattern of agreement and not a pattern of resistance.

By the time it's their turn to talk again, I've taught them exactly the type of referrals I'm looking for. In addition, if they're in need of my services, they'll be feeling just the right amount of pain that will likely motivate them to begin describing their situation. When they do, I'll get a meeting by saying, "Hmm, that sounds important enough for us to maybe sit down and talk about." Surprise, surprise. They agree.

But the last thing you want to do is to make them feel like they're being pitched to. If you get the sense that it's turning into a commercial instead of a conversation, then you're doing it wrong. Stop pitching and ask another question. You should only be doing between 15-20% of the talking. A final caveat: the number one rule with any communication is to be authentic. Feel free to model my pitch, but unless you make it fit your personality, it will come across as phony and manipulative. And nothing ruins a pitch faster.

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Tim David spent eight years as a magician, and in 2010 was named North America's Top Mentalist. He's now a corporate communications consultant and speaker. His book is *Magic Words: The Science and Secrets Behind Seven Words That Motivate, Engage, and Influence*.