

Win the Business with this Elevator Pitch

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Pretend that you are in an elevator at one of your industry's trade shows. You're heading down to the lobby when the doors open on the thirtieth floor. You instantly recognize the executive who walks in and quickly glance at his name badge to confirm he is the CEO of the most important account you would like to start working with. You have never met him before nor have you been able to generate any interest from his organization. You have forty-five seconds to introduce yourself, explain what your company does in a way the CEO would find interesting and applicable, and motivate him to take the action you suggest. Ready? Go!

So, how did you do? Even the most experienced professionals find this pressure-packed exercise difficult. When you're in this situation, avoid the six common mistakes most salespeople make:

They use truisms: They believe their company's own marketing pitch, which makes claims that are not considered entirely true by the listener. As a result, they instantly lose credibility.

They describe themselves using buzzwords: They repeat industry buzzwords or, worse yet, use technical buzzwords that are known only within their company.

They use fillers: They make too much small talk or ask frivolous questions that reduce their stature to the customer.

They demean themselves or the listener: Their statements turn them into mere salespeople, not business problem solvers. They unintentionally demean the listener by asking impertinent questions or assuming the listener knows exactly what they are talking about.

They present an unreasonable close: They don't take into account that they are talking to a senior company leader and use a close that is unrealistic or demands too much of the customer.

They are incongruent: Their tone, pitch, and tempo of speech don't match. They speak too fast and their quivering tone broadcasts that they're scared and nervous.

Here's an example of a poor elevator pitch. The problems are identified in brackets. Luke Skywalker, a salesperson for XYZ Technologies, is attending a trade show and happens to be in the elevator with Norman Bates, chief information officer at Wonderful Telecommunications.

Hello, Norman. How are you today [filler]? Do you have a moment to talk [filler]? My name is Luke Skywalker and I'm a sales rep [demeans salesperson] for XYZ Technologies. Have you heard of XYZ

Technologies [demeans listener]? Umm...[filler] Well, we are the leading provider [truism] of business transformational outsourcing [industry buzzword]. We have a unique extended-hybrid implementation methodology [technical buzzword]. Do you have time for me to buy you a cup of coffee and hear more about it [unreasonable close]?

My blog post, "[Persuasion Tactics of Effective Salespeople](#)," introduced *sales linguistics*, the new field of study about how salespeople and customers use language during the decision making process. A successful elevator sales pitch will incorporate the following sales linguistic structures:

Softeners: A softener eases listeners into the next thought or is used to set expectations. When you say, "I'm sorry to bother you," you are using the pre-apologizing softener technique.

Facts: A fact is the undisputed truth. Facts are recognized instantaneously.

Metaphors: Metaphors are stories, parables, and analogies that communicate ideas by using examples that people can relate to and identify with. Metaphors enable complex concepts and theories to be explained in an understandable, interesting, and persuasive manner.

Suggestions: Foreground suggestions are direct and explicit ("Consumer Reports gave our product the highest rating"). Background suggestions are indirect and their meaning is inferred ("One of their customers recently switched to our product").

Fallback position: Every customer conversation is actually a verbal negotiation. Instead of giving ultimatums that force the customer to accept or reject your close, provide options from which customers can select from prepared in advance.

Silence: Silence is an important and useful linguistic structure. It indicates you are listening and waiting for a response. Silence can actually be used to gain dominance during conversations.

Here's an elevator pitch that incorporates these sales linguistic structures:

Norman, hi, I'm Luke Skywalker with XYZ Technologies [fact]. It's a pleasure to meet you [softener]. I'm not sure if you are familiar with us [softener], but we work with AT&T [fact]. They've had to reduce their IT costs during these tough times. I'm here because James Bond, the CIO of AT&T, is presenting a case study on how he cut his IT costs by 20 percent using our outsourcing solution [metaphor, background suggestion]. There'll be CIOs from some of our other customers, including General Electric and Johnson & Johnson, speaking as well [fact, background suggestion]. The session is tomorrow at 1:00 p.m. if you can make it [foreground suggestion, softener]. [Pause — silence, waiting for response.] That's too bad [softener]. I'd be delighted to send you his presentation [fallback position, foreground suggestion]. Great. Just to confirm your e-mail address, that's Norman.bates@wonderful.com. Is there anyone else I should send it to [fallback position]? [Pause — silence]. Okay, that's Ferris Bueller, your vice president of infrastructure. Thanks, Norman. You'll be hearing from me shortly.

Your words are your most important competitive weapons. In this regard, your ability to deliver a compelling elevator pitch is crucial to achieve success. There are many sales situations where you have only a minute or two to conduct an entire sales call. You must be able to deliver a compelling and memorable message during this pressure-packed time sensitive encounter.

Write down your elevator pitch and analyze its structure for the use of buzzwords, fillers, and truisms. Use language structures such as softeners, metaphors, and suggestions to improve its persuasiveness. Finally, be sure to practice your pitch aloud so your delivery is smooth and confident. Remember, a sales call can happen anywhere and at any time. Always have a prepared elevator pitch.

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