

Networking 6: Top 5 Suggestions for Introducing Yourself

Eric Pye

Whether interviewing or networking for a job or developing business or personal connections, sooner or later you have to introduce yourself. Self-introduction can be stressful as it creates a lasting first impression. As with other elements of interviews and meetings, preparation is key, and will help you avoid telling a rambling life story, doing a resume walk-through, or fumbling verbally as if this is the first time you've been asked to "Tell me about yourself."

Fortunately there's a simple formula for self-introduction, sometimes referred to as an elevator pitch. Imagine you're in an elevator, one-on-one with a senior executive of a company you'd like to do work for. You have 30-45 seconds to sell yourself, as the elevator ascends from the 1st to 30th floor. In that time, you want to succinctly and credibly present your background, unique skills and desired outcome, before the elevator doors open and your captive audience is lost. Here is one suggestion on how you could accomplish this for a job interview:

1. **Formula:** Elevator Pitch = Past + Present + Value Proposition + Future < 200 words.
 - **Past:** a sentence or two about where you grew up, your academic history, and past employment.
"I grew up in Africa and moved to Canada in my early teens. I went to high school and university in Ontario, and graduated with an Economics Degree from McMaster University. In my early career I worked as a consumer loans advisor in a bank."
 - **Present:** a couple of sentences about your current work, education and accomplishments.
"Four years ago I transitioned into accounting, and now I'm a Cash Control Analyst with the City of Calgary. I'm enrolled in the CPA pre-requisite education program, and expect to be designated in 2016."
 - **Value Proposition:** describe a relevant project or set of skills that show you can make a difference. Your value proposition, or unique selling point (USP), should outline your capability and impact.
"In my role with the City, I recently helped create a new process for recording and reporting Recreation Department income that reduced input times for facility staff by 50%."
 - **Future:** tell about the desired outcome from your meeting.
"I'm interested in advancing my career as a process accountant, broadening my organizational and analytical skills and using my CPA learning, while working towards a more senior accounting role."

Two common fears around elevator pitches are that they're too short, and that scripting makes you sound unnatural; however, keep in mind that a short introduction shows the ability to distill a lot of information into a manageable package, and "scripted" is better than "unprepared." For maximum impact:

2. **Know what makes you credible.** The building blocks of credibility are: Presence (eye contact, posture, composure), Dynamism (expression, voice, enthusiasm), Authenticity (natural language, trustworthiness) and Expertise (skill, knowledge, experience). Authenticity and Expertise are built into your script.
3. **Practice.** Deliver your pitch to a friend or in a mirror. Memorize the script, and focus on making a positive impact through your Presence and Dynamism.
4. **Tailor your message.** While it pays to have a script, be prepared to adjust to the situation and context. For example, your personal history may not be relevant, your desired outcome might change, or you may want to emphasize different skills and accomplishments from your work experience. Practice different scenarios, and be ready to change your delivery and message (or cut it completely if body language tells you your "executive" is unreceptive), eg. *"I have an Economics Degree from McMaster University and have lived in Calgary for six years. I'm a Cash Control Analyst with the City of Calgary and am in the process of completing my CPA designation. I recently created a process for recording and reporting Recreation income that reduced input times for facility staff by 50%. I wonder if we could meet for coffee so I can get your ideas and input on moving my career forward as a process accountant, while working towards a more senior accounting role."*
5. **When you're done, stop talking.** After you've made your pitch, stop, smile, and let the person you're meeting decide whether to move the conversation forward or probe with a follow-up question.

As your introduction, prepared and delivered in a confident manner, will undoubtedly set you apart in networking and interviewing situations, begin working on your script and delivery today. You won't regret it!