



Why Elevator Pitches Never Go Forward (Just Up And Down)

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Of all the bromides and vacuous bloviation surrounding consulting, "elevator pitch" (or "elevator speech") is my nails-on-blackboard migraine, (with a close second being the horrendous formulation, "I'm going to deliver a training for them"). Elevators, last time I looked, go up and down in their automaton routines, and never move forward.

There is good reason for this.

In 22 years of independent consulting, and two million air miles (of my three million total) during that time, I've made exactly one sale on an airplane, and that was for a \$12,000 keynote speech. Now, that's certainly a primary sales route for me, right? I've never made a sale through a chance meeting in a hall, or a brief introduction, or a charity social event.

I have, of course, made valuable contacts at these and other opportunities, which turned into meetings, which evolved into trusting relationships, which resulted in business. So, am I being somewhat disingenuous here?

Never. I believe that the business eventuated precisely because I don't have an elevator pitch. Who on earth wants to hear about someone's approach to consulting, or team work, or strategy, or opinion of modern business in any confined space? It's like watching vacation slides trapped in a neighbor's family room. I keep dreaming, like a dog I suspect, of jumping through the window, relieving myself, and chasing a squirrel. I want to howl at the moon.

Switch Shoes

Put yourself in the other person's shoes. Most of us can see a "pitch" coming from a hundred paces. The "pitcher" might as well have on a uniform and be winding up sixty feet away. Except it's not our job to try to hit the pitch. We can just ignore it or, better still, walk away. Of course, in an elevator, you can't walk away without treading on someone's feet, so you just press a button and get off at the wrong floor, the delay being less irksome than the pitcher.

However, if we're asked about us, we tend to warm up only slightly less rapidly than Georgia asphalt at the beginning of an August morning. What did I think of that movie? What's my opinion of that book? How do I think the election will affect the business? Well, that's a great question you've asked. Walk with me for a while when we get off. You are going to 48, right?

If you believe for an instant that this is a relationship business (and not "a training"!) then the objective is to build relationships. And you don't build relationships with buyers by talking about what you do and how you do it. You build them by getting the buyer to talk about what's important to him

or her, and why. Ironically, all that time and effort spent on a sales "pitch" is wasted. All the seminars, all the "guru" insights, all the nonsense is just unnecessary.

What you need is simple: A decent vocabulary and a modest knowledge of current events and social happenings. Some homework about the buyer or company wouldn't hurt, but that will never happen when it is a chance encounter.

No One Is As Influential As A Listener

The ability to initiate a conversation based on an observance ("Do you like that book, I've heard conflicting reports"), a chance meeting ("What should we expect for dinner?"), or an introduction ("Are you the person quoted in those news items?") is far more important than the ability to launch your capabilities statement like some kind of over-extended slingshot.

Then, listening to the response, and asking further questions, you are able to engage in conversation and build a relationship by questioning and listening, appealing to the other person's self-interest. Let's not forget the sales model here, which is a series of small "yeses" leading to a meeting, conceptual agreement, a proposal, and so on.

I have news for you. You are not going to make a sale in an elevator, and the probability of even moving to a next step is non-existent if you tell me you've built a better mousetrap, created an electronic cat, or have a rat vacuum. But if you are able to discern that I have a rodent problem, you just may be on the right track.

Of course, I'm not going to admit that if you're simply lurking on the elevator or stalking me in the hall. But if you ask me if I'm aware that there is a rodent hair on my collar, I just may be interested in what you have to say.

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