

# Ride to the top with a good elevator speech

By Kathleen D. Pagana, PhD, RN

**T**he elevator door opens and you step in to find yourself face to face with the important person you've wanted to meet to discuss your promising idea. It's the chance you wouldn't want to miss. But that chance lasts only as long as the elevator ride. You have less than a minute to make an impression. Do you have an elevator speech ready?

## What's an elevator speech?

An elevator speech is any short speech that sells an idea, promotes a business, or markets an individual. It's a short summary, or pitch, that quickly describes the value of a service, product, or organization. The term is a metaphor for unexpected access to someone to whom you'd like to sell an idea or proposal. It derives from the early days of the Internet boom when web development companies needed venture capital. Firms were swamped with applications for funding, and in many cases, the companies that won the cash were those whose reps had a simple pitch and could explain a business proposal in an elevator in the time it took to ride to their floor.

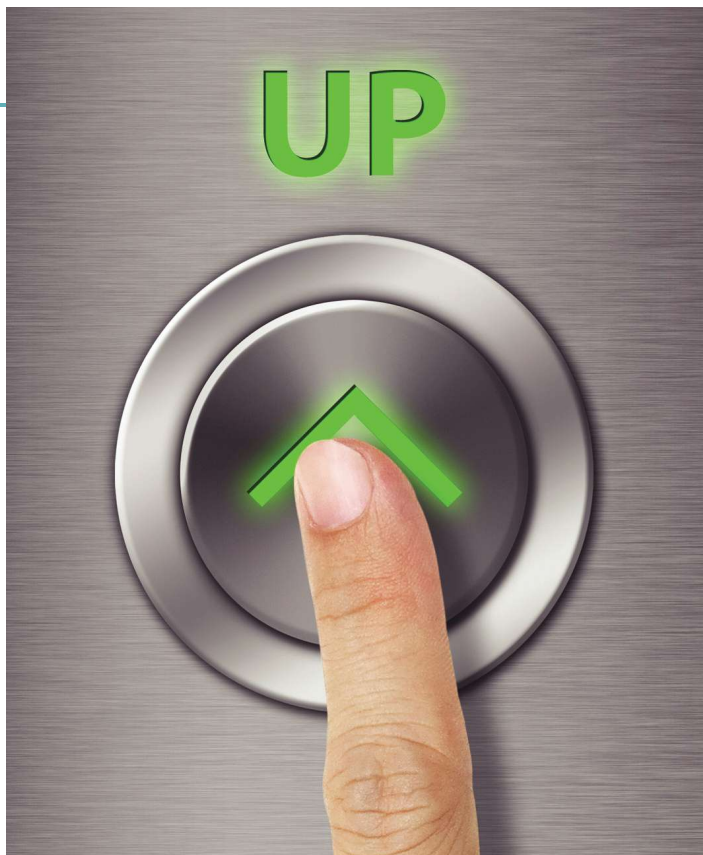
A great elevator speech describes and sells an idea in less than a minute. Of course, it's not restricted to elevators. It comes in handy any time and anywhere you need to give a concise presentation to capture someone's interest so you can move to the next step—a follow-up call, a

referral, a meeting, or a partnership.

## Why clinicians need an elevator speech

You need to be able to describe what you do, what you're interested in doing, and how you can be a resource to someone. The ability to sum up a unique aspect of your service or expertise in a way that excites others is a fundamental skill. Doing this in a brief, persuasive manner is an asset for any professional. A good elevator speech should grab one's attention in a few words and make that person want to know more about you. Here are examples where a good elevator speech would be helpful:

- Thomas goes to a recruitment fair hoping to get an interview at a certain hospital.
- Mary is finishing her master of science degree and is interested in a position in a new wound care clinic.
- Caroline has written a book on grant writing and would like to present her ideas at a conference.



## Key elements of a good elevator speech

- Brian is interested in research and would like to join the research team.
- Mindy is trying to expand her wound consultation business.

You can use an elevator speech when you want to grab someone's attention at a meeting, convention, or other social situation. In such situations, people typically ask, "What do you do?" A well-planned elevator speech can make the listener's ears perk up and want to know more.

### How to prepare an elevator speech

Before you can write an elevator speech, you need to know yourself, what you can offer, what problems you can solve, and what benefits you can bring to the prospective contact. For example, you may be an expert in professional communication and know strategies you can teach other staff to promote a better workplace environment.

You also need to know your audience. Will you direct your pitch to an administrator, a unit manager, or staff? You're more likely to succeed if your elevator speech is targeted to a specific audience and you adjust it to that audience. Try to prepare different pitches for different audiences; a generic pitch is almost certain to fail. (See *Key elements of a good elevator speech*.)

In today's busy world, clinicians must be able to communicate in a succinct, persuasive manner. Your elevator speech is your introduction to others. It has to be good. Keep practicing it and perfecting it so you can speak with poise and polish. The more often you give it, the better it will become. It's a great way to put your best foot forward when you have only a small window of opportunity to make a good impression. ■

Follow these guidelines when preparing an elevator speech.

- **Keep it short.** After hearing a few sentences, your audience should know what you do and what you want. Limit your pitch to 60 seconds.
- **Have a "grabber"**—an opening line that grabs the person's attention and piques an interest in hearing more.
- **Show your passion.** Your energy and dedication will help sell your proposal.
- **Make a request.** At the end of your speech, mention what you need. Do you want that person's business card? Do you want to schedule a meeting? Ask for a referral? Getting the person to take the next step is crucial. It's the reason you came up with your speech in the first place.
- **Practice.** Rehearse your elevator speech so that when the opportunity to use it comes up, you can do it well. Always be prepared to give your pitch so you can use it in a chance encounter. Memorize it.

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