

3 Ways to Pitch Yourself in 30 Seconds

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People often think of the **elevator pitch** as something you use when you're interviewing for a new job or trying to raise capital for a new venture. **The elevator pitch, however, is no less important once you've got the job as it is when you're looking.**

In fact, **your personal 30-second spiel** about who you are, how you're different, and why you're memorable is arguably more important once you've landed that great position or won the support of investors and now interact with senior colleagues and important clients regularly.

A managing director on Wall Street once told me of a summer associate who made an uncharacteristically strong impression on senior leadership during a welcoming cocktail party. Within days, the managing director received numerous calls from senior partners advising him to "make sure she gets the attention and resources she needs to succeed this summer." The young woman's career has been on the fast track ever since.

So what can you possibly say over canapés and white wine to create so many powerful advocates so quickly and effectively? Think through the following ideas before you craft your pitch:

1. Have a compelling reason for **why** you want to be there, as in "why did you decide to join the firm?"
2. Know what it is that uniquely qualifies you for the position so that you can answer the **how**, as in "how did you actually get a job here?"
3. Be able to explain **what** ties together past and current experiences in a way that is compelling and makes sense — what is the glue that holds your story together?

Of course, no executive or senior manager would dare ask those questions, but your elevator pitch is your opportunity to communicate these critical pieces of information to someone in a crisp but casual way — without even being asked.

As you answer the why, how, and what,

1. **Think relevant, not recent.** There's no rule that says you must talk about your resume in reverse chronological order. Mike was a marketing executive who took a sales position abroad for two years. Yet when he returned to marketing, he kept introducing himself as a someone who had just made a career switch, always leading off with an anecdote about his short stint in sales. Instead, Mike should have started with the fact that he was a seasoned marketing professional who had taken a sabbatical but was now back where he belonged — putting his marketing prowess to work and thinking about what drives consumer spending habits.
2. **Focus on skills-based versus situation or industry-based qualifications.** You don't have to have a background in finance to be good at finance. Alex was a chemist and researcher who had gone back to business school to get her MBA. She decided she wanted to work in corporate finance for a

large pharmaceutical company but she was afraid no one would take her seriously given her background. When I pressed Alex to explain to me why she chose finance, she exclaimed, “That’s the way my brain works.” Her thinking was methodical, mathematical and formulaic — all of which translated to someone who was a natural fit within a corporate finance department. Instead of focusing on the fact that her background was in academia, Alex could emphasize to colleagues and clients that she was a numbers person at her core.

3. **Connect the dots — what ties it all together?** If you are a chemist turned finance professional or a marketing executive with experience in international sales, you should find a way to bring together the richness of your experiences and show how each one complements the other. For me, personally, I had a significant hurdle to clear with clients as a former Peace Corps volunteer turned investment banker. I explained away the dichotomy of the two by emphasizing to others that I was big picture thinker by nature and a numbers person by training. Banking was a perfect combination of the two — I liked looking at client’s challenges and issues from 30,000 feet and then digging down into the details to come up with creative financing solutions. Whether the client was the mayor of my Peace Corps town in Chile or the CEO of a healthcare company, I could start at a high level and drill down quickly and effectively.

Mike, Alex and I were all arguably better positioned *because* of our unique stories and experiences. Ask yourself these questions as you craft your personal pitch and you’ll be able to use your story to impress others from the get-go too.

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