



Tips for Constructing an Elevator Pitch

Busy? We all are. Your schedule is tight and the people who you meet are busy. However, many of these “busy” people are folks that your nonprofit organization needs – grantmakers, individual donors, elected officials and potential board members. These people are vital to your organization’s ability to carry out its mission and continue to thrive.

As a member of a nonprofit board of directors, one of your primary responsibilities is to serve as an ambassador for your organization. How can you make new friends for your organization? How can you engage people in a limited amount of time and in a way that captures their attention and leaves them wanting to know more? Try developing an “elevator pitch”.

An elevator pitch is a short statement, not a speech, about the time it takes for one elevator trip of 2 minutes or less, that conveys the essence of your organization and peaks the listener’s interest. It should be the beginning of a conversation.

When composing your elevator pitch, it’s important to frame your message in a way that is concise, clear and compelling. Here are some elevator pitch dos and don’ts:

DO

Introduce yourself and your role in the organization. “Hi, I’m Jane Smith, Board Member of XYZ organization.”

Keep it simple. Identify the problem that your organization and the impact the organization has had. Convey what your organization does and who it serves. Include a quantitative result, e.g. “XYZ provides services to low income senior citizens on Long Island. Just last year over 2,000 low-income senior citizens received a free meal through our senior center program.” Throw in just one statistic. Don’t bombard listeners with numbers.

Find your own anecdote about the organization that illustrates its impact. People love stories. Have a story that you can tell.

Invite involvement in the organization. Let whoever you’re talking to know that they can get involved in a variety of ways: volunteer, donate, etc. Ask a question of the person.

Customize it. Your pitch for requesting a donation and the one you use for attracting a potential board member should be different. For example, “With a donation of \$ we could expand our meal services to an additional 500 senior citizens.” Or “Your expertise in the area of budget and finance would be tremendously valuable to XYZ’s continued positive effect in our community.”

Make it compelling. Use language that will really grab the listener but that reflects who you are. The more comfortable you are, the more passionate you will sound.

Offer to provide additional information. “I’d be happy to call or meet with you to tell you more about XYZ. May I have your card or e-mail so that I can speak with you more about XYZ?”

Write it out. Take time to write out your pitch and edit it. Then edit it again.

Practice it. Practice saying your pitch out loud until you are comfortable and the timing is right. Start out board meetings with one board member volunteering to deliver his/her elevator speech.

DON'T

Memorize your mission statement. Mission statements are often awkwardly worded. People sometimes get frustrated trying to memorize something. Just make sure you can clearly articulate the organization’s purpose.

Use jargon and technical terms. Most people don’t like to have to ask what an acronym stands for or what a specialized term means. It makes them feel inferior to the speaker.

Don’t obsess about the length. While your pitch should be concise, you do need to tell your listener enough about your organization to get them engaged. Strike a balance between content and duration.

The Center for Nonprofit Leadership has a team of consultants who can assist your board with this and other areas of board development. For additional information, please contact us at centerfornonprofitleadership@adelpi.edu or (516) 877-4429.