



EMPLOYMENT ADVICE BARBARA ROSE

12:00 AM CDT on Wednesday, July 23, 2008

Chicago Tribune

Quick, tell me who you are and what you do in less than a minute.

What experiences do you bring to your work and how do you do your job better than anybody else?

In short, why should I hire or promote you, invest in you, buy from you or listen to your advice? This drill produces an "elevator pitch," a message short enough to be delivered in the time it takes to ride from the ground floor to the executive suite.

Crafting a 30- or 60-second message is a useful exercise because it forces you to take stock of what you offer and where you want to go. Writing it down and rehearsing it makes the spiel yours.

"Polishing your pitch is the cheapest and most effective way to get or keep a good job in a tough market," says communications coach Mary Civiello, author of *Communication Counts, Business Presentations for Busy People*.

Meaningful minute. Ms. Civiello advises clients preparing lengthy presentations to start by distilling their messages into 60 seconds. Her basic formula: "Say who you are, what you do, and why you do it better."

When clients stumble over the third part she asks, "What do you contribute? Why is the world a better place because of what you do?" If that's a little too grandiose, consider what sets your performance apart. How is your contribution different from that of others?

Provide a quick anecdote, fact or analogy to illustrate your message.

For example, a woman who worked at a big hospital told Ms. Civiello she likes "helping people." That's the type of generic statement that flies by unheard. When pressed for an example, the woman recounted tracking down someone who spoke Urdu to translate for a patient whom no one could understand. That story brought her message alive.

That sort of example "creates a picture," she says. "If you combine a picture with your words, it doubles the amount of time people remember it – and you. Little stories sell good points."

Sherri Moss, a volunteer workshop leader at LDS Employment Resource Services in Naperville, Ill., recommends a similar tack – crafting "Me in 30 Seconds" statements.

The 30-second statement is especially useful when an interviewer says, "Tell me a little about yourself."

The Naperville career center suggests a five-part structure: Give yourself a title that says what you do;

refer to your experience; mention your education; offer something unique about yourself; tie it in with what you can do for the company or organization.

Keep it simple and conversational. "It's just 30 seconds," Ms. Moss says. "Don't try to fit your whole résumé in."

Here are some samples from a recent workshop: One woman said she's a "versatile customer service and operations professional" whose travels through 48 of the 50 United States gave her valuable experiences with diverse people.

An information technology manager said he accompanies 100 kids on relief missions each year to regions such as the Gulf Coast, then linked his quick story with his ability to communicate and understand an enterprise to make good technology decisions.

A financial controller who loves golf linked his diligence and follow-through in his golf swing with the qualities he brings to corporate work.

Rehearse, rehearse. Getting the words down on paper is only a start. Practice your delivery, preferably with a friend or family member who will videotape you.

"Be honest," Ms. Civiello says. "Think about your real qualities. If you don't believe it yourself, you're not going to be able to sell it."

Lighten up. If you're having trouble staying loose, she suggests you "plan a story that gives you a reason to smile, to be warm, to be likable."

And don't forget to be specific when you close: "How about lunch next week?" "May I call you on Wednesday or Thursday?" "Is there someone else you suggest I contact?"

Chicago Tribune