

GOING UP? YOU JUST MAY BE

By Craig A. Harrison

The elevator doors close. Do you stare up at the numbers, glance down at your feet or boldly look into the eyes of the stranger and launch into your elevator speech?

Your future is riding on your ability to communicate within and beyond elevators. Your elevator speech is that 16, 30 or 60 second sound bite that succinctly introduces yourself, and your unique qualifications may be your key tool for landing your next job. Are you making the most of your opportunities to tell the world about you?

Studies have shown that 16 seconds is the average time spent with a stranger in an elevator. It's also all the time needed to make a favorable first impression. Delivering your "mini-speech" can open many doors. And opportunities abound to tell others, too: standing in line for a movie, traveling on BART, attending a convention or sitting at the corner cafe. Here's mine:

"Hi, I'm Craig Harrison, the good humor man. I'm a humorous speaker and corporate trainer. I help companies and individuals aspire and achieve through motivational speaking and interactive training. Here's my card. Call me the next time your company needs a business humorist or high-energy trainer."

My speech is just a few sentences long and changes slightly each time I give it. It's been scripted, rehearsed and honed over months of delivery.

Your elevator speech should consist of your name and title, occupation, field of interest or desired position, and something special about yourself: talents, experience or approach. The goal is to stand out from the crowd, so be memorable.

Pronounce your name clearly. Be upbeat. Smile. Perhaps you'll press a card into their palm, or give strangers a mnemonic or other easy way to remember you. I met a poet named Lavignia who asked to be called Vinny. That's memorable.

The world is already full of software engineers, attorneys and administrative assistants. Put a special spin on your talents or occupation. A gardener, Gerald Turner, introduced himself as someone who was "turning the world green one garden at a time." That captured my attention and showed me he is excited about his craft, as did his green business card.

Represent your occupation in its most ennobling light. A dietitian describes her work as "teaching people how to behave in front of food." An attorney tells people she "empowers the powerless." A midwife "brings life into this world." These phrases invite further inquiry.

Share your qualifications, such as special skills, degrees or experience. Are you an award-winning graphic designer, the Chamber of Commerce's entrepreneur of the year or someone recently profiled in "Who's Who of Northern California?" Accentuate these distinctions.

Here's an elevator speech for a multitalented woman who hasn't yet defined her dream job, but knows what she has to offer: "Hello, I'm Bettina Kaplan the Global Warmer. I'm a goodwill ambassador to multinational companies seeking to expand their overseas markets. I use my MBA, international work experience and language skills, knowledge of protocol and cheery disposition to deliver clients the world. Here's my card."

Others naturally want to know "What's in it for me?" Your speech should phrase your skills in terms of benefits to their company. Here are examples for technical and non-technical job seekers:

"Hi, I'm Steve Zebriskie, I'm one of the few, the proud, the remaining COBOL programmers. I was a pioneer in business data processing. With 10 years of experience modifying embedded systems, I'm available immediately to assist you with your Y2K problems. Call on me if I can be of service. My e-mail address is nocrash@y2k.com."

"I make creative and innovative ideas heard. I'm Carrie R. Wheadon. I write reviews, lay out books, design ads and organize promotional material, sometimes all in the same day. I'm impeccably organized, tolerably opinionated and seek a noble challenge where I can constantly learn. Hablo español también. Know of any such openings?"

As job seekers, you should elicit more information: "Is your company currently hiring?" or "Does your group hire contractors?"

The ride is just beginning. Craft your 16-second sound bite. Hone it among friends and acquaintances. By being poised, polished and prepared, you can ride your elevator speech from the streets to the suites.