



Reel 'Em In: THE ANTI-ELEVATOR PITCH

How to attract business contacts in less than 10 seconds.

By Cliff Suttle, DTM

Since the 1950s, sales and networking trainers have harped on the idea that everyone needs an elevator speech — a pre-scripted 30-second-to-two-minute pitch about yourself or your company. Even though the term “elevator pitch” was first coined in 1995, the prac-

the “anti-elevator speech.” This speech is not a pitch or a commercial, but an invitation to start a conversation. You remember conversations, before the days of Facebook, Twitter and texting? You *talked* to people. They talked to you. It felt good, didn't it? Well, the art of conversation is still

how I wanted you to react. I wanted your confusion. Curiosity is an excellent conversation starter. When people are curious, they want that curiosity satisfied. Stay silent after presenting the hook and they'll usually follow with “What do you mean?” By asking a second question, the contact has made an investment in the conversation. He wants to hear more.

Crafting a good hook is the key to starting a conversation. There are four elements to a great hook:

▶ **Make it short.** Since the attention span of the average adult has shrunk, you have less time to catch his or her attention. “You dream it up, we make it happen” is about the longest you would want your hook to be. The hook for my current company, “We excite audiences,” is even shorter.

▶ **Make it confusing.** Nowhere in your hook should you ever tell how you do what you do. When you start with “I'm a car dealer,” people jump to conclusions. Don't make them jump to conclusions. Make them jump to confusion. I'm sure no one has guessed what type of company “You dream it up, we make it happen” describes. That's what you want. If you can make them ask for the information, they are more likely to be interested and will remember what you said.

“You must still avoid going into a sales mode. Instead, go into a relationship-building mode.”

tice has been around in one form or another for decades. It demonstrates how to attract business contacts during brief interactions.

Let's review this idea as it applies to today's fast-paced business world. What the elevator speech actually represents is a commercial. Who wants that? If you ask someone, “What do you do?” and the first thing he or she says is, “I'm an insurance agent,” what is the general response? To run!

The average American is exposed to thousands of advertisements daily. Would you want to add to that? Very smart people invented the DVR to allow us to fast-forward through commercials. Do your contacts ever fast-forward through *you*?

This is why, for the last two decades, I have not subscribed to the elevator speech doctrine. Instead, I use

alive and kicking, if you know how to get one started. That's what the anti-elevator speech does — it starts a conversation.

I've been using the anti-elevator technique since 1985, but it wasn't until 2008 that I decided to share it in my book about the topic. The concept is easy to remember, simple to apply and intrinsically makes sense.

The Hook

The anti-elevator speech starts with a hook, or a short statement that attracts attention. Here's an example of a hook I used to promote my company in the 1990s:

When someone asked, “What do you do for a living?”

I replied, “You dream it up, we make it happen.”

When you read that, did it make you wonder: What? That is exactly

▶ **Tell people exactly what you do, but not how you do it.** If you sell high-end sports cars, you sell an experience. If you supply home loans, you sell the American dream. If you sell drill bits, you sell holes. Great business people realize they need to focus on what the customer wants, not on what they have to sell. What do you really do?


▶ **Include an action or feeling word.** People respond to emotion. If you can connect with this part of people, their interest in you will rise. In my hook, the word *dream* fulfills this requirement. In my current hook, “We excite audiences,” *excite* is a great word. Other words, such as *love, hate, push, drive, exhausted, stress* and *joy*, also work.

Let’s take a look at some other hooks:

- ▶ “We sell 15-minute vacations.” — luxury car dealer.
- ▶ “We make your special day more special.” — florist.
- ▶ “We make sure you never forget.” — photographer.

It’s also important after you present your hook to say nothing. Be quiet and wait for another question. If you receive a reply, you have the person hooked, but he’s not in the boat yet. If you go into a sales mode at this point, you’ll lose your contact. That’s where the “reel” comes in. It begins to point out how you do what you do, but it doesn’t give away the show. Let’s look at my computer company’s reel:

The anti-elevator speech takes some thinking, tweaking and practice, but it is worth the effort. If your hook doesn’t work well, rework it. For the small percentage of people who don’t respond to your hook, consider this a gift. Those people are just not interested in what you have to offer, and they have just told you so.

Good luck and may all of your contacts be successful. 

Cliff Suttle, DTM, is a member of Novi Toastmasters in Farmington Hills, Michigan. He is a professional speaker, founder of **Excite Your Audience.com** and author of *The Anti-Elevator Speech* and *How to Become Meeting Royalty*. Reach him at Cliff@CliffSuttle.com.

“Don’t make them jump to conclusions.
Make them jump to confusion.”

So let’s review “You dream it up, we make it happen” based on this four-point system. Is it short? Yes, it’s only eight words. Is it confusing? Definitely. This could describe any number of businesses or products. Does it say what I do, but not how I do it? I’ll explain this in a moment. Does it contain an action word or feeling word? Yes.

The Reel

Now it’s time to reveal what my company did. I ran a computer software company that specialized in custom software development for anything from add-ons and accounting systems to running robots. That’s *how* my company did what it did, but what we *really* sold were solutions to problems. Imagine if I had started a conversation with, “Hi, my name is Cliff. I’m CEO of a custom computer software company that specializes in database design. We work with companies ... yada, yada, yada ...” I’m bored already, and it was *my* company.

“What do you do?”

“You dream it up, we make it happen” (followed by silence).

“What do you mean?”

Reel: “We get your computers to do what you bought them to do in the first place” (followed by silence). “How do you do that?”

In my reel, I start to point out how I do what I do, but I stop short of giving away the plot. My reel places people in the world of computers, but offers no further details. I await another question. “How do you do that?” would be the ideal response. Now you’re in a conversation, but you must still avoid going into a sales mode. Instead, go into a relationship-building mode. To paraphrase John F. Kennedy: Ask not what your *contact* can do for you, but what *you* can do for your contact. The truth is most people do business with people they like. Be the likable, trustworthy and helpful person — and that will make you the successful person.

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