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THE R&D BEHIND YOUR ELEVATOR PITCH

JAMIE STACEY



The elevator pitch: it's a few mere seconds of conversation.

With all that's at stake in the traditional ninety-second do-or-die moment of self-salesmanship, it's understandable that many people fear the gut-wrenching scenario played out when the elevator doors close, the big boss turns to the suddenly self-conscious employee and asks, "Well, what do you do here?".

So it's no surprise that in an article for the *Wall Street Journal*, reporter and columnist Katherine Rosman calls the elevator pitch "*the most awkward meeting.*" However, Rosman also states that nowadays, the real concern isn't the meeting itself. Instead, it's a new technology that enables elevators to route employees to appropriate floors according to rank, making those chance meetings with top-level executives disappear – and simultaneously, the opportunity to pitch oneself to decision makers.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

In this eBook, you will learn about:

- Establishing a common connection
- Showing relevance to your audience
- Communicating your skills
- Engaging your audience



Of course, the idea behind the elevator pitch isn't going away. Talking with people who could be good connections to future positions or projects will never go out of fashion.

Fortunately, opportunities to engage in conversation that quickly sums up what you have to offer are becoming more frequent. No longer consigned to just the elevator, the pitch is now the staple of networking meetings, professional conferences and a wide array of other events that bring industry professionals together. And in our ever more connected, efficient, online world, the well-crafted "self" sales pitch is morphing into a form that fits today's communication channels.



THE ELEVATOR PITCH: A SCIENTIST'S PERSPECTIVE

Much like the phases of clinical trials, an elevator pitch for today's scientist needs to be well planned. It must include key data points and have a desired outcome in mind, e.g. the continuation of the conversation.

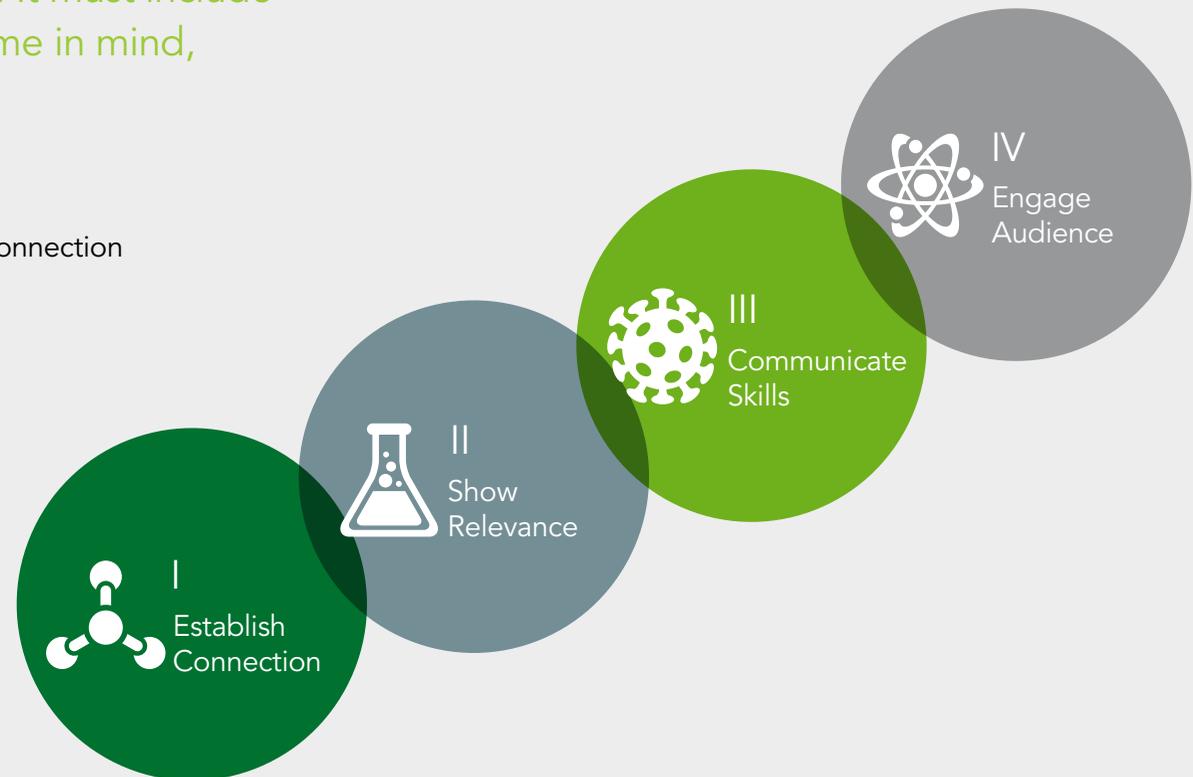
A successful pitch encapsulates four phases:

Phase I: It's memorable and establishes a common connection

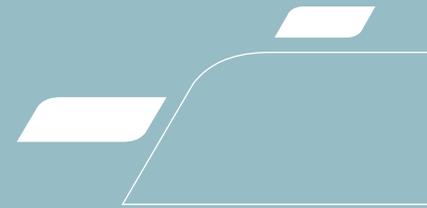
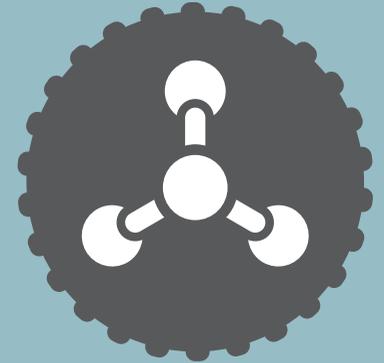
Phase II: It shows your relevance to your audience

Phase III: It communicates your skills

Phase IV: It engages your audience



PHASE I: MAKING IT MEMORABLE & ESTABLISHING A COMMON CONNECTION



Quick, give your knee-jerk first answer to the following:

Q: What's the #1 trait of a good elevator pitch?

Got the first answer that appeared in your head? That's your gut instinct answer. That's the one we want. Remember your answer like it's your card in a magic trick.

Many other characteristics, from speaking clearly to being specific, might have popped into your mind after your first answer. And it's true: all of them play a role in making your elevator pitch a success.

Regardless of how much energy you put into crafting your pitch ahead of time, when it's show time, it's a live performance before an important audience.

Now recall your answer to the question posed above. Picture it clearly in your mind.

Was this your answer?

A: It's memorable.

**WHEN IT'S SHOW
TIME, IT'S A LIVE
PERFORMANCE
BEFORE AN
IMPORTANT
AUDIENCE.**



Whatever your answer was, from now on it's *memorability*. By making your pitches *memorable*, you'll achieve the first step in successfully communicating who you are and what you have to professionally offer.

Prior to leaving this key point, however, take a moment to imagine the pitch scenario from the point of view of a hiring manager at the end of a long day at a job fair.

What are the chances a clear and detailed pitch will be successful if it's not memorable? Out of a field of 10? Out of a field of 50? Out of a field of 100?

Intimidating? Perhaps. But the good news is that memorability greatly increases the chances of your pitch having the desired outcome.

It's equally important to avoid making the mistake of launching into a sales pitch before an audience that's neither interested nor invested in what you're saying. Instead, do some research, listen carefully and find a common connection in order to establish an equal footing.

**MEMORABILITY
GREATLY INCREASES
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DESIRED OUTCOME.**



Regardless how comfortable you are talking about yourself, the first step in delivering a great elevator pitch is to concentrate on your intended audience. And for those who are even the slightest bit self-conscious, this point should not be lost.

It's essential to remember this rule: by the time you open your mouth to pitch yourself, you shouldn't be talking to a stranger anymore. Instead, you're speaking with someone who shares a similar interest or experience. And following this crucial rule gives your message a healthy dose of confidence, which will make it more powerful.

As a science professional, you're good at research. So if you're attending an event or conference, do your homework and make a plan of attack. Find out which professionals are participating in a panel, speaking at the event or are just likely to be there, and identify to whom you'll likely pitch.

Next, find something that connects you to use as an icebreaker. (Of course, if it's a chance meeting, a little listening before launching into your pitch goes a long way.) When it comes to finding common connections, think about education, career and personal interest paths that may have crossed or share a similar direction. And of course, you can also refer to mutual acquaintances as a conversation starter.

**IF YOU'RE ATTENDING
AN EVENT OR
CONFERENCE, DO
YOUR HOMEWORK
AND MAKE A PLAN
OF ATTACK.**



Make sure your pitch is memorable, your audience is interested, and that you establish a common connection.

Examples might include:

- alumni associations
- professional organizations
- pro-bono work
- community events
- travel
- sporting and fitness
- mutual acquaintances

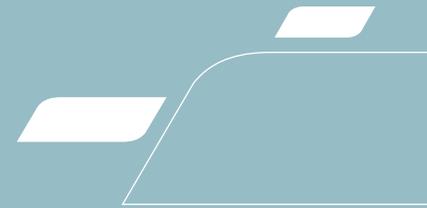
Obviously, steer well clear of topics such as religion, politics and highly controversial news items.

Finding common connections takes practice, but soon you'll be able to find one with almost anyone you meet. And by first shining the spotlight on your audience, you can choose your words for maximum impact. That in turn will make your pitch more memorable in your audience's mind.

**BY FIRST SHINING THE
SPOTLIGHT ON YOUR
AUDIENCE, YOU CAN
CHOOSE YOUR WORDS
FOR MAXIMUM IMPACT.**



PHASE II: SHOWING YOUR RELEVANCE TO YOUR AUDIENCE



Have you ever considered your brain might be hardwired to recognize power?

According to Associate Professor of Psychology at the University of Toronto, Jason Plaks, Ph.D., research indicates our brains are better at recognizing and remembering people we associate with importance and high status.

Simultaneously, according to Forbes, “Power, status and confidence are nonverbally displayed through the use of height and space.” Obviously, exuding confidence goes hand-in-hand with projecting power and status.

Now consider this: wouldn't you feel more confident if you knew you had something that would interest your listener? That would effectively make you relevant to his or her job?

**EXUDING CONFIDENCE
GOES HAND-IN-HAND
WITH PROJECTING
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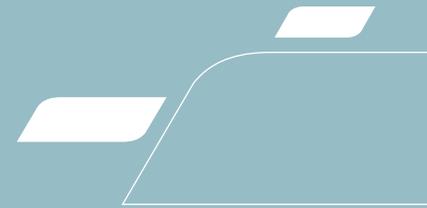
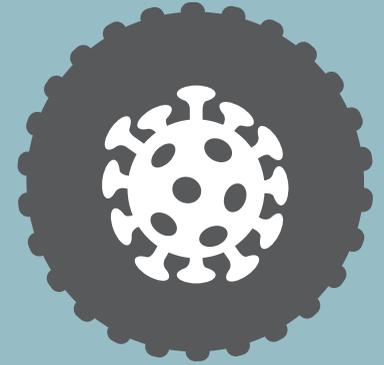
So your next task is to find out how you as a *professional* are relevant to the person you'll be meeting. Determine what you have to offer that could *benefit* this person, and you'll feel more confident launching into your pitch. Moreover, you can use your relevance as a hook to draw him or her in. For example, is he or she about to head a research project that builds on something you've worked on? Then that's your hook; your opportunity to get beyond the niceties and suddenly become of interest.

Remember: one of the best ways to be memorable is to possess something that someone else wants. By doing your research, you can determine what that is.

**FIND OUT HOW YOU
AS A PROFESSIONAL
ARE RELEVANT TO
THE PERSON YOU'LL
BE MEETING.**



PHASE III: COMMUNICATING YOUR SKILLS



Combining your knowledge and your abilities to solve problems is a skill.

And in your pitch, it's key to communicate concisely, but clearly, what you do so your audience recognizes you as a valuable asset.

But if summing yourself up feels like a daunting foreign language lesson, don't lose heart. You're not alone. Apparently, even those who hold degrees from Harvard Business School need help when the discussion turns to talking about themselves. It's actually such a widespread challenge that the school now offers an automated pitch builder that will analyze any entered pitch and even assess how much time it will take to present it.

On the school's website, Christine Sullivan, Director of Alumni Career and Professional Development, offers her take on the modern elevator pitch. According to Sullivan, in a "new 140-character world where everything is reduced to a sound bite, it's more important than ever to be able to deliver a clear and concise message."

Building concise and skills-based language into your pitch is all about sending the right signal in the right format. It's why Sullivan's message appeals to the Tweeter in all of us – and not the novelist or composer.

**YOUR PITCH IS
ALL ABOUT SENDING
THE RIGHT SIGNAL IN
THE RIGHT FORMAT.**



Forbes contributor Nancy Collamer suggests imagining yourself delivering your elevator pitch to an audience equipped with WIIFM or *What's In It for Me?* antennae. This notion of constantly considering how your pitch will be received is actually more helpful than disquieting. For instance, you might be a real whiz with pharmacokinetics, but until you describe yourself as trustworthy, ethical and effective, you could effectively be boring the same audience you intend to impress.

Just keep in mind that in this context, skills are more than what you do; *they're how you solve problems that are relevant to the person you're talking to.* Take a look at the following examples:

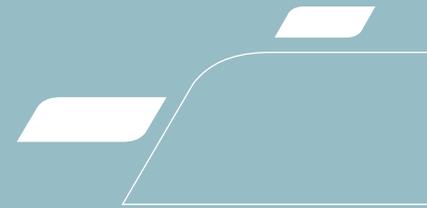
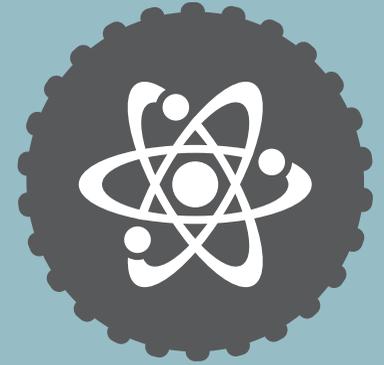
- resourceful problem-solving that allowed you to complete a project within time and budget constraints
- goal-oriented managing of multi-member teams that enabled you to resolve conflicts within the team and keep the project on track
- independent learning that provided you with the expertise to participate in a cutting-edge project

Keep your words concise, but never forget to highlight how your skills helped you address specific challenges. By giving examples that interest your audience *because they need somebody with your abilities on their team,* you'll make your pitch truly memorable.

**NEVER FORGET
TO HIGHLIGHT
HOW YOUR SKILLS
HELPED YOU
ADDRESS SPECIFIC
CHALLENGES.**



PHASE IV: ENGAGING YOUR AUDIENCE



So far, we've highlighted the nature of the elevator pitch as a live act. But once you've set the stage by establishing a common connection and your relevance to your audience, what you say next will mean success or curtains to your overall performance.

The natural ability to hold someone's attention is a gift shared by all the best live performers. Think of your favorite stand-up comics, and you've most likely felt at one time or another that each was telling you a joke in confidence.

How is that possible? Their shows were done live before hundreds, if not thousands, of audience members. Yet great performers can make you forget there's anyone else in the room. Beyond the set-ups and the punch lines, the real artists know how to think on their feet. More than anything else, comedians know timing and audience expectations. They know how to engage their audiences.

Just like them, to be successful, you must use your skills of observation to deliver your pitch in a style that engages your listener.

**GREAT PERFORMERS
CAN MAKE YOU
FORGET THERE'S
ANYONE ELSE IN
THE ROOM.**



Here are three steps to engaging your audience:

- 1. Ask more questions.** Whether it's in a polite greeting or during the hook at the opening of your pitch, asking questions and being uniquely interested in your audience's answers shows you're not a robot working through some prerecorded sales pitch.
- 2. Build on responses.** Always be prepared to incorporate your audience's responses into your pitch. Think about it: when a professional's opinion is asked for and given, it should never be ignored. So acknowledge your audience's responses and be sure to incorporate it in what you say next.
- 3. Eye-to-eye contact.** Think of everyone you could possibly share your pitch with in the span of a month. It could be five people or 50, but each of them deserves your genuine interest and attention. If your handshake, eye contact or story comes across as rehearsed or stale, you've just lost a potentially career changing opportunity by screaming you're an off-the-shelf fit when you want to be a hand-tailored match.

**ASKING QUESTIONS
AND BEING UNIQUELY
INTERESTED IN YOUR
AUDIENCE'S ANSWERS
IS THE BEST WAY
TO ENGAGE YOUR
AUDIENCE.**



Practicing Your Pitch

Now that you've mastered the four phases of developing your pitch, it's essential that you spend some time practicing it.

Consider this: have you ever seen bad stand-up comedy? If you have, you'll know it's an uncomfortable experience not soon forgotten. It also accentuates the expertise of those comedy greats you were thinking of earlier.

So how did they acquire their expertise? It's simple: they rehearsed!

Granted, there are opportunities when ad libbing makes for magical moments in several types of live performances, including the elevator pitch. But for the purposes of nailing down your best performance, you'll need a script you can practice, commit to memory, get feedback on and continue to develop as your message and audience dictate.

If you're intimidated by this process in any way, here's the good news: the more you practice, the easier it gets. At first, all you really need is determination, a mirror and some privacy. Even the most tongue-tied among us can imagine the reigns of a conversation have just fallen to them, and they must respond.

**THE MORE YOU
PRACTICE, THE
EASIER IT GETS.**



Perhaps you're thinking that watching and listening to yourself stumble over your words can be a nerve-racking experience. And it can be. But until you're comfortable communicating and experiencing your own pitch, you can't expect others to hear your message with excitement.

Good timing and tailor made content are nothing unless they're standing on the shoulders of a well-rehearsed pitch.

Now here's the secret weapon you've been waiting for. As the starting point for building the tightest, clearest elevator pitch possible, you're going to accept an invitation to speak at career day at your old middle school – or at least imagine that you are. Let's assume you're ready to apply everything discussed so far. How will you present what you do as a scientist to a roomful of 12-year-olds?

In less time than it takes to drop an eraser on your shoe, you'll find industry jargon gets you nowhere. And delivering some version of a spoken résumé only throws your pitch onto the boring pile.

Remember: 12-year-olds are brutal critics and can smell a canned performance a mile away! Interestingly, the rule of establishing a common connection couldn't apply more. By determining a shared interest, you'll be able to communicate your message in vocabulary that even 12-year-olds understand.

**BY DETERMINING
A SHARED INTEREST,
YOU'LL BE ABLE
TO COMMUNICATE
YOUR MESSAGE.**



And for many novice pitchers, this is the light bulb moment! Once you can explain what it feels like to do your job well and why you're still as excited by science as you were when you were their age, you're ready to make connections with practically any industry insider or outsider you meet.

For an important live, professional audience, one of your best resources is your recruiter. Given that you either are, or might be, in the market for a new position, you can return to the recruiter who helped you find your current job or you might choose to work with a new one.

Either way, it's just as important to pitch properly to a recruiter as it is to any employer. So when you're ready to do a test run, set up a meeting and pitch yourself. If you have a rapt audience who subsequently engages you in a conversation about your career and your goals, you did a good job.

But whatever the results, get feedback, listen closely and don't ever get defensive.

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AS IT IS TO
ANY EMPLOYER.**



Another great way to practice is on LinkedIn. Ask a connection to introduce you to somebody you would like to meet, and use your elevator pitch in a written message to that person. Recall Director Sullivan's words on clarity and brevity, then craft something powerful and go for it. If you get a thoughtful response that invites a conversation, you know your pitch is working its magic.

Practice makes perfect. So when circumstances allow, practice. Before you know it, you'll be able to take your standard self-sales-pitch and, at a moment's notice, turn it into anything from a quick half-minute conference introduction to a half hour's worth of cocktail party repartee.

**CRAFT SOMETHING
POWERFUL AND
GO FOR IT.**



Your best pitch should always leave your audience with the memory of a wonderful conversation with an interesting professional.

But remember, that's a two-way street. By establishing a common connection, communicating your relevance, highlighting how your skills help you solve problems and engaging your audience, you'll hopefully set up a meeting to continue your conversation on another day.

And for a first encounter, that's plenty. After business cards are exchanged, know when to bow out gracefully.

There's a cartoon by award-winning cartoonist for The New Yorker Liza Donnelly that might best sum up the essence of an elevator pitch. It shows a thirst-ravaged man in the middle of the desert. He's slumped over a table while an annoyed waiter with a notepad asks, "Just water?" Donnelly's cartoon is a perfect reminder that at the end of the day, there's only one thing that matters about delivery of a good elevator pitch.

It is, of course, "Does the audience get it?"

Be memorable, clear and concise, and like the comic hearing spontaneous laughter after a punch line, when your audience responds with interest, you'll know your pitch has passed its trials.

**WHEN YOUR
AUDIENCE RESPONDS
WITH INTEREST, YOU'LL
KNOW YOUR PITCH
HAS PASSED ITS TRIALS.**



SOURCES:

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

JAMIE STACEY is vice president and Americas Science Product Leader for Kelly Services, Inc. In this role, Jamie is responsible for strategic planning including gathering and prioritizing product and customer requirements for the scientific workforce solutions market. Jamie's expertise includes global system implementations, vendor management, global recruiting, employment marketing strategies, contingent labor programs, talent sourcing, and diversity & inclusion. She has a Bachelor of Science in chemistry from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and a Master of Science in organic chemistry from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.



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