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## 'Elevator speech' may take job hunt to new heights

*Find the job you've been looking for*

### Job Outlook

**A** large percentage of companies are betting on the strategy that says by research and development they will be better prepared to take advantage of a recovery.

Nearly 47 percent of 2,830 public companies tracked by research firm Multex increased spending on research and development in 2002. While research cuts were made in the technology sector, non-tech companies increased research budgets by 2.8 percent to \$110 billion from \$107 billion in 2001.

This seems to fly in the face of conventional wisdom that has so many companies pulling back and reducing investment on research and capital equipment. However, other companies believe that by going about their business as if the recovery were in full bloom, will be in a strong position when the recovery is fully underway.

Source: James E. Challenger, president of Challenger, Gray & Christmas, Inc.,

By Bill Quinlan

For O.C. Register Special Sections

**Y**ou step into an elevator and find your self face-to-face with the president of a company you've dreamed of working for. (You know the face, because you fastidiously follow trade publications and have seen this person speak at various industry-related functions.) You probably couldn't get past this person's secretary, but now you have about 16 seconds to introduce yourself and make a first impression. Are you prepared?

Admittedly, the odds of the scenario occurring are extremely rare. Nevertheless, everyone from sales representatives, to employees desiring promotions, to job seekers has been encouraged to prepare for this unlikely event.

The reason is that there is always a chance you will encounter someone who can help you in your job search when you least expect it. When the opportunity arises, you want to be ready.

Devising an "elevator speech" will prepare you to introduce yourself and explain who you are in a concise, memorable manner at a moment's notice.

Some have estimated that the average elevator trip lasts about 16 seconds. This is also the typically recommended time limit for an elevator speech. The point is not to give your listener a complete verbal resume – it is to let your listener know who you are and what you can do for him or her (or his or her company) in a quick, memorable, non-intrusive manner.

It is not like a "career objective" one might include at the beginning of a resume. The elevator speech should be friendly and conversational – perhaps even a little humorous.

Where a career objective might read, "A position designing Web pages for an advertising agency," for an elevator speech, one might say, "I'm Bob Jobseeker, Web spinner. I spin together Web pages for ad-agency clients ranging from restaurants to funeral homes."

An elevator speech should not be expected to result in a job offer, but, if delivered effectively, it could open the door to further conversation with a prospective employer.

#### Selling yourself

Pulling off an "elevator speech" requires preparation – you should not try to generate one the moment you have a chance to give it.

Jack Carroll, founder and principal of Mentor Associates and SalesLinks.com, recommends that job seekers come up with two or three sentences that summarize what they can do and for whom. Unfortunately, most job seekers don't do that, Carroll said.

SalesLinks.com offers a list of questions that salespeople might use to construct an "elevator speech" to sell their company's products or services:

- What is your product/service/solution?
  - Who is the customer it is intended for?
  - What need or problem does it address?
  - What does it do?
  - How does it work, and what are the benefits to the listener?
  - Why are you different and better than others?
- The questions can easily be adapted for a job seeker.
- What service would you perform for an employer?
  - What kind of employer would need this service?
  - How would the employer benefit?
  - What qualifications do you have that most others with your job title do not have?

The Web site offers a tool which will take the users answers to these questions and formulate them into a brief paragraph. (Visit [www.saleslinks.com/side/line/99c/11v1.htm](http://www.saleslinks.com/side/line/99c/11v1.htm).) Like Carroll's questions, the tool is designed for people or businesses selling a product, but job seekers could easily modify the resulting paragraph to help them with their elevator speech.

#### Crafting the speech

Craig Harrison, a corporate trainer, motivational speaker and job-seeking coach based in Berkeley, has written a booklet called "Riding Your Elevator Speech to the Top – Your 16 Seconds." Harrison also has a Web site at [www.craigspeaks.com](http://www.craigspeaks.com) that offers tips on creating an elevator speech, as well as sample speeches.

Harrison makes two points clear – the elevator speech is not ideal for use in elevators, nor is it a "speech." The elevator speech can be given "anywhere you have 16 seconds and a stranger," and it works best as "a conversational opener to showcase your confidence and abilities," Harrison said.

The speech could be given while standing in line for a movie, attending a convention or visiting a corner café. Harrison said he once delivered his speech on an escalator. It also works well over the telephone and can be helpful for getting past a company's "gatekeepers" to speak with prospective employers.

Obviously, the speech is easier to give in situations where one is expected to introduce oneself to strangers, such as networking events, job fairs or conventions. In more everyday settings, Harrison encourages job seekers to find other ways to start conversations with people they encounter. Offering compliments, asking nonintrusive questions, making a joke or simply smiling can all help break the ice, he said.

One of the most common questions people ask is, "What do you do?" The purpose of the elevator speech is to answer the latter question in a way that is ennobling and enlightening, Harrison said.

As an example, Harrison mentioned a gardener who would tell people that he was "turning the world green – one garden at a time." The gardener would give people a small bag of seedlings with his business card.

A receptionist who had worked at law firms, where the people who called were often under stress because of their legal situations, described herself as a "director of first impressions."

Prospective employers were impressed that she recognized the importance of her role, rather than seeing herself as someone who merely answered phones.

The elevator speech should also make it clear to the listener how the speaker would benefit an employer.

"WIFM is a radio station everybody listens to. That stands for 'What's In It For Me?' I force people to get very clear on what's in it for the listener," he said.

While many job seekers are prepared to articulate the type of jobs they hope to find, they leave it up to employers to figure out how the company will benefit from hiring them. Harrison coaches job seekers to provide the translation for the employers.

"Many people have the same job title as you, but what is unique about you?" he said.

A project manager who has a history of completing projects under budget should explain that they save the companies money. Other job seekers might explain how they expand product lines, improve quality, increase sales or deliver effective customer service.

Harrison has the job seeker examine their personal histories – what they have been known for in previous positions, what their background is, where they are from or with whom they apprenticed.

Harrison mentioned a woman who wanted a job in customer service, but whose background was in nursing. While the woman initially saw her background as irrelevant, she soon realized that many of the skills used in nursing – good listening, responding to the needs of patients, maintaining a good bedside manner – were highly transferable to a customer-service environment.

Once the speech has been delivered, the conversation should be just beginning. You can end the speech with a question to engage your listener in meaningful dialogue. If there is no time to talk, you might ask, "Shall we exchange business cards?"

For those who need additional help learning to construct a speech, Harrison also recommends becoming involved with Toastmasters International, which helped Harrison overcome an initial fear of public speaking. (Visit [www.toastmasters.org](http://www.toastmasters.org) for more information.)

#### Getting it ready for delivery

Once your speech is written, you will need to practice. Carroll recommended that job seekers memorize their speeches until they know them "as well as they know their name."

Harrison recommended calling up the answering machine at your home and leaving your elevator speech as a message. Upon listening to it, you will be able to refine it and determine which parts are memorable and which parts sound awkward. He also advised giving your speech to friends and family.

"Observe their reactions, and retool it. You've got to test it and take it on the road," he said.

Time your speech. If it is more than about 16 seconds, trim it. A longer speech will not be memorable and might annoy your listener.

When you are ready to give your

speech, keep a stack of business cards with you. You never know when you'll find yourself with in an elevator.

Bill Quinlan is a freelance writer who lives in Orange County. Readers can send e-mail to him at [quinlan@earthlink.net](mailto:quinlan@earthlink.net). Bill cannot provide job leads.



### Elevator Speech Checklist

When you think your elevator speech is ready to go, ask yourself the following questions before you try it on a prospective employer:

- Does your speech clearly convey the type of job you are seeking for?
- Does your speech tell prospective employers what your can do for them?
- Does your speech differentiate you from other candidates seeking positions with similar job titles?
- Does your speech incorporate such elements as humor, alliteration or rhyming to make it more memorable?
- Does your speech open the door to further conversation?
- Is your speech about 16 seconds long?
- Have you heard your speech on tape?
- Have you rehearsed your speech in front of people you know?
- If so, did you get the reactions you wanted?
- Have you memorized your speech so that you can give it without fumbling for the words?
- Do you have your business cards handy at all times?

You won't get hired based on an elevator speech, but you could get yourself an interview if you push the right buttons. Remember, you don't need an elevator to give an elevator speech.



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