

The Elevator story



The greater danger for most of us is not that our aim is too high and we miss it, but that it is too low and we reach it.

Michelangelo

I was a South African junior boxing champion many, many years ago and retain a love for the sport. The combined smell of resin, leather, sawdust, canvass, sweat still evokes distant memories of battles fought, won and lost. I love boxing stories. Welsh coal miner Jimmy Wilde, who fought in the early 20th century, was inducted into boxings' hall of fame in 1959 and was possibly the best, most courageous flyweight or any-weight boxer who ever lived and became known as *"the ghost with a hammer in his hand"*. Years later, heavyweight champion Muhammed Ali said *"float like a butterfly, sting like a bee..."*, expressing a sentiment similar to the description of Jimmy Wilde.

'What has boxing to do with story-telling?' you may well ask. *"I'm the ghost with a hammer in his hand"* would have served as an excellent elevator story - beginning in boxing circles, speaking volumes about Wilde's offensive and defensive capabilities, his speed and power, his mystical uniqueness.



An elevator story is telling with impact in the lift or elevator between the 7th floor and the lobby, who you are and what you do. (Equally of course it may be told in a parking lot, at a cocktail party, any gathering where there may be strangers – even weddings and funerals!). It influences the listener's perceptions and gives the listener a compelling reason to do business with you, conveys your employment-enjoyment. It is short, emotive, different, and relevant. It is designed to foster further conversation and contact. It is the captivating 'headline' to the rest of your story. And, in today's fast-paced world, we need to offer that snapping twig that is heard amongst all the other forest sounds, the 'phrase that pays', and take these windows of opportunity. A ready prepared elevator story is very useful. It is a means of effectively presenting yourself. Elevator stories express and impress. They 'elevate' you.

An elevator story can be especially effective when meeting a new prospect, or networking. When I joined my local Chamber of Commerce and Industry, all new members were given just one minute to introduce themselves and their companies. Very few were memorable, but one or two told elevator stories and their networking skyrocketed.

When offering information about your organization, your elevator story might start like this:

Petrol service station: “We treat you to the sort of pitstop experience that Michael Schumacher demands”.

eLearning institution: “We go out of our way to make sure that you succeed while you have fun”.

Retail Store chain: “You feel at home as we nurture you in our one-stop, great value and ultra-convenient stores”.

In fact, these organizational ‘elevator’ stories are unique value propositions. They offer benefits to the listener. Refer to the *Snapping Twigs* article above in chapter one.

Notice that in each case above the word ‘you’ is used – this is one of the winning words that boosts the listener’s importance (like L’Oreal’s “*because you’re worth it*”). In undertaking the time-consuming and difficult task of constructing, crafting and testing your elevator story, of finding those phrases that pay, make sure to include words that will attract the attention of, and appeal to your listener. (Find other winning words in the examples that follow).

At a personal level, an elevator story could start with:

Retail estate agent: “*I’m the person who finds families their dream home*”.

Street sweeper: “*My job is to see that you walk on clean, safe streets where you feel at home*”.

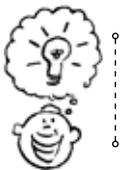
Flea Market stall owner: “*I am a flea marketer. I offer you treasures that you have searched for and cannot find elsewhere – at bargain prices*”.

Service provider: “*I go far beyond complying with set service standards, and delight with my understanding of where you are ‘at’, what you need, and delivering surprisingly quickly and effectively. You will enjoy the experience*”.

Financial Services provider: “*I make sure that you sleep like a baby at night and that you wake up to greater wealth*”.

Business consultant: “*When I visit, it’s like coming to your home - I immediately see the crack on your lounge wall that has been there for so long that you no longer see it*”.

...which might continue “*Not only are my diagnoses swift, but I also carry with me the kit that quickly and lastingly fixes your problem*”.



It’s the start that counts, as you may not have much more time than this! An elevator story is pithy, has impact, is positively framed, makes use of metaphor, contains a wow promise, and expresses your uniqueness. Simple and elegant.

Your elevator story deserves to be heard. In constructing it, be mindful of your identity (your

importance, self worth and being secure in who you are and what you do), your ability to consistently live up to its promise, and your passion and determination to walk-the-talk congruently: be what you say you are. Then wait until ‘word of mouth’ spreads and your success follows. Be mindful of the ‘Rinpoche’ diagram covered in the chapter on mindfulness above – about not ‘masking’ who you are and presenting a false image to the outside world, about discarding limiting beliefs and baggage, and presenting who you really are.

Bear in mind the Michelangelo quote at the beginning of this chapter and do justice to yourself. Too many of us ‘hide our light under a bushel’ at inappropriate times. Too many of us do not feel good enough about ourselves to construct and project our elevator story with confidence. Even at just the physical level we don’t believe we will stand up to scrutiny, which is why some suffer from extreme anxiety about their body image (body dysmorphic disorder) and many at a less intense but nevertheless real level – hence the popularity of TV shows such as ‘How to Look Good Naked’.



You may have noticed that most of the elevator story-starts above do not draw attention directly to the organisation or person. They draw attention to the solution that you offer to them.

Wander around your garden until you find an object, a metaphor, that fits with who you are.....a rock, blooming flower, tortoise.....Use the metaphor in constructing your elevator story.

Don’t be put off by this story:

An employee got into the lift without checking that it was going down to the ground floor. Instead it went up. When the doors opened on the top floor the Company President got in, and they rode down to the ground floor together.

The somewhat stern President said “Are you simply whiling away time, having fun riding up and down? Don’t you have work to do?”

The employ mumbled something inadequate, left the lift hurriedly, felt like a real fool. And afterwards was pleased that the President never ever found out who he was!¹

EXERCISE 5.1

Write, memorise and practise an ‘elevator story’ that you can personally use ‘between the ground floor and third floor’ when you are asked “Who do you work for?” It should be a short story-line perhaps containing a metaphor that captures your organisation, immediately hooks the listener, shows that you are different and better, and conveys your passion plus a benefit to the listener. (And be prepared to work for a long time at constructing your elevator story. It will not just drop into place and come naturally without lots of thinking, searching for appropriate metaphor, testing and re-testing.....).

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