



WHY NEVER TO GIVE ANOTHER ELEVATOR SPEECH

SURPRISING WAYS TO
CONNECT WITH ANYONE, ANYTIME

SAM HORN

Do you know anyone who likes listening to a long-winded speech? Me neither.

Speeches are lectures. Who wants to be lectured? That's why, from now on, when someone asks, "What do you do?" never again TELL them.

"It's not about you. It never was." – actress Diane Keaton

What?! Here's an example to show what I mean.

Years ago, I was on a speaking tour with my sons. We had a night free in Denver, so we went downstairs to the hotel lobby to ask the concierge, "What do you suggest?"

He took one look at Tom and Andrew and said, "You've got to go to D & B's."

We were from Maui at the time and had no idea what he was talking about.

We asked, "What's that?"

He must have instinctively known that trying to explain it would only confuse us. Instead, he asked a qualifying question, “Have you ever been to Chuck E. Cheese?”

My sons nodded enthusiastically.

He smiled and said, “D & B’s is like a Chuck E. Cheese... for adults.”

Bingo. Ten seconds and we knew exactly what it was and wanted to go there. They should have put him on commission.

“From now on, when someone asks, “What do you do?” never again TELL them.

Want to Connect? Turn Monologues into Dialogues

“Remember, you’re more interested in what you have to say than anyone else is.” – ANDY ROONEY

Why did that work so well? He turned a one-way elevator *speech* (aka monologue) into a two-way elevator *connection* (aka dialogue).

Here’s an example to show how you can do the same. A man approached me before a presentation and said, “I’m going to tell you something I haven’t told many people. I’m an introvert. I go to conferences like this all the time, but I often hide out in my hotel room because I’m so uncomfortable with small talk. Plus, I work in tech. My job is complicated. I can never explain it in a way that people understand it. It’s so awkward, I rather just avoid receptions and hall chat.”

I asked, “Want to brainstorm a way to introduce yourself that isn’t confusing and that can actually lead to mutually-interesting conversations and connections?”

He came back with, “Is that a rhetorical question?”

I asked, “What are the *end results* of what you do that we can see, smell, taste and touch?”

He thought about it for a moment and said something about credit cards, online purchases, financial software and computers. The light bulb went off in my mind. “Do you make the software that makes it safe for us to buy stuff online?”

He lit up. “Yes! That’s exactly what I do.”

“That’s good ... but don’t *tell* people that.”

He looked at me, puzzled. “Why not?”

“Because if you *tell* people, ‘I make the software that makes it safe for you to buy things online, they’ll go, ‘Oh,’ and that’ll be the end of the conversation. You don’t want to *close* the conversation; you want to *create* a conversation.”

“So what do I do instead?”

Ask, “Have you, a friend or a family member ever bought anything online... like on eBay, Travelocity or Amazon?” You just increased the odds they’ve *experienced* what you do or know someone who has. They may say, “Well, I never shop online. But my wife’s on Amazon all the time. She loves the free shipping.”

““ *Why did that work so well? He turned a one-way elevator speech (aka monologue) into a two-way elevator connection (aka dialogue).*

Now, confirm your connection by linking what you do to *what they just said*, “Well, our company makes the software that makes it safe for your wife to buy things on Amazon.”

Their eyes will probably light up and their eyebrows will probably go up. Both are signs of an intrigued connection.

People now *relate* to you and what you do. They have a relevant hook on which to hang a conversation and are more likely to want to continue the conversation. All in sixty seconds and all because you engaged them instead of lectured them. “

He actually got a little misty-eyed and told me, “I can’t wait to get home after this conference.”

“Why?”

“I can finally tell my eight year old son what I do in a way he understands it.”

That’s the power of turning an elevator *speech* into an elevator *connection*.

How about you? What do you and your co-workers say when asked, “What do you do?” Do your responses cause crunched-up eyebrows (a sure sign of confusion)?

If so, you’re closing doors and losing opportunities for yourself and your organization.

Why not turn your next staff meeting into a brainstorming session where everyone crafts

two-way introductions that open doors and engage people in mutually-rewarding conversations that are a win for all involved?

Are you thinking, “Okay, I can see how this two-way approach is a better way to meet people at conferences, business lunches, and networking events. How about when I’m giving a speech or trying to sell something? I’ve got to explain what I’m talking about then, right?”

““ The old-fashioned suggestion to “tell people what you’re going to tell them, tell them, and then tell them what you told them” is bad advice.

Never Again TELL People What You're Going To Tell Them

“The only danger is not to evolve.” – JEFF BEZOS

The old-fashioned suggestion to “tell people what you’re going to tell them, tell them, and then tell them what you told them” is bad advice. Here’s a more evolved way to open a presentation or pitch.

I had the privilege of being the pitch coach for Springboard Enterprises, which has helped entrepreneurs such as Robin Chase of ZipCar and Gail Goodman of Constant Contact receive \$6.8 billion in funding. A Springboard participant named Kathleen Callendar of PharmaJet walked up to me at one of their trainings and said, “I’ve got good news and I’ve got bad news.”

I asked, “What’s the good news?”

“I’ve been given the opportunity to pitch to a roomful of investors at the Paley Center in New York City.”

“That is good news. What’s the bad news?”

“I’m scheduled for 2:30 in the afternoon and I only have ten minutes. *You can’t say anything in ten minutes.* There’s no way I can explain our business model, team credentials, and financial projections in ten minutes.”

I said, “Actually, you don’t have ten minutes. As you mentioned, you’re speaking after lunch. Those investors will have already heard sixteen other presentations. You have sixty seconds, max, to prove you’re worth listening to.”

She said, “How is that possible?”

Here’s how it’s possible. This is the sixty-second opening that helped Kathleen win funding and be selected as one of BusinessWeek’s Most Promising Social Entrepreneurs in 2010.

“Did you know there are more than 1.8 billion vaccinations given every year?

Did you know up to a third of those are given with reused needles?

Did you know we are spreading and perpetuating the very diseases we are trying to prevent?

Imagine if there were a painless, one-use needle for a fraction of the current cost.

You don’t have to imagine it; we’ve created it. In fact, in this article . . .”

Are you intrigued? Do you want to know more? That means Kathleen Callender just got what she cared about in your mental door.

Let's put this in perspective. Before we changed her opening, Kathleen started with an explanation of what her business does—which is how most of us have been taught to start our communications. The problem with that is, explanations are often boring and confusing... and bored, confused people don't keep listening and they don't say yes.

Furthermore, she was using hard-to-understand technical jargon to describe her company's product, something about a “medical delivery device for subcutaneous inoculations.” A what?!

By replacing a complicated explanation with this concise “Did you know...?” opening, she got eyebrows up and smartphones down *in the first minute*. Here's how you can do the same.

“What startling research can you introduce in the first minute that would cause your listeners to think ...”

1. DON'T TELL. ASK THREE "DID YOU KNOW?" QUESTIONS.

What startling research can you introduce in the first minute that would cause your listeners to think, "Really?! I didn't know it was that big, that bad, that much, that fast?"

What recent data could you reference that offers fresh insight into the problem you're solving, the issue you're addressing, the need you're meeting, the gap you're filling? What respected resource can you reference that shows a sudden shift in a trend, a dramatic increase in scope, an unexpected and important change in regulations or your target demographic?

Are you wondering, "How do I find these eyebrow-raising statistics and studies?" GTS it. Google That Stuff.

Just search "What are surprising statistics about [your industry]?" or "What is recent research about [your topic]?" Up will come links to articles, studies, and websites that get YOUR eyebrows up. And if you're an expert about this issue and it gets your eyebrows up (a sure sign of intrigue), it is likely to get the eyebrows up of your listeners, viewers, and readers.

2. LINK THE WORD “IMAGINE” TO THREE BENEFITS OF YOUR PRODUCT, PROGRAM, OR PROCESS THAT MEET THAT NEED OR SOLVE THAT PROBLEM.

Why is the word “imagine” so powerful? It pulls people out of their preoccupation. They’re no longer distracted; they’re picturing your point. They’re mentally engaged instead of wondering “How long is this going to take?” or “When’s the next break?”

Let’s go back to Kathleen’s example. What did her decision-makers care about? What were they concerned about? How was her product an innovative way to disrupt the industry SOP (standard operating procedure) and change the current, ineffective way of doing business?

Well, no one likes painful inoculations, so we clarified they were “painless.” People were freaked out about the reused needles, so we indicated they were “one-use.” And investors almost always care about money so we pointed out her invention was a “fraction of the current cost.”

Do you see how we distilled a lengthy explanation into an “Imagine this” ideal scenario that was one succinct sentence? That’s your goal. In an age of blah-blah-blah INFObesity, you will give yourself a competitive edge by condensing and crafting the value of what you’re proposing into an “Imagine this” sentence that causes decision-makers to think, “Who wouldn’t want that?!”

3. BRIDGE WITH, “YOU DON’T HAVE TO IMAGINE IT, WE’VE CREATED IT.”

Now you need to prove that what you’re proposing isn’t pie in the sky or speculative; it’s a done deal and you (and your team) are ready to deliver it. Introduce evidence and precedence such as:

- **A case study** with data that demonstrates the validity of what you’re recommending.
- **A benchmark** that shows this has been done somewhere else, successfully.
- **A testimonial** from a satisfied client who will vouch for your results.
- **A quote** from a respected expert who lends credibility to your claims.

Why does this “Did You Know?” opening work so well? Because the quickest way to engage nay-sayers is to introduce something new they don’t know—but would like to know. They’re now smarter than they were a moment ago. They’re motivated to give you their full attention because you’ve just proven you will be a good use of their time and mind.

By leading with provocative questions, you’ve replaced mind-numbing INFObesity with an intriguing opening that earns interest and respect. While everyone else is still telling people what they’re going to tell them, you have already given yourself a competitive edge by bypassing perfunctory remarks and quickly creating curiosity and mutually-rewarding relevance.

Want another way to transform one-way speeches into two-way connections?

Replace Explanations with “Have You Ever” Questions

“**Time is the new money.**” – RICHARD BRANSON

In our short attention world, (Nancy F. Koehn of Harvard discovered that goldfish have longer attention spans than we do ... “Look, a squirrel”) I believe, “Time is the new trust.”

So you can trust that this manifesto will produce real-world results for you and your colleagues, let me ask a few questions.

- Do you have a complicated job, product, idea, or issue?
- Is it hard to get across its value and convince people it’s worth supporting, approving, or funding?
- Do you find the longer you try to explain it, the more confused people become?
- Will you be giving a report, making a sales presentation or pitch, or meeting potential clients, employers, or investors in the next few weeks?

If you answered yes to any of the above questions, promise yourself you will not try to EXPLAIN your priority project or TELL people how important and valuable it is.

Instead, ask “Have you ever” questions that put people in the scene of the problem your product, process, or project is solving. Here’s an example of what I mean.

I was judging a pitch contest at the California Women’s Conference, called *The Dolphin Tank*, which is a kinder, gentler version of the TV show *Shark Tank* or *Dragons Den*.

I reviewed the business plans in advance and wasn’t initially impressed with a product called Car*Go—described as a “hook you put in your car to hang your purse on.” I thought, “You’ve got to be kidding. You’re building a business around a hook that holds a handbag?”

However, inventor/entrepreneur Cari Carter did a brilliant job of winning us at hello instead of losing us at hello. When it was her turn to pitch, she hauled a full size car seat to the front of the room, set it down on the floor next to her, and placed a purse and cellphone on it. She then faced the group, wrapped her fingers around an imaginary steering wheel and started “driving” while asking these questions:

“Have you ever been driving along and you had to STOP all of a sudden?”

“Ask ‘Have you ever’ questions that put people in the scene of the problem your product, process, or project is solving.”

Did your cell phone or purse fall on the floor, and you're scrabbling around trying to retrieve it with one hand while trying to drive with the other?

Imagine never having to worry about that again. Imagine ... ”

She didn't even have a chance to finish. A man in the audience stood up and called out, *"I'll take two. One for my wife and one for my daughter."*

Kudos to Cari Carter. She went from a skeptical "Really?!" to an enthusiastic "I'll take two" in thirty seconds. That's the power of replacing a hard-to-understand explanation with an easy-to-identify with "Have you ever?" opening.

Here's how you can use this opening to quickly get across the value of what you're suggesting or requesting in sixty seconds or less.

Props. Cari made us look. If we're not looking at a speaker, we're not listening to that speaker. Instead of the audience in that cavernous Long Beach Convention Center ballroom having their heads down texting or checking email, everyone was watching Cari lug that car seat to the front of the room and wondering, "What are you going to do with that?" Instead of being just another talking head (ho hum), Cari visually intrigued us from the get-go.

What can you hold up, demonstrate, or show us so we're compelled to look at you? If you're selling a receipt aggregating app (a what?!), perhaps you could bring a carry-on suitcase with you to the stage and rummage through it, searching for wrinkled-up paper receipts.

Act out the problem you're solving. Cari quickly established commonality by reenacting a situation many of us had experienced. She bypassed the traditional elevator speech (yawn), and put us in the scene of a real-life situation where something went wrong. We all pictured a time that happened to us, and voluntarily, Socratically decided we wanted her product so we could prevent that from happening again.

Back to you. If you're selling a snow removal service, don't explain your price and packages; mimic using a snow shovel to dig into a huge pile of snow and toss it over your shoulder.

“If you want to connect with people, if you want them to care about what you care about, turn their confusion into clarity.”

Ask “Have you ever” questions. Cari didn’t elicit an eye roll and waste her time and ours by telling us what she was going to tell us. She jumped right into questions that engaged us and caused us to identify with—and connect with—everything she was saying.

Back to you. Could you ask, “Have you ever not been reimbursed for business trip expenses because you couldn’t find your receipts?” or “Have you ever thrown out your back or had an emergency trip to the hospital because you hurt yourself shoveling wet, heavy snow?”

Steve Jobs said, “A lot of people don’t know what they want until you *show* it to them.” I agree. People understand what they see. Think about it. When something that was previously confusing suddenly becomes crystal clear, what do people say? *“Ohhh... I see now.”*

If you want to connect with people, if you want them to care about what you care about, turn their confusion into clarity. Act out a frustrating situation with a prop while asking “Have you ever?” questions so they’ll think, “Been there, done that, don’t want to do it again.”

You’ll know you’ve succeeded when people say, “That just happened to me yesterday” or “Tell me more!” That means you achieved your goal of creating a genuine connection, and it’s because you asked instead of explained and turned one-way INFObesity into two-way intrigue.

In Conclusion, What Do We Want to CHANGE?

“We’re all in a race to be relevant.” – ELEANOR CLIFT

Never again give an elevator SPEECH. Never again explain what you do and/or what you’re trying to get a YES to. Never again “Tell people what you’re going to tell them.”

Instead, ask instead of explain. Open with “Do you know ... ?” “Did you know ... ?” or “Have you ever ... ?” questions that transform monologues into dialogues.

Turn confusion into clarity and connection by creating relevant, two-way communications that add value for all involved. 📌

Info



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR | Sam Horn, Founder/CEO of The Intrigue Agency, is on a mission to help people create quality, one-of-a-kind communications that scale impact. Her TEDx talk on INTIRUGE, and books *POP!*, *Tongue Fu!* and Washington Post bestseller *Got Your Attention?*, have been endorsed by Tony Robbins, Dan Pink, Stephen Covey, Miki Agrawal and Marshall Goldsmith; featured in *The New York Times*, *Forbes, Inc.*, and on NPR; and presented to National Geographic, NASA, Boeing, Cisco, Intel, Capital One, YPO, EO and Accenture. Learn more at www.SamHorn.com

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