

Creating a Powerful Elevator Pitch

Your elevator pitch is just the start of the conversation

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It happens daily: You meet someone standing in line for coffee, at a job fair, or at a networking event, and they turn to you and ask, “So, what do you do?” How do you respond?

An elevator pitch is what we call that brief response that introduces you to a stranger. It might actually happen in an elevator! The goal of the elevator pitch is to be succinct and interesting enough that the other person will want to continue talking to you, and a possible professional relationship can develop.

Creating Your Elevator Pitch

For veterans, the elevator pitch might feel awkward and unnatural. It can feel like bragging to sell yourself in this way. These feelings are completely real – you likely didn’t have to “pitch” yourself when you were in uniform. Now, in your civilian role, you should help others see your value when you don’t have a uniform to reflect your history and career. This is a natural state of discomfort.

For civilians, the elevator pitch is more natural. We are accustomed to speaking about ourselves and promoting our value to new contacts. With practice, you will get better at delivering your elevator pitch, and it will feel less awkward and salesy.

Your elevator pitch should not sound like a script that you are reciting. Instead, it should flow comfortably in a conversational tone. To create your elevator pitch, follow these three fundamental steps:

1. **State who you are and what you do, avoiding military jargon.** Assume you are speaking to a civilian who has no understanding of your MOS. If you’ve left your military service, what are you doing now? What do you want to do? The start of your elevator pitch should be succinct and focused.
2. **What makes you interesting/unique?** This is your *why* – why are you passionate about your work or goals? Why have you committed so much of your life and work to this field? Why should someone be interested in you?
3. **Share a story or illustration.** Finally, share a quick example to illustrate the work you do and what you’re interested in finding. The story will help the listener paint a picture of what you did and what you’re looking for. Stories are powerful tools to get others to remember you!

Here are two examples of how your elevator pitch might work:

My name is Mike Smith. I spent 18 years in the United States Army, specializing in the technical aspects of warfare. While the work I did was specific to our goals and missions, what I learned was that I have great project management skills and a passion for leading people. I am now looking for a career opportunity that allows me to help organize a system or a team and create measurable results! For example, in one situation while I was in uniform, I faced a situational challenge that required I pull together resources with very little notice and planning. I used my people-skills to get others on board for the mission, I kept a close eye on the limited resources we had available, and together we got the job done!

My name is Jeff Jones and I’m a personnel specialist. I learned personnel management and human resources skills while in the Marines for 10 years. In that job, I focused on helping individuals identify a career path in the Marines that would leverage their skills,

but also tap into their passions and goals. I really enjoy the mentoring aspect of human resources work! I had the opportunity to mentor many young Marines through their military career, and seeing them succeed today gives me great pride and satisfaction.

Delivering Your Elevator Pitch with Confidence

Half the impact of an elevator pitch is *what* you say; the other half is *how* you say it. When introducing yourself to someone new, they will not only assess the words you use to introduce yourself, but how you communicate your personal brand.

When introducing yourself, remember to:

1. Be genuine. If you are a naturally shy person, don't try to be a clown when meeting people for the first time. Stay true to yourself, and let the best of you come forward when meeting someone new. Embellishing or exaggerating is never a good idea, especially when initiating a potential business relationship.
2. Be enthusiastic. Consider that every new meeting could be an interview – you never know who you are speaking to. When you share enthusiasm you come across as confident and interesting.
3. Listen. Pay attention to the words the other person uses and the tone in which they speak. Nod your head in agreement to help build rapport, and if you don't understand what they are saying, ask for clarification.
4. Watch your body language. Maintain good eye contact and smile if the conversation is pleasant. When shaking hands at the greeting or departure, offer a firm, but not bone-crushing, handshake.
5. Follow up. Consider following up by connecting online or by email. Think about what a natural next step could be: meet for coffee or have a phone call.

Your elevator pitch is just the start of the conversation. Ask the other person about themselves and offer more details and information as the conversation evolves. A powerful and succinct elevator pitch can launch a healthy and rewarding professional relationship, so spending the time to get it right and practice it will yield great results!

Developed through the VFW's collaboration with Lida Citroën of the international brand strategy firm LIDA360, this article is part of the VFW's expanding education and transitioning services, resources and [webinars](#) designed to provide service members and veterans transitioning to the civilian workforce with an opportunity to learn about personal branding and strategies for navigating the job search process. To learn more about Lida's commitment to the veteran community, [check out her recent TEDX talk](#).

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