

You've probably heard of the "elevator pitch", a speech you would make to someone about yourself if you happened to share a 20-30 second elevator ride with him. Most people never expect to find themselves in an elevator with the CEO, so they never bother to create this short sales pitch for themselves as a job candidate. However, doing so can be very helpful to you during your job search.

SO TELL ME ABOUT YOURSELF

Many hiring managers start off interviews by saying, "So, tell me a little about yourself." This moment is your time to shine, but if you're not prepared, this simple question can be fairly nerve-wracking. What does the other person want to know? Where you went to school? Where you're from? How many kids you have? If you don't prepare an answer ahead of time, you may end up providing the interviewer with a lot of information he doesn't need, while omitting things that would be helpful for him to know. Hint: keep it professional and about your career progression; don't get sucked into the trap of talking about your personal life.

HELLO MY NAME IS...

Your elevator pitch will depend on where you are in your career and where you're trying to go. Just like your resume, it needs to take into account the audience who will be hearing it. If you're introducing yourself to someone at a networking event, you should offer them a brief snapshot of who you are as a professional, today. For instance, "Hi, my name is Joe Smith. I'm a technology consultant who has spent most of my career designing Web sites and networks for private and public sector companies in the mid-Atlantic. I'm currently looking for a role as an internal IT manager to cut down on my heavy travel schedule."

IN THE INTERVIEW

Let's say the person on the other end of your pitch likes you enough to get you an interview with their buddy. When you get to the interview, the hiring manager asks you to tell him about yourself. You would then adjust your elevator speech to be more relevant to an industry-specific audience. For instance, you might say, "Hi, my name is Joe Smith. I started designing Web sites while I was working on my history major in college, and at about the time of my graduation I realized that the job market valued my IT skills more than my history degree. I went to work for a consulting company, and during the 15 years I've been there, I've done a little of everything from Web design to help desk support to network administration. Your IT manager position caught my eye because it would allow me to utilize a lot of the different skill sets I've had to pick up during my years as a consultant."