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October 16, 2018
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Forbes / Leadership

OCT 26, 2011 @ 03:32 PM 76,878 👁

How To Speak With Authority

**Jenna Goudreau**, FORBES STAFF ✓*I write about business and women's leadership.* [FULL BIO](#) ✓

“Women are the majority of the population but still a minority voice,” says Christine Jahnke, a speech coach and the author of *The Well-Spoken Woman*. She’s worked with some of the [most powerful women](#) in the nation, advising [Hillary Clinton](#)’s presidential campaign and [Michelle Obama](#)’s first international speech, to help them command authority in any setting.

While Jahnke’s tips are generally gender-neutral, professional women may want to pay particular attention: Naturally high voices tend to make you seem younger, says Jahnke, so “some women may be starting a couple steps behind.” Whether you hope to ace a meeting, improve your presentation skills or project more power and authority when speaking with business associates, Jahnke offers the following guidelines.

 [Gallery](#)

Learn From The Pros: 10 Tricks To Project Authority



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According to Jahnke, speaking from a place of strength and authority is mostly a mental game. “Once you are in the room, recognize that you belong there,” she says, noting that women often approach meetings and presentations [as if they’re being tested](#). When you feel confident and comfortable, it’s infectious. Furthermore, Jahnke cautions against avoidant behaviors like sitting in the back, hiding behind furniture and keeping your head down.

Stand like a champion.

“Giving presentations and making speeches is very physical,” says Jahnke. When on stage or standing before a group of people, she advises using the champion stance: position one foot in front of the other, place your weight on the back foot, hold your head up, drop your shoulders back, lean your torso slightly forward and smile.

Sit with your elbows on the table.

When sitting down, Jahnke counters your mother’s advice: Get your elbows *on* the table. “Don’t put just your hands on the table; it looks [too lady-like](#),” she warns. Instead, sit up straight, lean forward and place your forearms on the table-top. Whether in person or on camera, maintain eye contact with fellow speakers or the camera lens.

Tailor your message to the audience.

When approaching a presentation, says Jahnke, a common mistake is asking: What am I going to say? Instead, she advises considering: What does my audience need to hear, and how much do they know about my topic? [Melinda Gates](#), co-chair of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, is especially good at understanding her audience and telling stories in a way that transports them to remote parts of the world, so that they can experience and visualize philanthropy’s impact.

Get to the point.

“Your competition is the attention span,” Jahnke says. Rambling, unfocused

breathe. Nooyi had to learn a slower, more effective pace that lent more authority to her ideas. Jahnke says that broadcasters usually speak at a pace of 150 words per minute, which is conversational yet metered.

Utilize your vocal tools.

“The worst thing you could do is drone on using a flat monotone with no variance in pitch or pace,” cautions Jahnke. She believes the voice is one of the most underused tools and can be manipulated to project power and incite interest. Optimize it by using a mid-range pitch, inflection to offer emphasis and variety, a volume that attracts attention but is not overly loud, pauses after important sentiments and clear pronunciation so that words are not lost.

Cut out fill-in words.

Ums, uhs, hms, you knows and likes will dilute your message and undermine your power. These “fill in” words may make you seem nervous, unprepared or unfocused. Oftentimes people use them because they are afraid of dead space, but in fact a pause is more powerful, says Jahnke.

Inject humor and warmth.

Female leaders like IMF chief [Christine Lagarde](#) and [Facebook](#) FB +0% COO [Sheryl Sandberg](#) are excellent examples of women who are articulate and well-spoken but also utilize humor to connect with the audience. They project an ease and optimism that invites in listeners and establishes credibility.

Let go of self-doubt.

“Be Tina Fey--not Liz Lemon,” says Jahnke. Trusting in yourself and in the importance of what you have to say goes a long way in gaining the same trust of others. Fey’s *30 Rock* alter ego Liz Lemon is plagued by [self-doubt](#) and self-consciousness that weakens her authority. Jahnke suggests building confidence by finding opportunities to practice your speaking skills, be it volunteering to be a



THE BLOG 11/09/2011 04:42 pm ET | Updated Jan 09, 2012

Public Speaking Tips For Women



By Tara Sophia Mohr

You are brilliant.

Your ideas? Incredible. Your questions? Insightful. Your critiques of the status quo? Right on.

I keep meeting brilliant women like you, with powerful ideas to contribute, important businesses and organizations to build, provocative questions to share. But so often, the way they communicate fails to command power. They equivocate, apologize, and look away as they speak.

I do this too. We are subtly undermining ourselves with their words. As a result, our ideas aren't having the impact they could.

Here are eight ways you might be undermining yourself with your words—and eight ways to stop:

1. Drop the “just:” “I’m just wondering ...” “I just think ...” “I just want to add ...” “Just” demeans what you have to say. “Just” shrinks your power. It’s time to say goodbye to the justs.

2. While you are at it, drop the “actually.” “I actually have a question.” “I actually want to add something.” “Actually” communicates a sense of surprise that you have something to say. Of course you want to add something. Of course you have questions. There’s nothing surprising about it.

3. Don’t tell us why what you are about to say is likely to be wrong. We are still starting sentences with, “I haven’t researched this much but ...” “I’m just thinking off the top of my head but ...” “You’ve clearly been studying this longer than I have, but ...”

We do this for lots of reasons. We don’t want to [appear arrogant](#). We aren’t totally sure about what we are saying. Or we fear being wrong, and so we buffer the sting of a critical response by saying up front, “I’m not totally standing



No matter what the reason, doing this takes away from the power of your voice. Time to change the habit.

4. Don't tell us you are going to "just take a minute" to say something. Often, in presentations or meetings, I hear women say, "I'd like to ask you to take just a minute to consider this idea" or "Now, I'm going to take just a few minutes to tell you about our product." Think about how much stronger it sounds to simply say, "I'd like to tell you about our product."

Go ahead and only take a minute, if that's appropriate, but skip using the phrase "just a minute" in a talk or presentation. It sounds apologetic and implies that you don't think what you are about to say is worthy of time and attention.

5. Don't make your sentences sound like questions. Women often raise the pitch of their voice at the end of a sentence, making it sound like a question. Listen to your own language and that of women around you, and you are likely to notice this everywhere. Unsurprisingly, speaking a statement like a question diminishes its power. Make statements sound like statements; drop the tone lower at the end.

6. Don't substitute a question for a statement. You might think you are "suggesting" increasing the marketing budget by asking, "What about increasing the marketing budget?" in a meeting, but your colleagues aren't likely to hear an opinion (and certainly not a well thought-out opinion) in your question. When you have something to say, don't couch it in a question.

Sometimes, of course, there are strategic reasons to use a question rather than a statement: to gently introduce an idea to a group that is likely to be resistant to it, for example. But women often turn to questions rather than statements because we are avoiding conflict, avoiding visibility, avoiding claiming power. We use questions because we have old stories about it being dangerous or inappropriate to state our ideas definitively, and we can't see how [sharing our perspective boldly and directly could actually hugely benefit our careers](#). Time to let the old stories go.

7. Punctuate and Pause. Imagine sitting across a table listening to a woman share this: "We are working hard on this, because we want to get the business up in running by 2012, specifically April 2012, which is the target date, and we are very optimistic that with the right financing we can get there, and so that is why I've been approaching different investors every day..."

You know this type of communication: clauses get piled on top of one another, the speaker interrupting their own thoughts with digressions.

When we don't feel we have the right to take up space in a meeting or conversation, or when we are nervous, we tend to rush, and never leave a moment without words. Brief pauses between your sentences connote confidence and a sense of comfort in the role of speaker. They allow the listener to absorb what you are saying and give you a moment to gather a deep breath and collect your thoughts.

How does it feel, in contrast, to imagine listening to this: "We are working hard on this. We want to get the business up and running by April 2012. We are very optimistic that with the right financing we can get there. I am approaching different investors every day."

All that has changed is punctuation, but speaker number two sounds calmer and more on top of her plan. Punctuate and pause.



doesn't sit right with you in your heart; They are about giving up the self-diminishing patterns that stem from being afraid of power or from believing what our inner critics have to say, and as a result, sharing our ideas tentatively.

So, how do you begin changing your speech? Start by increasing your awareness of the unhelpful speech patterns you currently use and be mindful of your intention to speak differently.

I love speaking trainer [Jeanne Marie Grumet's](#) recommendation to take these changes one at a time. Focus on one that stands out to you. For example, for a few weeks you might just work on noticing when you use a question when you really have a statement or opinion to share and work on changing that. Then you might shift to noticing your "justs" and eliminating them.

The world needs your ideas. It's time to start sharing them fully, loudly, boldly, slowly — without diminishment or apology.

[Tara Sophia Mohr](#) is an expert on women's leadership and wellbeing. Her work has been featured on *The Today Show*, CNN.com, ForbesWoman, and numerous other publications. She is the creator of the free, downloadable [10 Rules for Brilliant Women Workbook](#).

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Tara Sophia Mohr

Expert on women's leadership and wellbeing

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Public Speaking By Lawyers

By Steven J. Matz

"Half the world is composed of people who have something to say and can't and the other half who have nothing to say and keep on saying it."

—Robert Frost

We live in a world of speeches. Short speeches as in every day conversation, medium length ones as in commercials, and tediously long speeches as we listen to political campaign rhetoric or continuing legal education moderators. As we consciously evaluate communications which keep us interested and those we tune out, we take the first step toward being more effective communicators.

The effect of a good speech cannot be overestimated. Cicero's orations drove the tyrant Cataline from Rome; a single speech at the 1984 Democratic Convention by Mario Cuomo thrust him into contention for a presidential nomination he continues to disclaim.

Public speaking by lawyers serves a variety of purposes. It gets an attorney out of the office and into the public eye. It keeps one in touch with community sentiment. It assists in educating the public concerning their legal rights and responsibilities, reduces negative stereotypes and increases public awareness as to the availability of the legal system to redress societal problems.

"My duty is to speak. I have no desire to be an accomplice."

—Emile Zola

Once you have decided to attempt public speaking, the next question is how do you get started? There are a variety of groups an attorney can target, and a number of ways to gain an invitation to speak to a particular group. Most County Bar Associations maintain a Speakers Bureau which places attorneys in schools or before organizations which have requested speakers. Charitable organizations, chambers of commerce, fraternal organizations, professional organizations, support groups, and religious organizations are all excellent sources for public speaking engagements. Your membership and active participation in those organizations increases the likelihood that you will be perceived as a resource and will be asked to speak. It is a given however that the primary purpose for joining an organization is to serve it and the community. In the absence of such motivation, don't join at all.

Another excellent source for speaking opportunities is your existing clients. By actively supporting the community and charitable organizations supported by your clients, you may gain insight regarding the needs of your clients and may organize presentations which address both your client's existing and future requirements. Arranging seminars or lecturing before a client organization not only reinforces client perceptions of you as an expert, but also provides an excellent opportunity to engage in cross-selling of your firm's services.

"In speech-making, as in life, not failure, but low aim, is crime."

—Wayland Maxfield Parrish

There are many elements which must be combined successfully in order to result in effective public speaking. Your attitude, body language, voice, clothes and mental preparation all have an effect on how your presentation will be received before you ever say a word.

The more we can educate the public as to their legal rights and responsibilities, the more our reputation as a profession will improve.

Understanding your audience, preparing and targeting your message, the delivery of your presentation and your responsiveness to questions all play an important role. Visual aids, physical arrangements and some thought as to what you will do both before and after you speak will all serve to either increase or decrease your audience's perception of you as a voice of authority.

"No speech can be entirely bad if it is short enough."

—Irving S. Cobb

Most treatises on the subject list what are termed the biggest mistakes in public speaking. My candidates for this list include the following:

- An imprecise purpose.
- Lack of organization.
- Too much information.
- Not enough support for your ideas and concepts.

- Monotonous tone and sloppy speech.

- Not anticipating the real needs of your audience.

To paraphrase Samuel Johnson, the two most important powers of a speaker are to make new things familiar and familiar things new.

"Things that are true and things that are just have a natural tendency to prevail over their opposites, so that if decisions of Judges are not what they ought to be, the defeat must be due to the speakers themselves and they must be blamed accordingly."

—Aristotle

Once you have gained the skills and confidence necessary to effective public speaking, seek out an opportunity to utilize those skills. The entire Bar is served when attorneys share their knowledge and expertise with the public. The more we can educate the public as to their legal rights and responsibilities, the more our reputation as a profession will improve. Effective public speaking not only challenges your audience to raise their level of knowledge and sophistication in a particular area, but challenges you to be both knowledgeable

and innovative in your presentation. If you constantly strive to improve your communication skills and test those skills in a public arena, you will be doing yourself, your practice and your profession a great service. ■

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LAW DAY SPEECH WINS NATIONAL AWARD

Dr. Eric R. Gilbertson, President of Saginaw Valley State University, has won first place in a national competition. The American Bar Association has presented the 1991 Judge Edward R. Finch Law Day U.S.A. Speech Award to Dr. Gilbertson for his Law Day speech, entitled "Atticus Finch and Arnold Becker: Lawyers and Other Rogues and Heroes." Dr. Gilbertson will receive the first place award of \$500 and a recognition plaque.

Dr. Gilbertson made his remarks in a speech given at the annual Saginaw County Bar Association Law Day awards dinner on May 1, 1991. The Finch Law Day U.S.A. speech awards competition is sponsored annually to foster a deeper appreciation and understanding of the place of law in American life and to accord national recognition to the winning speech as the most outstanding in content and effectiveness in furthering the purposes of Law Day U.S.A.

Family Law Section

You are invited to join the steadily growing Family Law Section of the State Bar of Michigan. Membership entitles you to receive the Family Law Journal ten times per year (which includes the most recent developments in the area of family law) and discounts on all Family Law Section seminars. The Section is actively involved in proposing and reviewing new legislation and court rules, and takes an active role in bringing about positive change in the area of family law. We encourage your participation. To join send a \$25 check payable to the State Bar of Michigan, 306 Townsend Street, Lansing, MI 48933-2083 for the annual membership dues.

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THE SMARTEST MARKETER

What New Associates Should Know About Marketing

BY ALLISON WOLF

Don't kick yourself for skipping the marketing elective as an undergrad. Marketing yourself as a lawyer is something you can learn as you go. To help get you started, here are some things your new bosses would like you to know about building business.

Learning to market yourself and your services is about taking control of your career. In a law firm, it is about proving yourself to management and showing you can add value to the firm, too. Developing marketing skills just takes an open mind, a genuine interest in clients, and a willingness to learn.

Understand that Law Firms Are Businesses

Law firms are in the business of selling legal services. The hours you will be billing are the crucial revenue generators. The clients you serve are vital to the firm's prosperity. Partners are the business owners. And they want associates to know what is involved in

making the business succeed. "I wish they understood at a gut level that this is a business and that we have to always be thinking and acting like one," says Richard Sybert, managing partner of Gordon and Rees.

One day, if you build a strong practice and become a contributor of clients and net profits to the firm, you too can become a business owner. I'm sure you already know this. Sybert's point is that you don't just need to know it. You have to act on it.

As an associate, your job is to slowly and steadily develop your legal knowledge and abilities while at the same time learning how to effectively manage your practice, build strong client relationships and generate business. You don't have to do this overnight. You have a good seven to ten years to get there, but don't wait to get started.

Invest Early and Frequently

Marketing and business development is like contributing to your retirement savings plan: You need to invest early and frequently to make the biggest return. Hugh Gottschalk, managing

WHEELER TRIGG KENNEDY

partner of Wheeler Trigg Kennedy, offers this advice: "Developing business takes time and hard work. Rather than expecting immediate pay-offs, focus on developing long-term relationships with clients and professional colleagues. Doing so ultimately will result in more business and referrals, as well as create good friends and personal satisfaction."

A lot of new associates ask, "What can I do to market when I am so new to the practice?" Start immediately by getting to know the other people in your firm. Get active in your local professional community. Join the business organizations related to your practice.

Join community organizations. Become actively involved, join a board, help out, and meet people. "Everyone with whom you come in contact is potentially a client or referral source," says James M. Shaker, a partner at Ryan, Swanson & Cleveland.

Here's another tip: Develop a virtual, private peer network of lawyers. An associate I know started a small alumni group. She and her law school colleagues have lunch once a month. Just a few years in, this has already developed into a powerful referral network.

Invest Nonbillable Time with Existing Clients

There are three important truths that underlie everything you need to know about law firm marketing. The first is that 20 percent of the firm's clients contribute to 80 percent of the income. The second is that existing and past clients are the number one generator of new business for the firm. The third is that



the most frequent source of new business is through word-of-mouth referrals.

Translation: What your clients say about you when you aren't around is the number one factor that is going to contribute to your success or failure in the business of law. What's the key?

"Try to create relationships with clients that are based on trustworthiness and loyalty and create long-lasting friendships," says Michael O'Donnell, chairman of Wheeler Trigg Kennedy.

As an associate starting out, it helps to remember that the partners are your clients as well. Let's face it, what the partners say about you when you aren't around is critical, too. Make both your outside clients *and* the partners you work for feel like their matter is the most important one you are working on. This can involve something as simple as returning phone calls or answering e-mails as quickly as possible, listening carefully when given instructions, and never being too busy to keep them apprised of progress.

By super-pleasing your existing clients, you can expand the amount of work you do for them, maintain the relationship for a longer time, and benefit from the referrals they send your way.

Talk Less and Listen More

Your ears are your greatest marketing tool. One of the most common errors lawyers can make is talking too much and failing to listen. In some cases, inexperienced business developers will try to talk their way to new business. Instead, learn to listen deeply and look for the ways in which you can help people. You will find that helping others will lead to others helping you.

"Every communication with a client, irrespective of how seemingly mundane the topic may be, is a marketing opportunity. It may not be an 'active opportunity,' but it can lead to

such an opportunity," advises Gery Zacher, a former managing partner of Gordon and Rees.

Develop a Meaningful Introduction

Of course, you can't only just listen. When it is time to talk about yourself, learn to do so in a way that opens up the conversation and gets people to ask you questions. A good way to do this is to develop a way of describing your work that emphasizes the value

"As an associate starting out, it helps to remember that the partners are your clients as well."

you provide to clients. For instance, an estate lawyer might say: "I assist clients with estate planning. I help them ensure that their wishes will be followed while keeping the taxes and probate fees down to a minimum."

You can also use the same technique to introduce your law firm. Hugh Gottschalk teaches his associates to introduce the firm as a "Denver law firm that handles trials and appeals around the country for Fortune 100 companies."

Getting in the habit of introducing yourself and your firm in this way takes some practice. Develop a few different introductions in advance and get used to saying them before your next networking event. (See the next page for helpful tips and a short "elevator pitch" worksheet.)

Learn How to Close the Deal

It takes practice and skill to learn how to turn the people in your life into clients. It's about knowing how and when to offer your assistance—and also understanding that this is a natural part of business. How can an associate master this step?

"Learn how to ask for work," says Laurie Axford, Intellectual Property chair at Gordon and Rees. "New associates don't know how to ask for new assignments from potential and existing clients. Very few associates have any sales training, and everyone in sales will tell you that if you don't ask for something, you won't get it."

Look for opportunities at your firm to receive some sales training. If it's not offered, ask for it. When you have invested in building a network of strong relationships with clients and contacts, learning how to ask for the work is the step that closes the circle and brings in the file.

One Last Tip: Find Your Personal Style

It's easy to get swept along in the currents of a law firm. If you want to end up with a practice you enjoy and clients you like, it is critical that you learn to chart your own course. Marketing can help you do that. As an associate, it is your time to discover the kind of work and clients you find the most interesting. It is also time to explore the kind of marketing skills that you like best. It might be writing articles or maintaining a blog. It could be you have a flair for presenting. Find out what works best for you while advancing you toward your goals, and do it. Get yourself under sail and not lost at sea! **LP**

Allison Wolf (allison@shiftworks.ca) is an executive coach, legal marketing consultant and founder of Shift Works Strategic Inc, a company focused on using the practice of coaching to enhance the performance and success of lawyers in key business areas.

PERFECTING YOUR ELEVATOR PITCH

BY CATHERINE ALMAN MACDONAGH AND BETH MARIE CUZZONE

Your introductory description—a.k.a. the “elevator pitch”—is your introduction and description of who you are and what you do. It is your opportunity to define (or redefine) your personal brand or your reputation. Communicating your elevator pitch to others allows them to remember how you help people. An added benefit is that other people can literally be your commercial. Here are guidelines and a short exercise to assist you in creating your self-introduction.

WHAT IT IS

- 10–20 seconds in duration
- A sound bite
- Succinct and memorable
- Spotlights your uniqueness
- Focused on benefits
- Delivered effortlessly

RULES FOR AN EFFECTIVE ELEVATOR PITCH

- It must pass the “so what?” test.
- Do not say, “I’m a partner/counsel/associate/solo.”
- No sales pitch.
- No legal-ease!
- Try this: “My name is x and I help....”

GUIDELINES

- Keep it short.
- Think “tag line.”
- Solve a problem.
- Point out the benefits.
- Be excited about your work!
- Be genuine.
- Practice makes perfect.
- Use the elevator pitch worksheet to get started.

EXAMPLE: “My name is Kenna. Kenna O’Donnell. I help commercial real estate developers with their contracts in major cities all over the world.”

TIP: Repeating your first name as in the example above helps people remember it.

ELEVATOR PITCH WORKSHEET

1. What are your deliverables? Identify services or features.

2. Write a list of benefits your clients derive from working with you (and make sure they pass the “so what?” test).

3. Combine the deliverables with the benefits to write your 10- to 20-second elevator pitch. Practice it (try looking in the mirror too, body language is important) until you can say it effortlessly.

HELPFUL HINT: Many lawyers provide more than one legal service to more than one group of professionals. Remember to tailor your elevator pitch to the person with whom you are speaking or the situation in which you are networking. For example, if you are a business lawyer, you will introduce yourself differently to a start-up entrepreneur than to an in-house lawyer at a multinational company. If you have no information about the person, try using the event itself as a way to establish a connection. LP

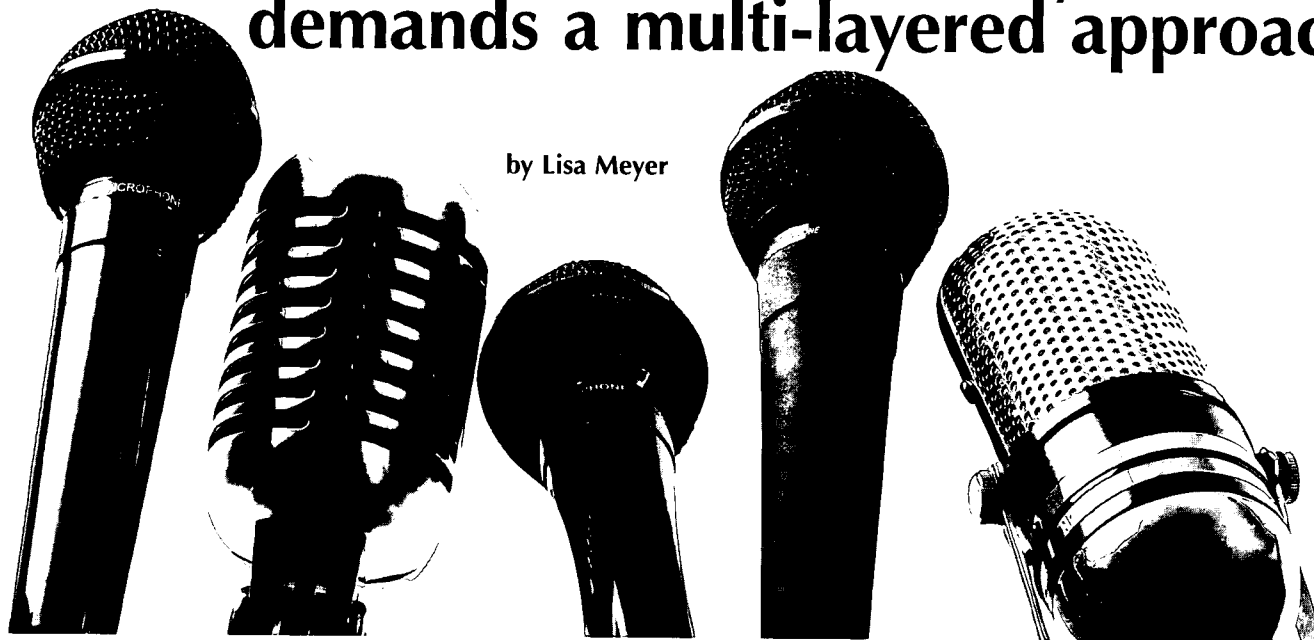
Catherine Alman MacDonagh is the Director of Business Development at Day, Berry & Howard LLP and the co-founder and director of the Legal Sales and Service Organization (LSSO). Beth Marie Cuzzone is Director of Business Development at Goulston & Storrs. She is also co-founder of the Legal Sales and Service Organization.

Excerpted from *The Law Firm Associate’s Guide to Personal Marketing and Selling Skills* by Catherine Alman MacDonagh and Beth Marie Cuzzone (ABA, 2007). For more information on the ABA Law Practice Management Section’s new Associates Development book series, visit www.ababooks.org.



A public relations plan for lawyers demands a multi-layered approach

by Lisa Meyer



PUBLIC RELATIONS IS DEFINED AS COMMUNICATIONS with the public to influence attitudes and opinions in the interest of promoting a person, product or idea. For lawyers, PR initiatives should position you as a “thought leader” in your field, serve as a tool for new business development, and bring prestige and recognition to your firm.

Traditionally, before launching a public relations campaign, marketers build a PR plan by describing an organization’s goal, audience and strategies for delivering a message in pursuit of a favorable public image. The media is often the ideal outlet for delivering a key message. However, a well-rounded PR plan for lawyers should have multiple goals and strategies. A lawyer’s PR plan should include media relations, personal PR and firm PR.

Media Relations: Tips for Working with the Media

Maximizing media relations can be as simple as first, understanding what the media desires, and second, having the

tools to not only avoid PR nightmares, but position yourself as an expert in your field. Approaching PR proactively is the best way to earn the respect of the media. The following are tips on working with the media—for your personal benefits, and ultimately for the good of the firm’s brand.

• **Newspaper mentions**—Issue a press release to local media and trade publications when you participate in a speaking engagement or have received recognition. Often, press releases lead to mentions of your name, ideally associated with your firm name, along with a reference to the subject matter you spoke about, which reinforces this area of your practice. Have a current photo taken and send a jpeg along with the news.

• **Quoted source in news story**—Approach the media by sending a media advisory or simple email notifying them that you are working on a case, issue or trend that may draw media interest. Reporters appreciate being informed and are often eager to hear from lawyers working on high profile issues or interesting, newsworthy cases.

• **Expert source in trend/feature story**—Consider trends that may be of interest to the average reader. Business and features writers are often open to story ideas. Start by asking yourself if the idea is relevant to a broader readership (which makes it easier to pitch) and whether or not it is timely and relevant.

• **Authored article or idea pitches**—When laws are changed, or bills are being considered by the Legislature, consider communicating your expertise with related editors. Draft a brief summary of your story idea (a paragraph or two), and how it relates to the upcoming or recent law change, and how the information will benefit the publication’s readership. Some publications allow submissions of authored

articles, which are an ideal PR opportunity, giving you maximum exposure and credibility in your field.

• **Understand the media**—A basic understanding of deadlines, journalistic writing and what's newsworthy is important before approaching the media. Start by reading the newspaper or watch the TV show you are approaching and be familiar with their staff, format and focus before you make the call or send the e-mail. Building relationships with members of the media is important, but remember that it's very unlike building relationships in other industries. Stick to providing reporters with facts, figures and appropriate documents to position yourself as an expert resource.

Personal PR: Building Your Individual Brand

In addition to media relations efforts, lawyers must focus on their individual marketing plan. What is your personal brand? How do you reinforce your image and areas of credibility with clients and prospects? Business development strategies, networking and client relationships are key components of a lawyer's personal PR effort.

• **Analyze your SWOT**—Marketers often use a "SWOT" analysis to determine an organization's Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. Develop a brief written summary of your personal SWOT analysis and write down a few goals for tapping into the opportunities and working on any weaknesses.

Lisa Meyer is the director of marketing and client relations at Preti Flaherty, a Portland-based firm of more than eighty-five lawyers in Portland, and she can be reached at lmeyer@preti.com. Meyer serves as president of the New England Chapter of the Legal Marketing Association.

• **Focus on relationships**—For every client you gained, did another slip under the radar? Consider ways to increase contact and build relationships with prospects or current clients. While the economy has undoubtedly taken a toll on some of your clients' businesses, the current market presents exciting opportunities for many others. Now is the time to get creative and drive client development activities. Spend time reviewing your list of contacts, and resolve to make a phone call or send an e-mail once every two weeks to a different person from your list. Once a month, try to take one person out for lunch to discuss their current needs. Keep your target list posted in your office, or put reminders on your calendar each month. Remember that a big piece of your relationship with clients is doing good work first, understanding their business and its challenges, and being a trusted provider.

• **Try new business development strategies**—Review matters you have opened over the past several years and make a list of how each relationship was developed. Use this list to guide your upcoming marketing efforts. For example, if you determine that a large percentage of your work comes from referrals, spend more time with these referral sources. Or if you discover that no work has come from a particular organization membership, maybe it's time to join a new trade association or group to generate new leads. Speaking engagements or presentations at seminars or conferences is yet another opportunity to reinforce your personal brand and generate leads.

• **Track client activity**—Stay up to speed on the activity of clients, prospective clients or referral sources using Google or Lexis/Westlaw alerts. Take time to check that email folder regularly.

Reach out to clients who are making the news (good or bad) to let them know you are available to support their business. Your library, marketing and information technology colleagues can help you identify a reasonable number of businesses to track and set up the alerts.

• **Survey your clients**—Create opportunities for face time with clients and ask them for candid feedback about your service, responsiveness, etc. A casual, information-gathering lunch is one option. Asking for, and listening to, their feedback shows them that you're engaged in the business relationship and are flexible enough to meet their needs.

• **Update your bio and collateral**—Your professional biography and marketing collaterals (brochures, etc.) specific to your practice are primary components of client communications. The art of the bio is to combine convincing detail with an engaging message in a way that spurs action: a telephone call to you, rather than to your competitors! For lawyers with many years of practice, your bio should provide greater detail of capabilities, case studies and credentials.

• **Work the room**—Some lawyers are natural communicators with a great deal of networking experience. Others are new to networking, and some find small talk and mingling to be painfully awkward. Before you arrive at an event, think of it as research, where your job is to meet new people and ask questions. Focus on learning more about the people you meet, not charming them with funny jokes or whit.

Avoid your friends at social events and try to circulate around the room, unless they provide a cross-introduction. Don't be fashionably late, as that makes it very difficult to break into cliques. Most importantly, as you meet new people, think of ways to follow-up. Do you know

someone you would like to introduce them to? Does an article come to mind that might interest them? As you leave, tell them "I'm going to email you that article" or "I'll send you Jane's contact info next week." This is the perfect way to get their business card and follow-up later to keep building on the relationship.

Firm PR: Building an Elevator Pitch and Cross-Selling

The third public relations component lawyers should consider is firm PR. Regardless of the size of your firm, reinforcing the firm's overall brand is critical to the success of the business. When you're asked "What do you do?" and you answer, "I'm a lawyer," consider how you can bring the conversation around to "we." In most cases, the question is simply a polite way of getting a conversation going, and not a request for your resume. Take control of the opportunity to make a strong first impression that might set the tone for a future relationship with the firm. Switch your reaction from "I" to "we" with a technique some legal marketers refer to as the thirty-second elevator pitch. Referencing the firm, in addition to your role, also sets the stage for potential cross-selling opportunities.

This branding technique teaches lawyers to describe their firm in thirty seconds by giving listeners a concise, memorable description of your firm that's appropriate for brief encounters.

• **Building your elevator pitch**—Can you describe your firm in thirty seconds? That's about the amount of time you have to chat briefly while riding the elevator. It's just enough time to give a concise pitch that outlines the firm's brand and your role in the mix. It's also a very brief encounter that might leave

you walking off the elevator regretting the time you wasted. What did you leave out? What does that person now believe, correctly or incorrectly, about your firm?

Your thirty-second elevator pitch should tell a brief story. Try using examples of your firm's recent work to build a memorable (yet concise) description. The following uses Preti Flaherty as an example:

Q: "What do you do?"

A: "I'm a real estate lawyer with Preti Flaherty." (say this with positive body language—don't apologize!)

Q: "What type of work do you do?"

A: "Well, have you seen the old textile mill on the Saco River? (Starting with a question might get some information about the person you're talking with and his or her business.) Our corporate and real estate groups are working with the developer to revitalize the entire island into high-end housing and a marina. We just closed the deal a couple of weeks ago."

Or, using Preti Flaherty's work with Mercy Hospital:

Q: "What do you do?"

A: "I'm a health law attorney with Preti Flaherty."

Q: "Okay, what does that mean?"

A: "Have you seen the new Mercy Hospital facilities on the Fore River? We worked with Mercy to get a certificate of need from the state for its relocation to those new state-of-the-art facilities."

Developing your unique, but firm-oriented, elevator pitch has multiple benefits:


1. Makes a better first impression for your firm.
2. Gives a consistent message about the firm.
3. Allows you to communicate more persuasively by engaging the listener.
4. Reinforces your firm's brand with your face and voice.

Your three-minute airplane pitch—What if you have three minutes? That's about the length of time you might spend giving your "airplane pitch." It begins with your thirty-second pitch and adds more detail—what's new at your firm, what matters are on your desk, etc.

But what are the most important aspects of the firm to mention? Which matter builds the best framework for telling your story? How can you articulate the specialties of your practice group in only three minutes?

Your thirty-minute presentation—Remember your last thirty-minute PowerPoint presentation? It should begin by delivering your firm's brand message in about five minutes, with the remaining time devoted to the topic of interest to the client.

Put Your PR Plan into Practice

Being mindful of public relations opportunities—which extend well beyond making media headlines—is the best first step in launching your personal PR plan. Pick one or two tactics from each section (media, personal and firm PR) and prioritize them into your business development efforts. Ask your firm's marketing or business development professional for help, or reach out to your administrative team. The Legal Marketing Association of New England is an excellent resource for lawyers and support staff to learn more about marketing techniques that are unique to the legal profession. Remember that branding, client satisfaction, and business development are ongoing pursuits. Branding yourself as a thought leader and trusted advisor—and your firm as a market leader—takes dedication and consistency. 

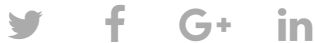
GET THE WORK

Three Secrets To Crafting Law Firm Elevator Pitches That Impress

Everywhere you turn there are potential clients ready to hear about your law practice. Are you ready to deliver a pitch that will impress and persuade them to consider doing business with you? Below are three secrets to crafting an elevator pitch that will make potential clients eager to learn more.

By CHELSEY LAMBERT

Jul 6, 2016 at 10:26 AM



Everywhere you turn there are potential clients ready to hear about your law practice. Are you ready to deliver a pitch that will impress and persuade them to consider doing business with you? Below are three secrets to crafting an elevator pitch that will make potential clients eager to learn more.

Secret #1 – Create Multiple Pitches

If you're serious about creating a powerful elevator pitch, the first thing you must embrace is that no one pitch will fit every client. That's why you need different pitches for different clients. Make a list of the type of clients you want to attract.

- What are their legal needs?



- Are those clients ordinary individuals or businesses?
- What is the income of those potential clients?
- How well does the potential client understand the law?

The profile of the clients you want to pitch will determine the content of your pitches. For example, how you pitch a business bankruptcy client will be very different from how you pitch a consumer bankruptcy client. Give the wrong pitch to a client and you risk losing their business.

Secret #2 – Share The Reason Why You Practice Law

People do business with professionals who are passionate about what they do. For attorneys who want to craft extraordinary pitches, telling the tale of why you practice law is critical. Unfortunately, this is often challenging for some lawyers. Here are a few tips for incorporating this important information into your pitch.

- **Tap into your original enthusiasm for law.** Why did you go to law in the first place? And if you've changed practice areas since your first venture into the legal world, why did you choose the practice area you're in right now? Did you become a family law attorney because you want to help others through difficult divorces? Did you become a bankruptcy attorney because you want to help financially struggling people get a fresh financial start? Get honest about your motivation and transfer that authenticity to your pitch.
- **Keep your explanation simple.** While your process of discovering your motivation for doing what you do may include a lot of personal and professional history, this isn't something you need (or should) share in full. In other words, don't waste time explaining how your impoverished childhood became the impetus for your life as bankruptcy attorney. Instead, simply say "I help families use bankruptcy to escape the poverty debt creates." That's a lot more powerful than just saying you're a bankruptcy attorney and rattling off your qualifications.

Secret #3 – Explain How You're Different

When you're pitching potential clients, you're one in a million other attorneys trying to get their business. Even if you're not directly there with other attorneys, you can safely assume that your target has heard a few lawyer pitches before especially if they're in the middle of a

legal crisis. To stand out from the “white noise” of lawyers offering their services, you must show how you’re different from everyone else. There are so many ways to differentiate yourself from the pack, but it’s important that your unique position matter to the target. When crafting your pitch, identify all of the ways that you are different from the average attorney. Do you have more experience? Do you have a unique life experience that puts you in a better position you to help the client? Are you faster? Are you cheaper? Do you services that are more personalized than the average attorney? Oftentimes there are several ways that you’re different, so when you’re delivering your pitch be prepared to highlight the difference you believe will matter to the target. For example, if a potential client lets you know that they’re having trouble finding an attorney because most of them are “legal mills” then you know that your personalized service is something that will matter to that person.

Crafting a powerful pitch will give you a serious advantage when trying to win over new clients.



Chelsey Lambert is Vice President of Marketing & Communications at [Smokeball](#), a provider of practice management software for small law firms, based in Chicago, IL. Her mission is to help attorneys, and legal professionals understand the technology that is available to them, how to use it, and the positive impacts it can have on their business. After leaving her role as a Practice Management Advisor for the Chicago Bar Association in 2014, she continues to speak and write for legal organizations across the US, on technology, hiring, marketing and small law firm best practices. In her spare time, she enjoys a good yoga class, volunteering, and taking in the sunshine on Chicago’s beautiful lakeshore.



TOPICS



ASK THE MARKETING EXPERTS

Embarrassed About Your Elevator Speech?

By The Editors | Oct.29.14 | Ask the Experts, Business Development, Daily Dispatch, Legal Marketing

Question: *I need help with my "elevator speech." When I begin to tell people about my practice, I tend to get flustered and embarrassed. Do you have any advice that would help me feel more comfortable telling people about my business?*



Lynne Franklin: Remember the goal of giving an elevator pitch. It's to begin building rapport that can lead to additional conversations — and perhaps new business and referrals.

You want to make a memorable, positive first impression on people in 20 to 30 seconds, so they ask, "Would you explain more?" or "How do you do that?" The other person wants to determine if you are professional, good at what you do and approachable. It's hard to pull this off if you're winging it or saying the same thing every time.

Here are four tips to make your elevator pitches better and easier to give.

1. Work on this before you walk through the door. Consider these questions:

- Who are my ideal clients?
- What do I do for them?
- What is the main benefit they get from working with me, or pain they have eased by working with me?

2. Practice. Know what you want people to remember, rather than memorize exact words, which can sound rote.

3. Set a goal. Are you at a networking event and want to identify people worth meeting again? Are you at a first meeting with prospective clients and want them to know you've successfully handled similar cases? Are you speaking with friends and family and want them to know what you do (so they can refer prospects to you)?

4. Ask the other person to speak first. This isn't just polite — it's strategic. You show your interest in them, which makes them wish to reciprocate. You also get to hear what they do, so you can tailor your pitch to be more meaningful.

Most of all, this is a conversation. Bring a genuine interest in other people. That takes the pressure off of you to "perform." And goodwill leaves a lasting positive impression.

Lynne Franklin's elevator pitch is "I help business leaders get clients and employees to do what they want!" She is principal of Lynne Franklin Wordsmith and author of "Getting Others to Do What You Want."



Jim Jarrell: If I'm being perfectly honest, the fact that you get flustered and embarrassed when you try to deliver your elevator speech would seem a pretty strong indication that you're not well-prepared or well-rehearsed to deliver it. Unless you practice your speech, you won't be able to speak with poise and polish. And with poise and polish come certainty and confidence. Finding the right words and using a comprehensive vocabulary will help you make your case with conviction.

Before you even start crafting your elevator speech, you need to identify what your goal is. Whether you use it to get the ball rolling on a job or project or something larger, you should know exactly what you want from your elevator speech before you go out and execute it.

Elevator speeches should be persuasive, so I suggest using [Monroe's Motivated Sequence](#) to help you craft the elements of your speech. To begin with, adults have short attention spans, so you have to grab their attention early and make it count. Then, your speech should help establish a sense of urgency or a need for what you're trying to sell (in this case, legal services). Once you've established the need, satisfy it by explaining how you can solve their problem — this is the "meat" of your speech and should be concise and to the point. (You may also want to prepare counterarguments.)

Next, you will need to describe a detailed picture of success. The goal is to help motivate your audience to agree with you, so make sure your visualization is believable and realistic.

Lastly, you want to leave your audience with a call to action. Give them your card and ask them to call you, or give them your website address to find out more information. The key is to not overwhelm them with too many calls to action. It should be simple and easy, but also help you achieve your goal.

For some of us, delivering the perfect elevator speech comes naturally. The rest of us need to be well-prepared and well-rehearsed, or our message won't be well-received. Using Monroe's Motivated Sequence can help improve not only your speech, but can help boost your confidence.

Jim Jarrell currently manages marketing and business development activities for Indianapolis-based Barnes & Thornburg's litigation department as a member of the firm's Chicago office. Visit jimjarrell.com for more information.



Tina Emerson: Assuming that you are giving this elevator speech in a scenario that includes prospective clients, telling people about your practice should be as natural as telling someone where you're from. If the information is canned and overly prepared, it will sound that way. I like to stick to a few basic tenets of the elevator speech. Do not tell people what you are, tell them what you do. For example, I would much rather hear "I help create business partnerships among medical and dental practices," instead of "I'm a contract lawyer."

If you already know the legal needs of the prospective clients, think about how you or your firm can help them based on your experience. "My firm also handles real estate matters for those practices, if they have new rental agreements, or do construction loans, or if they purchase existing properties."

If this is a networking event and you are not literally in an elevator, you should finish up by engaging your new contact in a conversation. Ask a question such as, "What is an issue that has challenged you most recently?" Hopefully, this will compel your prospect to share some information that will be helpful to you and allow you to discuss your experience in greater detail.

Tina Emerson is marketing director at Rogers Townsend & Thomas, PC, in Columbia, S.C. With 15 years of B2B communications experience, she leads the marketing and business development efforts for the firm's offices in North Carolina and South Carolina. She serves on the publications committee of the LMA's Strategies. Follow her on Twitter @tfemerson.

What's Your Question?

Not every law firm has a professional marketer or business development coach on staff to answer questions. So [send us your questions via email](#) or use the comment section below, and we'll pass them on to the experts at the Legal Marketing Association to answer. Watch for the best ones here in Ask the Experts.



The Legal Marketing Association provides professional support and education as well as opportunities for intellectual and practical information exchange.

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Elevator Speech Strategy: Fill in the Blanks

By [Kevin Houchin](#) on March 1st, 2011

Q: What do you do?

A: [Insert elevator speech here.]

You must have a great an answer—because your elevator speech strategy is critical to **effective professional networking, niche marketing, brand development**, and even your social media strategy—but have you ever really thought about it? You should, but you don't have to make it complex. Most people screw it up. They screw it up by answering the questions completely.

Don't do that, because you're missing a great opportunity if you do. Rather than completely answering the question in 30-60 seconds, craft your elevator speech answer to achieve these goals:

1. Plant a seed of curiosity.
2. Begin a conversation.
3. Shift the focus to the person asking the question.
4. Establish yourself as a trusted advisor and expert in our niche.
5. Reposition the legal industry as a “helping” profession.

You can do all of this by filling in the blanks in this elevator speech template.

“I help _____ [insert your target client such as “creative people”]
_____ [insert verb such as “solve,” “protect,” or “plan”] _____
[insert your favorite project/case such as “business,” or “family”].”

The key here is to NOT just say “I'm a _____ lawyer,” because nobody wants to talk to a lawyer, especially in an elevator where one might potentially be trapped for hours. Additionally, “I'm a _____ lawyer.” stops the conversation cold without any chance to begin the conversation.

The “I help . . .” response almost requires the first person to ask “How do you do that?” Now we're talking. Now we're having a conversation. Now is when you drop the “A-word” or the “L-Word” on them. Now you can say something like “I'm the attorney that helps the inventors protect their intellectual property.”

Helping

Humans are not programmed to dislike people who help others. Somehow, we lawyers have misplaced that element of our reputation and paid dearly for it. Working the word “help” into the first 30 seconds of a conversation with a new acquaintance in the context of your personal identity and the legal industry can only—well, help.

Here’s a video about this approach to elevator speeches from my Fuel The Spark: 5 Guiding Values for Law and Life ethics CLE workshop. (Yes, I used to shave my head. And yes, it still freaks me out a bit to see what I looked like.)

What are some of your favorite approaches to the elevator speech?

(photo credit:<http://www.flickr.com/photos/stevecherches/3537627917>)

Last updated December 12th, 2017.

Kevin Houchin is a [business lawyer based in Fort Collins, Colorado](#). He is also the founder of [The Space Between Center for Creative Spirit in Business](#). He can be found on Twitter [@KevinHouchin](#).

[lawyerist.com](#)



Elevating the Elevator Speech

By [Allison Shields](#) on May 24th, 2011

Kevin Houchin wrote about his [fill in the blanks elevator speech strategy](#) earlier this year. This post expands on some of his ideas and takes the elevator speech to the next level.

I think of the elevator speech as more of a cocktail party (or trade show, networking meeting, CLE program or conference) introduction than a true elevator speech. But the scenario is similar: you are at a networking event or a cocktail party and someone asks you, “What do you do?” Many lawyers dread this question, and it shows. It is at this point that you are supposed to say something short but memorable about what you do. As Houchin notes, this is an opportunity; your response should be a conversation starter. Unfortunately, more often it is a conversation killer.

The typical response is something like, “I’m a tax lawyer” or “I practice matrimonial and family law.” Sometimes the explanations are more complicated, but they almost always focus on the lawyer and the area of law they practice in. How well does this response work for lawyers? If you look closely at the faces of those with whom the lawyer is talking, you’ll see their eyes beginning to glaze over.

So how do you change this scenario so that your “elevator speech” or introduction makes an impact on your audience? Kevin’s suggestion is to use a ‘fill in the blanks’ approach to initially craft your elevator speech, identifying who your clients are and how you help them. This is an excellent start. But I would go even further with the idea that you should not answer the question that was asked. To make Kevin’s fill in the blank strategy even more effective, remember that the key to starting a good conversation is to make it all about them, not about you.

What’s in it for me?

Clients and potential clients perpetually come from the “what is in it for me?” mindset. They want to know what you can do for them. Emphasize the *clients you work with and what they need* instead of what you do. Focus on what the client actually values, not what you think the client values.

To be really effective and grab clients’ attention, you’ve got to answer the question, ‘so what?’ Lawyers tend to market themselves by talking about their knowledge and experience and the ‘features’ of the service they provide, but many clients (even those experienced in using lawyers) may not understand why that knowledge or experience is important to them.

When tempted to talk about features, think about why those features of your service are helpful to the client. How do your particular qualifications provide value to the client? How will your specific

experience help clients achieve their goals?

For example, why should the client care if you have been practicing in commercial real estate for 15 years? What if you said that you have been helping clients negotiate real estate contracts for 15 years, so you know what elements are important whether the economy is in a boom or a slump? Or what if you said that your 15 years of experience allows you to recognize which elements of a real estate contract are most negotiable, and which lawyers know their stuff?

Of course, it goes without saying that in order to do this, you must have an intimate knowledge of your clients. You must constantly ask yourself, “**Who are you marketing to?**”

Speak your clients’ language

Knowing your clients well means understanding how they describe their problems and challenges so that you can use those words instead of the typical legalese or industry jargon lawyers use to describe what they do.

Even if your clients know these terms, others in their network (potential referral sources) may not. Use language lay people understand.

Be aware that you may have more than one audience, particularly if you work in multiple practice areas or if you get business from several different kinds of referral sources. Craft an elevator pitch (or several) that will speak to the benefits each those audiences will receive from either working with you or creating a referral relationship with you. Recognize that each audience may have its own unique language.

Make it personal—use examples

Your introduction needs to reflect your unique practice and personality in the same way your **website needs personality**.

A great way to improve your short introduction is by using a specific example tailored to the person with whom you are speaking. Ask questions and then tailor your comments to reflect their response. For example, if you have a commercial litigation or business practice, you can ask what the person does for a living and then create an example that would be relevant to their business. A business lawyer speaking with a restaurant owner might talk about contracts with suppliers or vendors, or negotiating lease agreements for the restaurant space.

As Tom Kane says on his Legal Marketing Blog, **don’t be boring, tell a story instead**. Tell stories about ways you have worked with clients in the past.

If you don’t have enough time or information to relate an example directly relevant to your companion’s business or personal interests, relate it to a common or everyday experience. And if you cannot tell your clients’ story, then tell your own. Do you have a specific story that inspired you to become a lawyer or to serve this particular clientele? Tell *that* story; clients will relate.

(photo:

Last updated November 8th, 2017.



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LEGAL MARKETING BLOG

NAVIGATING THE TURBULENT WATERS IN AN EVOLVING LEGAL MARKETPLACE

"I'm a Lawyer" Is Not an Elevator Speech

By Tom Kane on July 10, 2013

POSTED IN MARKETING TIPS, PROSPECTING FOR CLIENTS

In response to the question "What do you do?", saying that you are a tax lawyer, or employment lawyer or whatever is not a good reply. More on that in a moment.

In the online **ABA Journal: Law News Now** this month, an article entitled "**50 Simple Ways You Can Market Your Practice**" by **Stephanie Francis Ward** provides some good tips that will help lawyers develop business. I really like many of them. However, I take issue with one in particular. I'm not being critical of the author, who is a journalist after all and not a legal marketer. My guess is that she just got some bad advice somewhere.

My issue is with Tip "*23. The best elevator speech? 'Hi, I'm a lawyer. What do you do?'*" Although it appears to be a question, the tip comes across as a statement. Or it is incomplete because it ends there. IMHO that is the worst possible self-introduction a lawyer can make. If the other person is not a lawyer, the conversation could very well come to a screeching halt. Reasons vary, but might include: putting people off, some people simply don't like lawyers (or maybe they're jealous), feel less educated, or the statement simply comes across as arrogant, know-it-all or I'm smarter than the average bear, or whatever. Sorry, but such an opening is just dumb.

Better to say something like, if for instance you are an employment lawyer representing companies, "I help employers avoid and resolve employee issues." Which may lead to the obvious "How do you do that?"....and the discussion is underway, rather than shut down.

It is advisable to have more than one elevator speech, of course, depending on the circumstances and the audience. But, it does take work and practice to develop an effective and meaningful one. Try them out on colleagues and friends. It is best to delay disclosing your occupation *until* you've laid the groundwork as to how you help people with their problems.



Tom Kane

"I believe it is critical for lawyers to market their practice in a meaningful and ethical way."

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The Perfect (Elevator) Pitch

It's a skill every businessperson needs. How to create it, rehearse it, and tailor it for a specific audience

By [Aileen Pincus](#)

One of the most important things a businessperson can do—especially an owner or someone who is involved in sales—is learn how to speak about their business to others. Being able to sum up unique aspects of your service or product in a way that excites others should be a fundamental skill. Yet many executives pay little attention to the continuing development of "the elevator pitch"—the quick, succinct summation of what your company makes or does.

That's too bad, because the elevator pitch—so named because it should last no longer than the average elevator ride—is far too important to take casually. It's one of the most effective methods available to reach new buyers and clients with a winning message. True, you may not actually be doing the pitching in an elevator, but even if your meeting is a planned, sit-down event, you should still be prepared to capture your audience's attention quickly.

KEEP IT FRESH

Every business grows and changes, and your pitch needs to grow and change with it. You can have the most creative logo, the slickest slogan, the most dazzling brochures, and the most cutting-edge Web site, but if your elevator pitch is out of date, you're missing one of your most important opportunities to "brand."

You know your business better than anyone. How are you keeping abreast of the latest ideas? What continues to set you apart from your competition? How can you speak about your record of quality goods and services and make it relevant to your future plans?

As your audience's needs and expectations change, make sure you change the way you speak about your business. Your language, your approach, and what you choose to highlight for a particular audience has got to change over time.

For instance, what has worked in years past with print and broadcast audiences could bore an online audience to tears. You wouldn't think of not updating your other sales and marketing materials, so why would you let your elevator pitch grow stale?

Knowing your business, product, service, or issue well is one thing, but how do you convey excitement and spark interest to those outside your organization? What do you highlight? What do you leave out? And how do those choices change with your audience?

ALWAYS BE PREPARED

In the early days of my executive coaching firm, I'd worked out an elevator speech with three quick points about what set our training services apart. It was working well, and I'd gotten comfortable, perhaps too comfortable, with using it.

One day, I won a brief introduction to a client in an industry we hadn't trained in before. After my standard elevator speech (in a hallway this time), this decision-maker smiled and said: "Frankly, lowest cost isn't necessarily our highest priority. I'd need to know a lot more about how you might add value to our existing efforts at training, not just your cost—and you'd need to convince me your firm could handle something we don't already offer our type of demanding professional."

He disappeared before I could recover. I didn't have another chance with him for almost a full year. When that time came, I'd made sure to learn all I could about the training his company already had in place and the precise value we could add to existing efforts.

I'd already taken the lesson to heart: Adjust the pitch to the person who is listening, and refine it as you and your business continue to grow and change. It worked, and we've since been able to win that valuable account and many others in the same industry.

I've been on the other side of the less-than-perfect pitch, too. At a conference, a young businesswoman approached me to introduce herself and her Web-building services. She was eager and confident, but after a few minutes of hearing about her competitive pricing, her creativity, and a few of her clients, I said: "Well I hear from a lot of design services, and it's hard to tell the real differences between you. What do you think really sets your work apart for someone like me in a services industry?"

The question obviously caught her off-guard, and she admitted she didn't have an answer. An honest answer, but not a first impression that achieved her goal of getting a second meeting.

Continually perfecting the elevator pitch ensures that you are always able to put your best foot forward as your business grows and changes and your client base expands. Click [here](#) to view our slide show of tips for developing that "perfect pitch."

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