Here’s the pitch.

Picture this: You’re waiting for the elevator and waiting next to you is the CEO of the organization for which you’d like to work. You have to act fast – you have less than 30 seconds to connect with the employer, sell yourself, and prove why you’re the one to hire.

Hence the term “elevator speech.”

A chance introduction, such as the one above; a networking event; and leaving a voicemail are all perfect opportunities for your elevator speech.

Your elevator speech should very quickly market your qualifications, abilities, and ambitions – and should last anywhere from 15 seconds to three minutes, depending on the situation. Its function is to rapidly educate the listeners on “You,” the brand (See: “All About You”). You want to generate enough interest so they want to learn more, which will hopefully lead to an interview.

Ideal pitch.

Your elevator pitch must communicate what differentiates you from all other candidates and makes you distinctive and valuable to the employer. Basically, it compresses into a few seconds all the crucial points from your résumé, cover letter, and interview. Since time is limited, your speech must be presented clearly and in a compelling way and answer these questions:

-- Who are you and what do you offer?

-- Why are you interested in the position?
-- What are your credentials?
-- What can you do for the employer?

A successful elevator speech is the ideal chance to promote yourself and boldly answer those two interview questions, “Tell me about yourself” and “Why should I hire you?” in as few words as possible. Keep your message focused, clear, and unforgettable.

Remember, you are the product.

Pitch practice.

Your elevator speech should:

-- Sound natural, unprompted, relaxed, pleasant, and genuine.
-- Be concise, authentic, and brief – truthfully express what interests you without overloading the listener with information.
-- Provide supporting facts and specifics of your credentials.
-- Hold the listener’s attention and make them want to continue the conversation.
-- Address the employer’s problems, but don’t provide a complete answer – save that for the full interview.

As with any verbal, face-to-face encounters: practice, practice, practice.

-- Work on your body language and delivery in front of a mirror or with a friend. Pitching an elevator speech is an opportunity outside of an interview to interact in person and make a positive, lasting impression.
-- Once you’re comfortable with your message, tailor it to fit multiple audiences.
-- Maintain eye contact and be aware of the employer’s body language, but don’t overdo it.
-- Use daily, informal language. Breathe, pause. Don’t sound desperate.
-- Ask for a business card or way to contact them, and even suggest a future meeting when done.

Keep in mind that not every elevator speech ends in a follow up. Also, remember that, while it’s about “You,” the brand, don’t make it all about you. The employer is only interested in how you will meet his/her business and employment needs.