A New Perspective
The elevator speech grows up.

QUICK OVERVIEW
Terri Sjodin’s newest book, Small Message, Big Impact: How to Put the Power of the Elevator Speech Effect to Work for You, is a helpful guide for professionals faced with effectively communicating a critical message in a short period of time. Sjodin asserts that in today’s busy market, none of us is entitled to a decision maker’s time. We have to earn it, and to get in the door, we’d better have a compelling, brief message.

With examples and insights as entertaining as they are effective, Sjodin offers readers a new twist on the three-minute elevator speech. She introduces what she calls the Elevator Speech Effect, the idea that “big efforts in small, subtle ways can make an enormous difference.” Sjodin’s elevator speech has grown beyond a bland icebreaker or a clunky one-size-fits-all opener. It is precise and customized with a solid case, fresh creativity and an authentic voice. Sjodin’s passion for successful messaging is apparent on every page as she draws on pop culture, film and history to show readers how to ramp up their own creativity and craft a compelling elevator speech.

APPLY AND ACHIEVE
So what? Everyone sells something, whether it’s a product, service, philosophy or idea. To be successful, a seller must present his or her message as something a prospect needs or wants. The bottom line is what you’re putting out there has to pass the “So what?” test. The easiest way to explain this test is with an example that doesn’t earn a passing grade.

Take Paul, a guy who has great contacts and sells advertising for a growing online magazine. He often tells potential clients that his company is No. 1 and has the largest reader base and lowest ad rates in the market. But those accolades haven’t closed many sales. Paul’s problem is that simply saying his company is at the top of the food chain doesn’t make it real to clients. His claims simply don’t pass the “So what?” test.
Like Paul, many of us let common phraseology and clichés stand in the way of answering our listeners’ burning questions. We rely on superlatives—best, largest, oldest, newest, most popular—which are useful in ceremonial speeches but less effective in persuasive presentations. Your prospects come to you with specific needs and preferences. Often they don’t even know there is a solution until you provide it. So the next time you deliver a talk to a potential client, use the “So what?” test. Make sure you’re not only selling your best features but also meeting your prospects’ needs.

You’re in the airport waiting for a flight, burning time by checking your BlackBerry and reading the paper. You just want to get home. Then you catch a glimpse of the CEO of a company you have wanted to meet with for weeks. He’s standing against the wall, also waiting for his flight. Your flight! Hmmmm, wouldn’t it be great if you were seated next to him? Should you walk over? What would you say? You don’t want to be intrusive, but gosh, it’s a great opportunity to talk with him and introduce yourself. There’s no secretary to screen you out. All you have to do is walk over and hand him your card. Your pulse quickens and your mind races. What will I say, you ask yourself. I’ll leave him alone. You decide he doesn’t want to be bugged. Then, over the loudspeaker, you hear first class passengers invited to board the plane. He is gone, and so is your shot. Bummer.

Stop. Rewind. Let’s play that again with a new ending.

You’re in the airport waiting for a flight, burning time by checking your BlackBerry or iPhone and reading the paper. Then you catch a glimpse of the CEO of a company you have wanted to meet with for weeks. He’s standing against the wall, also waiting for his flight. Your flight! Hmmmm.

This time you are calm, cool, and collected. Like Frank Sinatra, you casually stroll over and stand next to him and strike up a conversation. There is a bit of pressure, but you can calmly control the pace and your nerves. Yes, it is true you are running short on time, and you know that they will call the first class passengers invited to board the plane. He is gone, and so is your shot. Bummer.

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The short conversational message you shared with the dream client in the middle of that busy airport is an example of what’s known as an elevator speech. (In your world, it might not be a CEO. It could be any decision maker you want to access.) I define the term as a brief presentation that introduces a product, service, philosophy or an idea. The name suggests that the message should be delivered in the time it takes to ride an elevator up or down several floors; anywhere from thirty seconds to about three minutes. Its general purpose is to intrigue and inspire a listener to want to hear more of the presenter’s complete proposition in the near future.

So what is the Elevator Speech Effect? My concept of the Elevator Speech Effect was actually inspired by MIT
Small Message, Big Impact

mathematician and meteorologist Edward Lorenz’s notion of the “Butterfly Effect.” That phenomenon, backed by the laws of physics, suggests that a small change in one side of the world could result in a massive difference on the other side. For instance, the flutter of a single butterfly’s wings in one hemisphere could change the path of a tornado in the opposite hemisphere. In an article titled “The Meaning of the Butterfly: Why Pop Culture Loves the ‘Butterfly Effect’ and Gets It Totally Wrong” in the June 8, 2008, edition of The Boston Globe, science journalist Peter Dizikes wrote: “In today’s culture, the ‘Butterfly Effect’ has become a metaphor for the existence of seemingly insignificant moments that alter history and shape destinies. Typically unrecognized at first, they create threads of cause and effect that appear obvious in retrospect, changing the course of human life or rippling through the global economy…”

On a fundamental level, we all understand how big efforts in small, subtle ways can make an enormous difference. Although we cannot always track the direct link that occurs, we can begin asking the question, “What would have happened if I hadn’t delivered that first elevator speech, the one that got the snowball rolling?”

Self-evaluation is the key to morphing your talk for future effectiveness.

Today’s elevator speech has several fundamental characteristics:
• It can be formal or informal.
• The typical length is approximately two to three minutes (depending on the circumstances).
• It is a clear, brief message with intention.
• It has a sole function, which is to intrigue a listener and obtain his or her interest, therefore winning the speaker the chance to offer a longer, more detailed presentation at a later time.
• It has structure.
• It has a close.
• It is a tool that helps you earn the right to be heard.
• It can, most important of all, initiate a sequence of events resulting in dramatic and amazing opportunities, both large and small, far into the future.

THE POWER AND PURPOSE OF THE ELEVATOR SPEECH

The elevator speech I know is a concise and persuasive presentation, delivered in approximately three minutes, to a decision maker, a peer, or a potential customer. The intention is to obtain a longer, more in-depth meeting during which you can deliver your even more complete sales presentation or proposition. The elevator ride is a metaphor for unexpected access to someone you want to sell on some idea, project, or initiative.

DEFINE YOUR INTENTION

To reach any goal or realize any dream, you must first define your intention. The American Heritage Dictionary defines intention as “a course of action that one intends to follow; an aim that guides action; an objective.”

Think about the young man who arrives at his girlfriend’s house to pick her up for their date. He’s waiting

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Change Your Perspective

Sometimes the best way to energize your message is to step back and look at it from a new direction. The elevator speech is no different. When people expand their vision of what the elevator speech can do, it becomes a powerful communication tool that serves as a personal bridge to the future they envision. When one person delivers a three-minute elevator presentation to another person, and that person is intrigued by the message, it can lead to an infinite number of personal and professional opportunities. Remember, the elevator speech is more than just a generic tool to use in chance moments. It also can serve as an effective strategy for managing multiple talking points and communicating complex ideas.
nervously in the living room when her stone-faced father zings him with, “Son, what are your intentions toward my daughter?” The young man freezes. He has no idea what to say because all he has planned is dinner and a movie. Panic swells. Palms get sweaty. There’s mumbling and stuttering. It’s not pretty.

We’ve all been there; caught completely off guard because we had not defined our intention, and neither did we know how to articulate it. Establishing a clear intention is hard work and requires careful deliberation and, ultimately, a specific set of steps to execute.

**A CORE OUTLINE TO GET YOU STARTED**

- The introduction should capture the listener’s attention, should explain where your talk is going during the next few minutes, and should state why you are there. It sets up mental signposts in the mind of the listener.
- The next building block is the body of the presentation, which sets forth the persuasive case, establishes credibility, and typically includes three main points, which are supported by strong arguments and illustrations.
- The body of the presentation is followed by the conclusion, which summarizes what you have just said and could, possibly, introduce a couple of additional points you wish to discuss in detail when you are given more time.
- The final building block of the core outline is the close, or your specific call to action. Ask for an appointment time so you can offer a longer, more in-depth presentation in the near future.

**IT’S NOT ONE THING; IT’S THREE THINGS**

We live in a world where people love to find shortcuts. Regardless of what a person might be presenting, pitching, or promoting, I often hear the same phrase followed by the same question: “Terri, I am kinda busy, so can you just tell me really fast—what is the one thing I need to know about giving a great presentation?” My response, which always is the same, goes something like this: “Okay, here’s the one thing you need to know: It’s not just one thing; it’s three things!”

Furthermore, the term “great” is subjective. What one person thinks is great could be merely OK to someone else. So in place of great, let’s go with memorable, impactful, and effective. That said, I have found that really outstanding speakers typically meet these three benchmarks:

1. **Case**—They have built solid persuasive cases, employing clean, logical arguments and evidence to support their messages.
2. **Creativity**—Their illustrations of the talking points are really creative. They have blended thoughtful analysis and storyboarding to craft intriguing and interesting messages.
3. **Delivery**—They present their messages in their own authentic voices. There’s no boring professional mode; they aren’t canned Stepford people. Their presentation style is genuine, and people sense the truth in their delivery.

**Build a Persuasive Case**

Your case must have a compelling proposition, idea, product, service, or event. Your arguments should clearly explain, albeit briefly, why your audience needs you, why they need your company or solution, and why they need it now. We want to intrigue them and tempt them a bit so that they are inspired to want to give you that next appointment time.

**Get Creative and Bring the Message to Life**

Now is the time you want to pique your prospects’ interests and curiosity and maybe even make them laugh. You want to present your elevator speech in a clever, witty way that lingers in the mind of each and every prospect. To truly craft a creative message, you have to dig in and work at it, employing all kinds of your own stories, anecdotes, humor, and thought-provoking illustrations to keep your message fresh, unique, and different.
Delivery: Speak in Your Own Authentic Voice

At this point I want to remind you that the more you speak from your heart and personal experiences, the deeper the connection will be that you form with the audience. As your personality and style shine through, your talk will unfold in the mind of the listener. When you’re sure of your subject, you’re more relaxed and sincere. Polish might come from practice, but charisma—the trait that draws an audience closer—comes from certainty.

TEN BASIC STEPS TO DEVELOPING AN ELEVATOR SPEECH

Any effective three-minute elevator speech—whether planned or spontaneous, general or complex, presented in a formal competition or in an office out in the real world—has a unique set of requirements that must be met. For simplicity, I’ve defined ten basic steps to developing any elevator speech. With those ten steps as a foundation and customized attention to detail, the Elevator Speech Effect can take hold.

1. Define your intention. Ask yourself, “What do I want to happen as a result of my three minute elevator speech?”

2. Examine your scenario. Is this talk for a planned or spontaneous situation? Prepare accordingly, charting the course that will help you earn the right to be heard.

3. Draft your core outline. Start thinking about your messaging, your goals, and your creative ideas, and remember to keep in mind the flow of your talk.

4. Build your case. Choose your most compelling arguments. Explain to your listeners why they need you, your product, or your service; why they need to join your effort; and why now.

5. Don’t forget to close. Think back to your intention. Present your prospect with a clear directive and a respectful call to action. Ask for that next appointment, follow-up call, or meeting. Make it easy and painless for the listener to take the next step with you.

6. Get creative. Have some fun and get creative with your openings, illustrations, and closings; grab your listeners’ attention and send them home with distinct memories.

7. Speak in your own voice. Try a conversational approach that allows you to be comfortable and true to yourself and your personality.

8. Write it out. It’s helpful to write out your elevator speech in a long version at first, then take a tip from President Ronald Reagan and transfer your core outline and points and phrases to an index card.


10. Use it! Any elevator speech is only effective if you use it, so take it out and let it flow.

The No. 1 Biggest Mistake

A common misstep when selling a product, service, or idea is data dumping. Most people feel more comfortable in the information zone and spend far too much time there during a presentation. They forget to be persuasive. They forget that a persuasive presentation has a very specific intention. You want the listener to take action after hearing what you have to say. At its best, a persuasive presentation is a transactional process between the presenter and the listener. A compelling presentation will pair rock-solid information with compelling arguments. If you are too informative, nothing happens. If you are too aggressive, nothing happens. Find a balance, and you’ll see results.
ACTION STEPS
Get more out of this SUCCESS Book Summary by applying what you’ve learned to your business. Here are a few questions and thoughts to get you started.

1. Can you think of an example of a brief conversation that initiated a sequence of events that positively affected your life or career over time? Can you think of a time when you walked away and missed an opportunity?

2. Brainstorm a list of three scenarios—personal, professional, and dreaming big—in which you could use an elevator speech. (Example: Do you have a fundraising opportunity for your church? Do you have a business idea or program you want to promote? Do you have an entrepreneurial business idea? Do you have a desire to land your dream job?)

3. Write down a clear, realistic intention for each of these scenarios.

4. Think of a prospect on your radar and write down an answer to these three questions: Why should this person choose you? Why should this person choose your company? Why should this person act now?

5. Recall a recent sales presentation (brief or full length) where you were the listener and the presenter wanted you to take some action at the end, but you declined. Why didn’t you want to move forward? Did the speaker build a strong case based on your needs?

6. List three key decision makers who could help you move one step closer to your goals. Think about how you can gain access to these people. Do you currently know anyone who knows these three people?

7. Compile a list of places and events where you can network to help you acquire new leads and contacts and develop more elevator speech opportunities.

Recommended Reading
If you enjoyed the summary of Small Message, Big Impact, you may also want to check out:

Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us by Daniel Pink

The Magic of Thinking Big by David Schwartz

The Go-Giver by Bob Burg

About the Author
Terri Sjodin, one of America’s most sought-after female speakers, has trained thousands of people across the world. She specializes in teaching professionals to sharpen their persuasive speaking skills. More than 20 years ago, she started Sjodin Communications from a spare room in her home in Orange County, Calif. Today, Sjodin’s clients include Fortune 500 companies, industry associations, and academic conferences. She is a popular keynote speaker on Capitol Hill and was named one of the 2007 Top Five Women in Business by the Orange County Business Journal. Sjodin is the author of New Sales Speak: The 9 Biggest Sales Presentation Mistakes and How to Avoid Them and co-wrote Mentoring: A Success Guide for Mentors and Protégés with Floyd Wickman. Beyond her success as an entrepreneur and author, she is a frequent guest on radio and television talk shows throughout the country, appearing on CNN, CNBC and many major network affiliates for ABC, CBS, NBC and FOX, cable and radio.