



MEMBERSHIP BUILDING

By Craig Harrison, DTM

16 Seconds to Success:

Your Elevator Speech

Perhaps the most critical skill that members can develop for club building, as well as for their own professional and personal advancement, is a 16-second "elevator" speech.

Sixteen seconds is the average time one spends riding in an elevator. It also is all the time you need to tell a stranger about the wonders of club membership. Within 16 seconds you can explain what Toastmasters is, what it has done for you, and by extension, what it can do for them. Invite your conversational partner to visit your club. It's that simple, and so effective!

Your enthusiasm is contagious, your own presentation skills are an endorsement, and your accessibility establishes a stronger bond than any handout, Web site or toll-free phone number. Don't misunderstand me: There is nothing wrong with the latter methods, but nothing beats the word-of-mouth salesmanship of an excited member.

Imagine yourself alone in an elevator when it stops on the second floor. A stranger enters and you smile. You're wearing your Toastmasters

pin, and the stranger asks you about it. That's your opening:

"I received this pin from Toastmasters, the public speaking organization."

"Oh, public speaking... that scares me to death," the stranger replies.

"That's how I used to feel. In fact, that's why I joined Toastmasters. They've helped me improve my ability to think, listen and speak on my feet, and in a supportive environment too. It's actually fun! Guests are always welcome and there's no pressure to speak. Won't you come and visit? Here's our club's card."

Congratulations! You've just given your first elevator speech. You smiled, gave good eye contact, and were personable – all of which are skills you've fine-tuned in your club. You also shared your success with others. And we know from experi-

How a few prepared comments to a stranger can open the door to club membership.

ence that success is contagious. Lastly, you've planted the seed with this stranger, offering him or her your visual aid – in this case a club business card. In closing, you've left the door open for him to follow suit into your club.

The beauty of elevator speeches is that they can be given anywhere: at conferences and conventions, on sidewalks, in hallways, at parties or on public transit. I've even delivered one on an escalator!

Elevator speeches are not only valuable for membership building, but for professional and social networking as well. My elevator speech for my home club comes out differently each time, but that's actually more effective since it sounds more natural and off-the-cuff. Suppose someone sees me hurrying along on the sidewalk and comments on my sense of urgency.

"Oh, I'm headed to my weekly Toastmasters meeting! It's where professionals meet to improve their communication skills in a fun-filled format. We practice giving prepared speeches as well as speaking extemporaneously. And we sharpen our evaluation skills too. Come visit next week as my guest and experience the magic. Here's our card."

Walk your talk! Use short interchanges to introduce others to your Toastmasters club. You'll be amazed how many people have heard of us, been curious, or even been looking for the impetus to finally visit a

club. You're that spark. You're going up and they can too. As Toastmasters, we pride ourselves on time management. We are skilled at giving five- to seven-minute speeches, fluent at presenting two- to three-minute evaluations, and adept at speaking extemporaneously for one to two minutes. Yet in the real world, sometimes all you get is 16 seconds to capture someone's attention and get your message across. As skilled Toastmasters, 16 seconds is all the time you need to deliver your "elevator" speech.

I encourage you to practice yours with fellow club members, friends and even on your own

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answering machine and in front of a mirror, where you can study how you sound and look. Soon you'll master this "short form" of public speaking.

When you push the right buttons with your elevator speech, your club's membership will be going up. All it takes is 16 seconds! **T**

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