

Spreading Our Values Using an "Elevator Speech"

PROBLEM:

- Many people know what they believe, but cannot say it clearly and quickly.
- We often can't respond to something others say, in a way that is persuasive and from the heart.

SOLUTION:

To control debate, develop and use a brief summary statement of your values, and how they relate to issues important to you. This is called an "Elevator Speech". Build a sentence stating what you believe. Memorize and repeat. Use it often.

Introduction

The use of Elevator Speeches does not belong to one political party. Elevator Speeches are actually an old sales technique. Good sales teams have them on hand at all times in case they find themselves with a new prospect and not enough time to really get out a full pitch.

In terms of selling our ideas in social and political debate, the elevator speech is a powerful tool because it brings us up to the highest possible level in the discussion: the level of values.

All political debate exists on three levels: **Values** (top), **Issues** (middle), **Policy** (bottom). Progressives love to talk on the bottom level because it sounds more "real" and concrete. **Policy** is where the facts are. You can put policy onto paper, graph them, hand them out to the room. **Issues** are the large headings that give rise to many policies. They are tougher to get out for progressives. And **Values**--these seem almost impossible for many progressives to talk about, but they are what's really important. Social conservatives talk about values much more effectively, and use them to frame political talk around their issues.

Speeches by progressives are often much too long, but sound weak. Why? Too much policy. Not enough values. The power in the Elevator Speech lies in the way it brings our ideas up to the level of values.

Examples of Elevator Speeches:

1. **"I believe in freedom and liberty, low taxes, less government, traditional values, and a strong defense."**
2. **"I believe in prosperity and opportunity, strong communities, ethics in government, a great education for everyone, and quality affordable health care for all."**
3. **"I believe in fairness and opportunity for all, a strong democracy based on ethics, investing in our future, the rights of individuals & families, and leading the world by example."**

Elevator speech #1 above has been used by some conservative politicians, to express their values and justify their positions on important political issues. Speeches 2 and 3 above are ones that progressives might use.

Each of the elevator speeches follow the same structure. Each starts with a clear statement of belief ("We believe in") followed by a statement of the two most prominent core values, followed by four statements that express core values with a mix of issues and metaphor. They are all based on values, and that's what makes them strong.

Here's the formula:

We believe in [value] and [value], [expressed value], [expressed value], [expressed value], and [expressed value].

Building Your Elevator Speech

Step 1: Pick two core values

Here's a list of some progressive values:

Empathy	Equality	Strength	Fairness
Fulfillment	Prosperity	Service	Trust
Open Communication	Responsibility	Protection	Opportunity
Freedom	Community	Cooperation	Honesty

These aren't the only ones, but they are good values.

To start building our Elevator Speech, **take a "We believe in" statement and then put two core values after it:**

Example: We believe in [prosperity] and [opportunity]

Step 2: Add 3-4 values expressed as metaphors, related to issues.

These **expressed value statements** will back up our core beliefs. Building an expressed value is easy. Here's how:

2a. Try starting with another basic value, such as "**protection.**" This is a very crucial progressive value.

2b. Rather than just stating it, turn that value into a metaphor: **[protection] is [a community]**. Talking about protection in terms of a community is effective for many reasons. It's about people, first of all, and not guns. On the other hand, some people believe in the metaphor: [protection] is [threatening with weapons]. The phrase "It takes a village" is so powerful because it is an extension of the [protection] is [a community] metaphor. Another expression that follows logically is "strong communities," which is short, quick, and gets the point across.

Our Elevator Speech now sounds like this:

"We believe in [prosperity] and [opportunity], [strong communities]

Take some other core values and turn them into expressed values:

[honesty and trust] ---> [ethics in government]
[opportunity] ---> [a great education for everyone]
[fairness] ---> [quality, affordable health care for all]

2c. Add the three additional expressed values above, and we get example 2 on page one.

This is just one example. It's not a perfect elevator speech. But it can be used the next time you find yourself in a situation where you can talk about values.

You should write your own, one based on what's important to you, one which you can talk about with passion and enthusiasm.

This is based on information from Dr. Jeffrey Feldman. For more details on this subject, and the original, longer version of what's above, please see "Elevator Speech" under "Strategies" in the left column at <http://www.frameshopisopen.com/>
See that web site for lots of other great ideas about communicating values, too.

Another good reference on framing is "Don't Think of an Elephant", by George Lakoff.

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You can download this document and find other links at <http://ProgressiveActionAlliance.org>