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Elevator Speech

I would like to hear what you use an an "elevator speech"; or in other words, what is your short response to others when they ask questions like "What do you do?", "What kind of lawyer are you?", or "What kind of law do you practice?".

I would like to develop a short 5-second response and a longer response for those who are still attentive after the 5-second version. I usually ad lib my responses, which has varying degrees of effectiveness. Part of this concept goes against my grain, because I fervently avoid tooting my own horn. I am not shy or even particularly modest, as some of you may have noticed from my occasional posts. Its just that I have always preferred to be discovered rather than advertise myself. I never used pick up lines with girls either; I just waited for girls who showed an extra degree of interest in me on their own.

In any case, I was hoping that if I read what others are using as an elevator speech; perhaps I could form at least an outline of how I might respond effectively and still retain my natural personality. Thank you for whatever you are willing to share.

D.A. "Duke" Drouillard

"I do real estate law. My clients are either buying or selling property, or fighting with their neighbors over the fence and the driveway, or with their siblings over mom's house."
It gets me clients regularly.

Rebecca K. Wiess

I don't know how to be effective without tailoring to various common situations. I have several, but not memorized, just a general approach I try to stick to, as you do.

I try mostly to appear charming and articulate. Competent and understandable is important but social skills and small talk get you referrals. The most important thing is to ask them first and seem really interested and then do YOUR pitch.

For general cocktail party talk:

"I am a lawyer and I do business law. I'm not a litigator [insert courtroom lawyer if they don't look too educated]. My clients are mostly people who are starting a new business and need help setting up and running companies. I help a lot of software companies and internet companies and



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other businesses and I do their contracts and help them protect what they create."

For a social group, mostly doctors:

"I am a business attorney. I start up companies and do corporations law. I also write and negotiate all the contracts for their suppliers and for selling things to their customers. One big thing I do is help businesses select their company name and protect it so no one else can use it -- a lot of people really get into trouble that way. I also do some house closings but not much outside of business. If you know anyone starting a business I can definitely help them."

For other attorneys, business:

"My practice is commercial transactions, IT transactions, startups, copyrights and trademarks, intellectual property protection. I have some general business clients but most of my referrals come in for software companies, internet businesses, entertainment, publishers, artists, advertising. I help them set up the right type of entity, I do all the contract negotiation and drafting, I do their employment work, and I do all the intellectual property protection work. I farm out the litigation."

For other IT/IP attorneys (bar section, seminar, etc) where we are all standing around waiting for something to start or we have had a few drinks and going around telling a story:

"My clients at this point are mostly IT startups doing custom product development, internet B2B. A few of them are actually trying to create the next big thing. Some are deploying software via social networking and Web 2.0. Not too many years ago, my clients all used to be systems integrators. I also have a fair amount doing IT employee leasing. Some of them are still traditional data processing, believe it or not. I also have a fair number of engineering companies, civil engineering, mech engine, a few bio engineering, and one far-out guy who models molecules in this 3D hologram technology. I'm not doing the IP work on that one! I do all their corporate work, their employment work, and their contracts work. I don't do IP litigation. Actually I don't do litigation--do you do litigation?"

For someone who has just breathed fire about a bad legal experience and I think they might go postal:

"I do consulting" or "I'm a landlord, I rent out my house, and I have a couple of other jobs as well." (true)

Carol Shepherd

Foonberg recommends something along the lines of the following: Since I have begun using it, it has either gotten me clients, or enabled me to refer clients to others.

Q: What kind of law do you practice?

A. The telephone book lists over 26 types of lawyers-from Advocacy to

Zoo law, and many in between. With the exception of criminal law I do many kinds of civil law, with the exception of Federal specialities such as immigration, patent, and trademark. What kind of lawyer do you need?

Q: (person tells the nature of their legal problem) or states that they do not have a problem just now, but are interested for future reference.

A. I do many kinds of law. Right now I am working on X<Y<Z types of cases, and in the past I have handled A, B, C types of cases. My practice is aimed at the everyday person, sometimes I call it "family law", because it is everything a family may need. Construction contracts, uncontested divorce, rent control law, personal injury, etc. etc. And if you have a specialty that I cannot handle, I will refer you to one of many colleagues who does. (Good opportunity for a SOLOSEZ referral)

Lynn Sherrell

I agree Duke, Tooting your own horn is passe. Hence I focus on why I love our profession. Here is mine,

"I have the absolutely best job on earth, I get the privilege of coming to the aid of good people on the lowest days of their lives. On the days when all of their friends and family abandon them, I help them pick up the peices of their lives. I am a crisis trial lawyer and I am there when they get arrested (or Divorced), (or lose everything they have). I get the opportunity to be their angel. I bring them peice of mind."

After a stun of silence they usually look at me and say, "that is the first time I ever heard the words angel and lawyer used in the same breath."

It really sets up the next hour of discussion on Lawyers, crisis trial work (aka bet the firm work) and of course me (disguised as an angel).

Tony "the 'O's" are my halos and the "L's" are my wings" Colleluori

"I am a patent attorney. I help inventors get patents on their inventions. I also handle trademark and copyright issues."

Michael A. Blake

Tony, I love that!!!

Here's mine, FWIW: I do mostly special education work. I represent parents of children with disabilities trying to get the services they need for their children, mainly in a school setting. I also do a little criminal defense work and juvenile cases. I get appointed on family court cases and I do a little work in family court. Then, depending on the day, I handle crises for people that walk in my door or call me crying!

Elizabeth H. Robinson

Still working on mine. To the question, "what kind of lawyer are you?," the inner child in me is still blurting out, "a good one, I hope!"

Lisa B. Collins

"We do Business Brawls." I've *never* had anyone *NOT* know what I was talking about. I almost always get lots of questions as followup. More referrals than I can count.

David Zachary Kaufman

PS: created by my 2nd grader (who is now in 10th grade)

Tony

I love your "speech". Let's not be lawyers in denial, who try to distance themselves from the negative stereotypes of lawyers as sharks, panderers of frivolous lawsuits, and bearers of responsibility for the "lawsuit crisis", NAFTA, loss of jobs in Detroit, and exodus of doctors from rural America. Saying defensive things like "I do not sue anyone; Honest, I do not", and "I am not a litigator, really and truly" are weak, powerless, and just reinforces the base canards promoted by the anti-lawyer, anti-jury, anti- democracy groups which would like the totality of consumer rights to be determined by binding arbitration of adhesion contracts. Hurray for angels, hopefully not in disguise.

Lynn Sherrell

"I'm an employee civil rights lawyer. I represent employees against their employers when their rights have been violated. I handle sexual harassment, discrimination, retaliation, wrongful termination and overtime/breaktime cases. That's all I do." Takes about 5-10 seconds to say.

Gene Lee

I just say, "we practice the law of running a business."

Jim Bowman

Hi Duke! "I never used pick up lines with girls either; I just waited for girls who showed an extra degree of interest in me on their own." I won't comment on this one, but thought it was humorous.

I also somewhat customize my elevator speech after listening to the person to whom I'm talking.

A quick answer is "I'm an estate planning attorney, I do wills, trusts and probate law."

Some other I have used are:

1. Estate planning is a happy place. It beats handling probate or conservatorship or leaving turmoil for your family. It certainly beats having to fight out a guardianship proceeding because the parents did not have a Will. It beats your family members having to guess at your medical decisions. It's a happy place because you are in control now.

You're alive, you're healthy, you have assets, you have people you love and people who love you.

2. Another way to think about estate planning is asset protection. Your assets are you, your children, your business, your properties, all the stuff that you've worked hard for. Asset protection is protection from probate, conservatorships, taxes, and turmoil. The federal government may be your favorite charity, but maybe not.

3. Estate planning is an act of love - it protects you and your loved ones. It's like having an insurance policy. You may not need it right away, but when you do need it, your family will be very pleased that you cared enough to plan ahead. You also might discover, as my clients have, that making an estate plan actually decreases your anxiety and leaves you with peace of mind.

If you want more for estate planning, contact me off-list as I have some more I can share with you.

Best,
E.J. HONG

EJ,

I love the third and fourth "speeches" I am generally against saying I am a (X Type of) lawyer or even saying the word lawyer because it immediately has the person thinking their own thoughts about what a lawyer is and what he does and how he does it.

I therefore think that when we "speak" about our work, we want to draw them into the thing that makes is interesting to us. Not only does it describe what we do but it gives a motivation for doing it.

When I read the last "elevator" speech of yours, I for the first time really understood what made someone do the work you do, (I usually hear estate planning and my eyes glaze over and I think about a stuffy room full of gold diggers waiting to see what some unpleasant uncle who they hated left to them...) I think describing at as act of Love or as Asset Protection is a great way to throw that old thought out and make the listener want to know more.

Everybody "knows" what we do and who we are as soon as we say we are lawyers. When we tell them why and how we do what we do, what they "know" is now challenged and they want to know more which is to our advantage. I save the lawyer thing for as long as I can, not because I am ashamed of being a lawyer, but because the importance of the work still awes me to this day, some 23 years after being admitted. I still get a kick that people pay me to do this stuff. I don't think I have ever "worked" for a

day in my life, if work is supposed to be drudgery or difficult to experience.

Tony Colleluori

Not my speech, just a comment: At the moment, I'm practicing "door" law, with an emphasis on Personal Injury. It is challenging speaking about P.I. without sounding like the lawyers on the commercials during the daytime soaps.

Jeena Belil

Hi TonyC - dude/angel/spidey-lawyer,

Thanks for your thoughts - I'm glad that you now have a different vision of estate planning-it worked, yeah!

Following your suggestion, I could also say "I help you save money and protect your loved ones."

At one networking meeting, a gentleman who introduced himself before me said that anyone who is breathing is a good client for him. I followed by saying that I take 'em dead or alive. I prefer alive because they smell better but that I can take 'em if they're not breathing.

EJ

I usually say, " I practice mainly criminal law and family law, and sometimes in the same case." That usually gets a laugh and lends to further conversation.

Micah G. Guilfoil

Depending on my mood and the tone of the question, I answer "I'm one of those G-- Da-- trial lawyers you read so much about in the papers" or "I represent consumers -- ordinary people -- in financial situations. I handle bankruptcies and I also sue debt collectors and have some predatory lending cases." I would say about half the time I follow that up with a grin and say "It's fun!"

I get lectures on how people need to have personal responsibility about 50% of the time, blank looks 25% of the time, and a nod and "ohhh" and sideways looks 25% of the time. I give those people my card and say "Just give me a call or pass it on -- lots of us know people who need help and I really can help people." Gotten a few clients that way and a few acquaintances have turned into veritable streams of referrals.

Amy Kleinpeter

OK, depends on the situation, but one I have used with some success in

more casual atmospheres is that I am a trial lawyer who specializes in winning. Usually at least good for a laugh and usually leads to further conversation. Gauge your audience with this one though - could backfire too!

Michael J. Smith

Several months ago, a cousin asked this question. I explained at some length the sorts of things that drew me to the law, what interested me most, the sorts of cases I anticipated, and so forth. After waiting patiently for me to finish, she summed it up quite nicely, giving me my five-second answer:

"Oh, so you're just a good ol' fashioned hometown lawyer."

With some reflection, I adapted that to:

"I have a general practice - some might say just an old-fashioned lawyer. It's often easier to say what I won't do, and that's mostly very specialized work, like patents or tax law, complex criminal cases, and contested divorces. I like to call it 'proactive law' - especially things you can do to plan and organize you life to *prevent* legal crises, like estate planning and wills. And for small business, policy review, contract review, succession planning, and the like."

If asked to elaborate, or if the conversation suggests it, I will elaborate on the sorts of planning most people overlook, and point out how it ties into things they might not consider, like retirement planning and funding, and the relationship with estate planning, college planning for the kids, and so forth. If they own a small business, I might mention the link between succession planning, disaster planning, and retirement planning.

Patient relatives who aren't afraid to be blunt are good practice/sounding boards for these sorts of things.

[As to tooting one's own horn, I did an MBA concurrent with my MD; the importance of marketing, in its myriad forms and subtleties, cannot be overlooked.]

(All course, for the moment, this is all prospective, since I'm still looking out the window every hour or so, to see if the mailman has come yet with news of my bar exam results...)

Rick Rutledge

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