



Thinking Differently about Your Elevator Speech

It may be time for a revision.

By Terrie Temkin

You know the mythical elevator speech? It's that 30-second answer you'd give if a stranger on an elevator asked you, "What does your organization do?"

Tom Ahern, writing at Asking Matters (askingmatters.com), describes an exercise he does with nonprofit people where they write their own elevator speeches. The result is discouraging:

Ninety-nine times out of 100, those delivering their elevator speeches never mention the donor. The donor plays no role at all.

So true. So painfully true. And if only it were true of elevator speeches alone. Truth is, donors are absent from almost all things nonprofits say about themselves. From mission statements to annual reports, donors are rarely glimpsed. Even a lot of fundraising messages manage to avoid mentioning donors. Instead, it's all about what the organization's leaders do, how they do it, and how effective they are at it – usually in their own internal and impenetrable jargon.

There's no problem with that if you don't need donors to fund your work. But if you need donors, you really ought to proclaim it. Why should anyone care how cool you are – unless they're part of the coolness?

A homeless shelter might say it like this: ***We make it possible for generous people in our community to help the homeless get off the streets – permanently.*** Such a statement gives donors – the "generous people in our community" – their due.

If you think properly about donors and their importance, you'll naturally start revising your elevator speech and everything else.

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