

## **INTRODUCING YOURSELF Or Making Yourself Known In Any Situation**

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An impression supposedly takes hold within the *first four seconds*. Neuroscientists report that the brain's spindle cells, an ultra rapid connector of emotions, beliefs and judgments, work within 1/20 of a second. But don't give up. You still can influence how others respond to you.

There is a range of advice about how to introduce yourself or make yourself known. Whether called an elevator speech, escalator pitch, Twitpitch or networking in general, the question remains: How you can *you* best capture who you are and what you offer? Consider these criteria for assessing the content of what you say:

- authentic
- brief
- precise
- interesting
- memorable
- relevant or beneficial to the listener

**Why Prepare?** The more thoughtful the anticipation and practice for varying situations, the more likely you will present yourself well. Then you'll be better able to influence others' impressions for your benefit and open doors to continuing conversation.

**When to Prepare?** Any time you expect to be with new people is worthwhile to consider how to present yourself. Note how best to match their mores and norms with yours, what you want to accomplish and the opportunities the situation may offer.

Even when you'll be with people you know, review how you present yourself. Maybe include new information, refine what you say or try a different approach. This applies to professional and well as purely social situations, if they exist. Obvious or not, every contact holds opportunities.

Your improvements will be worth the likely investment of thought and imagination – usually no more than five to ten minutes.

**What to Prepare?** There is no one best way to introduce yourself. You may start with your name only and offer a firm handshake. Possibly add something taut and engaging about yourself or the situation, to be expanded as the conversation continues. If you expect time will be limited, consider frontloading your approach with a little more relevant information. Or you can explore mutual interests and see if the other person will ask you questions.

Some people recommend a well-rehearsed, even slick, spiel, of 50 words or less. The latest from Twitter, the Twitpitch, calls for 140 characters or about 20 words.

When answering the over-used question – “What do you do?” – you are handed an opportunity to transcend a job title that reduces you to a sound bite. Be prepared to offer a short description that's fresh and informative, possibly prompting curiosity.

More important is providing a sense of who you are to encourage a well-founded connection. That's why I ask people: "What are your interests?" rather than "What do you do?" That can open conversation, if you are willing to try this underused gambit or another one you prefer that could distinguish you for original, thoughtful outreach.

Ultimately, no canned pitch can be as effective as tailoring your approach to the situation in an authentic, pithy way. That includes the person you're meeting, the circumstances and the medium, as well as your own goal. Given all the Internet sites for social networking, there are also many opportunities in addition to face-to-face introductions.

For extraverts, introducing yourself flows fairly easily and often enjoyably. Develop a core message to adjust as the situation warrants. Introverts especially need to do this to ensure that any discomfort they may feel does not distort the message they send about themselves. Consider <http://www.ruthschimel.com/documents/Networkingandintroversion.pdf>.

In fact, consider a truly effective introduction as a process rather than one shot. There should be iterations and refinements based on self-assessment and experience. Ironically, at the very point you feel totally at ease is the time to modify and improve your approach. That avoids an automatic, soulless presentation or response, even boring yourself with repetition or verbosity.

**How to Prepare?** After choosing the content you want for a particular situation, jot down the main points, possibly using bullets. Then review and practice it several times, over a day or two.

Experts hold that at least 80% of communication is nonverbal. So your tone of voice, facial expressions, including the look in your eyes, and gestures all affect the message you send about yourself, consciously or unconsciously.

Here are ways to attend to and strengthen your content as well as nonverbal communication:

- Practice in front of a mirror.
- Make a recording and assess what you hear.
- Do role plays with a partner on videotape.
- Request frank feedback from partners in practice.

After an actual situation, briefly review what happened. Give yourself kudos for what worked well. Identify one aspect you want to improve. What did you learn about how you relate to others?

Bottom line: How you will be received is not in your power. But what you do to make an effective impression is. So whatever your level of confidence, act as if you feel at ease. Keep your sense of humor and social antennae primed. (See Daniel Goleman's *Social Intelligence*.)

No doubt you already know much of the foregoing; your job is to choose, adapt and add to what's useful and apply what works for you. By allowing another person to open a window to who you truly are, in the best sense, you can start building trust. After all, making yourself known can be the start of a mutually beneficial relationship, whether professional, personal, or both.

**Action:** Note what you want to work on and who can help you improve your self-presentation.

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