

DON'T BE A ROBOT

by Kristyn Childres

Somewhere along the line, the elevator pitch got a bad rap. It seems like no one wants to listen to one, let alone deliver one. Talking about what you do can be scary whether you're in front of one person or a group — how can you communicate the value you offer in a clear and convincing way, without sounding like a robot?

Nicole Olynk Widmar, Assistant Professor of agricultural economics at Purdue University, has tips for talking about what you do in an elevator pitch. "Elevator pitches tend to be monologues — sometimes, you feel like you're talking at someone instead of to them. But it's not supposed to be an in-your-face information attack — that's not the goal."

IT'S NOT JUST A SALES PITCH

According to Widmar, the value of the elevator pitch often comes from representing yourself to people who may or may not ever truly be your customer. She suggests thinking of the elevator pitch as something that sticks with people because they learn what your values are, how you create value or who you are.

TAILORING YOUR TALK

The elevator pitch isn't supposed to be one-size-fits-all, Widmar warns. You should tailor it to different

audiences, and that involves thinking about how you can create value in the eyes of the particular person you're talking to.

It's one thing to talk about your business when you bump into someone at the supermarket, but you may have to change that conversation completely if you're going to stand in front of the local zoning board.

ELEVATOR PITCHES AND AGRIBUSINESS

Widmar suggests that people in the agriculture industry should think differently about communicating with customers than with the general public or with people who are very concerned about industry practices.

"It's not that different because you shouldn't be changing who you are," Widmar says, "but you may only have 30 seconds or a minute, so it's important to prioritize as you represent yourself to different people."

Say you're selling fertilizer to a farmer. They're already going to know a lot about fertilizer, so you might only need to say that you're available and you create value by having weekend hours. Just let them know that you're there to serve them.

But when talking to people without an agricultural background, or people who are concerned about industry practices, you still want to present the same information — the truth of what you do and how you do it — but you might have to give more details.

For example, if you're talking to a zoning board or customers who are concerned about environmental implications, Widmar says that you might need to provide different sources to verify the information. Also, let them know that their concerns are part of your value system — that you're concerned about their values, too.

PLANNING YOUR ELEVATOR PITCH

Many agribusinesses don't interact with the public on an everyday basis. When you know you'll be interacting with the public, do a little planning and thinking, but keep it natural — you want to come off professionally, not like you're a robot giving a memorized speech.

When planning your elevator speech, Widmar suggests thinking about the following questions:

- What is the setting?
- How much time will you have? In some cases, it's really only 30 seconds.
- Who are you talking to, and what concerns might they have about your business?
- What key points do you want to make?

If you're really nervous, Widmar also suggests developing an opening and closing phrase that you're comfortable with.

Consider these ideas the next time you talk to someone about your business. By planning what you say and listening to people's responses, you can change the way you talk about your business and maybe even learn more about your customers and the problems you can help them solve. **AM**

Upcoming Agribusiness SEMINARS

Agribusiness Finance for Non-Finance Managers
August 13-16, 2013

Structuring Decisions: Innovating Through Turbulence
September 10-12, 2013

Learn more at
www.agecon.purdue.edu/cab

Center for Food and Agricultural Business

PURDUE
UNIVERSITY

Kristyn Childres is the Content Marketing and Social Media Manager at the Center for Food and Agricultural Business at Purdue University.

You can reach her at kristyn@purdue.edu.

