

# Your Two-Minute Pitch: The Keystone of Your Search

## If Your Pitch is Wrong, Everything is Wrong

by Kate Wendleton

**T**he “Two-Minute Pitch” is the answer to the question, “So, tell me about yourself.” With a great pitch, people are more likely to see you as *appropriate* for the kind of job you’re going after. However, as we say at the Five O’Clock Club, “If your pitch is wrong, everything is wrong.” You may have an interview every day and be absolutely brilliant in those meetings, but employers will not see you as appropriate for their jobs if your pitch is wrong.

The top of your résumé is the *written* positioning of yourself. The Two-Minute Pitch is your verbal positioning. And they must correspond. For example, consider Wally, a web press supervisor with extensive skills and experience, and a track record for high-quality jobs and great productivity. So, the top of Wally’s résumé reads:

**Web Press Supervisor  
with 20 years’ experience  
and an emphasis on  
quality and productivity**

In an interview, when an employer says, “So tell me about yourself,” Wally could start out with the verbal version of that same pitch, such as, “I’m a Web Press Supervisor with over 20 years’ experience. I’ve always emphasized quality and productivity. For example . . .” And then he would go into examples of his accomplishments, which may even correspond to some of the bulleted accomplishments at the top of his résumé.

If your résumé is done well, I should be able to pick it up and recite a pretty good Two-Minute Pitch *right from your summary*. Consider Elliott, who recently was a VP of marketing for a mortgage company. Previously, he had been in sports marketing, and he was now anxious to get back into that field. Since he now wants to return to sports marketing, his résumé starts out with: “I’m a marketing manager with 15 years in the leisure and sporting good industry,” and so on. Test

your own résumé and see if your pitch is that clear.

People tend to pitch themselves incorrectly unless they’re thinking clearly about their positioning. Here’s a typical example. I was chatting with Kathy before the start of a Five O’Clock Club meeting. Here’s the way the conversation went:

Kate: *So, what field are you in, Kathy?*

Kathy: *Banking.*

Kate (sensing her positioning was incorrect): *Well, I doubt that. What do you do in banking?*

Kathy: *Customer service.*

Kathy worked in customer service, not banking. She was positioning herself incorrectly. This doesn’t matter so much when she’s talking to me, but it does matter when she’s trying to get a customer service job.

Many job hunters have to reposition themselves, if only to emphasize certain parts of their backgrounds and downplay others. Figure out the kind of job you want to have next, and make sure that your résumé—and your verbal pitch—make you look appropriate to that target market.

**Sugar, Sugar, Sugar  
Use the Jargon of the Industry  
You Are Targeting**

*Great minds have purposes,  
others have wishes.*  
Washington Irving

Cheryl had been in a sales position in the sugar business. In her small group, Cheryl talked about bulk sugar, liquid sugar, brown sugar, white sugar, sugar cubes, truckloads of sugar and train-carloads of sugar. Everything was sugar, sugar, sugar! Yet Cheryl wanted a job in the bulk food business.

It’s easy for an outsider to see that Cheryl simply needs to say “bulk food” instead of “sugar.” But when it’s happening to you, it can be much more difficult to see that *you are positioning yourself incorrectly*.

*Use the jargon and the words of your new industry.* If you don’t *know* the new jargon, then you must learn it. You cannot pass the translation responsibility on to the people who will be interviewing you.

Cheryl may think, “If I can sell sugar, they should be able to see that I can sell food.” But they think Cheryl’s committed to the sugar industry. It is *her* responsibility to show them that she understands and can fit into the new target industry by using their jargon.

Eventually Cheryl learned to say “food” instead of “sugar.” She soon got a terrific job in the food industry. A few years later, she repositioned herself again and got a terrific job in computer software!

**Where Your Pitch Is Used**

*All managers establish relationships over their careers. . . . the unsavvy [managers] form fewer of those relationships. They are also more likely to let relationships fade when they move on to new positions. . . . The savvy managers . . . consistently seek to build relationships and then keep them up once they move on. It doesn’t take much time, just a phone call now and then to ask, How are you doing?*

Joel M. DeLuca, Ph.D., *Political Savvy*

Your Two-Minute Pitch is the backbone of your search. You’ll use it in job and networking interviews, and in your cover letters. You’ll be ready when someone calls and says, “So tell me about yourself.”

Your résumé summary statement could serve as the starting point for your pitch. Keep in mind:

- to whom you are pitching
- what they are interested in
- who your likely competitors are
- and what you bring to the party that your competitors do not.

Think about your target audience and what you want to say to them. Examine your background to find things that fit.

**Your Pitch in a Networking Meeting**

The format for a networking meeting

is covered in much more detail in our book, “Getting Interviews.” Use this format whether you get into see someone through a targeted mailing or by using someone else’s name. These are both networking meetings. Here is the format, briefly, so you can see where your Pitch fits in:

- Exchange pleasantries—so the manager will focus on you.
- Tell her why you’re there—such as, “Jane suggested I contact you because she thought that you could give me the information I need. I’m interested in moving into the sports marketing field.”
- Then the manager will say, “Fine. What questions would you like to ask me?” Rather than ask questions at this point, say, “I do have questions, but first I’d like to tell you a little about myself.” And then you give her your Two-Minute Pitch. “I’m an accounting manager with strong Lotus Notes background,” and so on.

That’s how the Two-Minute Pitch fits into the networking meeting.

### Your Pitch in a Job Interview

When you have a job interview, you are likely to be asked, “So Jane, tell me a little bit about yourself.” If you have not done your homework and you know nothing about the company, you will be in trouble. Find out something about this employer *before* you give your pitch. Otherwise, you will not know how to position yourself.

So, for example, you could say, “There are a lot of things I have to say about myself, but I’d like keep it relevant to your situation. What do you see as your needs right now?” Or say, “I can tell you a lot about myself, but first I’d like to know what it was about my cover letter or résumé that made you call me in.”

Once the hiring manager tells you something about what is going on in the organization, then you will be able to position yourself appropriately. Know something about them before you give your Two-Minute Pitch.

### Your Pitch in the Cover Letter

*The heights by great men reached and kept  
Were not attained by sudden flight,  
But they, while their companions slept,  
Were toiling upward in the night.*  
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Your cover letters will be much more effective if you use The Five O’Clock Club format.

- Paragraph one is your introduction. You might say, “I have been following Apex Chemicals for some time and admire your emphasis on tight controls. I, too, focus on the close monitoring of business units and would like to work in a place like yours. I think we should meet because you never know when you may need someone like me.” Your opening paragraph is generally *specific to the company*.
- Paragraph two contains your summary. *That is your pitch*. “I am a senior accountant with over five years’ experience in Lotus Notes.”
- Paragraph three contains the bulleted accomplishments you think would be of most interest to this target market. “You may be interested in some of the specific things I’ve done:

- Reduced expenses in 4 units saving company over \$200,000.”

And so on.

- Paragraph four is the close, where you ask for a meeting, such as: “I will call you in a few days to set up a mutually convenient time to meet.” Then you’ll follow up with a few phone calls.

### What’s Wrong with This Pitch?

*Know how to ask. There is nothing more difficult for some people. Nor for others, easier.*

Baltasar Gracian,

*The Art of Worldly Wisdom*

Take a look at the beginning of my client Joshua’s pitch, and see if you can tell what’s wrong.

“I have 18 years’ experience in education and training: in developing training programs, in running training centers, etc.”

What’s wrong with this pitch? We can’t know for sure until we know *to whom he is talking*. It turned out that the pitch was wrong because the interviewer was not interested in training, but in personal computers. How much did Joshua know about PCs? A lot. “Why, I can make PCs dance,” he said. He added, “The only problem is that the hiring manager would probably want someone who could network them together, and I’ve never done that.”

“Can you do that?” I asked.

“Of course I can” Joshua replied.

“Then go *do* it,” I said, “so you can tell her you have already done it. Network together the computers you have at home. And join a group that specializes in that. Ask one of the people if you can go along and help him or her network computers together.”

Here’s the pitch one week later:

“I have eighteen years’ experience in computers, specializing in PCs. I have built PCs from scratch, and I’ve done software and applications programming on PCs. I also understand how important networking is. I’ve even networked together the PCs I have at home, and I belong to a group of PC experts, so I always know whom to talk to when tricky things come up.”

But Joshua was feeling some frustration because he was an older guy aiming at a field full of mostly young people. He said to me, almost pleadingly, “I can do anything that has to do with PCs. Kate, I can make PCs dance!”

Joshua is speaking out of his *passion* and his love of PCs. I said, “Joshua, you have to say that in your Two-Minute Pitch.” So, then Joshua’s pitch ended on this note, “I can do anything, *anything* that needs to be done with PCs. I can make PCs dance. And I am very excited about talking to you today because I know that your shop relies on PCs. Maybe you can tell me more about that.” Of course, Joshua got the job.

You too have to convey your passion, if indeed you’re feeling any. Your passion will help *dramatically* to separate you from your competitors.

### The Outline of Your Pitch

*Courage is doing what you are afraid to do.  
There can be no courage  
unless you’re scared.*  
Eddie Rickenbacker

When developing your own pitch, first ask yourself “What is the most important thing that I want them to know about me?” No, it’s not that you’re a hard worker and dedicated. That doesn’t separate you from your competition, and it’s a useless thing to say. Your opening statement should be a *positioning* statement having to do with the field you’re in or the one

you're going after. For example, "I'm an international marketing manager."

Now what's the *second* most important thing you want them to know about you? This thought should separate you from all the other international marketing managers, such as, "with a strong operations background."

What is the third most important thing? This statement usually supports the first two, and may be an overarching statement that introduces the accomplishments that will follow, such as, "My experience includes strategic planning, business generation, and people development. On the strategy side, I wrote the business plan for the division, which encompassed ..." Here you would give concrete examples of your *accomplishments*—but not *too* detailed because you can give the details later. You don't have to cover your entire career in two minutes. Give an overview, and you can interject, "I can tell you more about that later."

The final statement in your pitch could be something like, "I'm excited about talking to you today because of the strong international component of your business."

That is how you can think through the formulation of your pitch. It has an overarching statement with organized details to enable the listener to grasp the key points you are trying to make.

### Repositioning Yourself in Your Pitch

Remember, *most* people have to reposition themselves based on the kind of job that they want to go after next. For example, when we asked Janie to "tell us a little bit about yourself," Janie said, "I've worked for big consulting firms my entire life."

If Janie still wanted to work for a big consulting firm, *then* her pitch would have been okay. However, Janie now wanted to work in international communications. In fact, when we dug into her background, we could see that she had been *doing* international communications with the big consulting firms.

So Janie had to reposition the top of her résumé to read, "Communications Executive – with 10 years of international experience."

Here's the start of Janie's revised verbal pitch, which now matches her résumé: "I'm a communications executive with ten years of international experience." Now, notice how you *feel* about the next sentence of her pitch: "I have ten years of international experience" [now pay attention] "in Europe, Latin America, South Africa, the Far East, Eastern Europe and Russia." See how much more interesting it is with the geographic details rather than if she had said only, "I have ten years of international experience." That would have been boring!

### The richness of a pitch is in the details.

#### You need to include details about yourself too...

...otherwise yours will be a generic pitch and it will not capture the imagination of your listeners.

And so Janie went on. "In fact, I was based in Amsterdam for three years." That adds even more interest.

And then: "I am known for getting new business. I've trained people all over the world in proposal writing and 50 percent of their pitches have resulted in new

business." Now pay attention to this next part:

"... These pitches were aimed at companies such as IBM, Philips, Natwest and GE." Again, see how the details add interest to Janie's pitch. You have to do that, too.

So decide on a *key statement* about yourself. Janie's pitch was, "I am a communications executive." What's yours? Then, what's your sub-pitch? Janie's sub-pitch is "with ten years of international experience including the following countries." And then, what are the most important additional points that you want to make about yourself that would be of interest to your target market? Janie added a few accomplishments that had to do with international communications, and this is the pattern you should follow.

### Interviewers Need to Know Your Level

One final word about the beginning of your pitch. Prospective employers need to be able to tell what your level is. So if, for example, you say, "I install computer systems," they can't tell if you're making \$25,000, \$50,000 or \$200,000 a year installing computer systems. So that's not a good pitch.

The listener needs to be able to identify your level quickly, within the first two or three lines on your résumé, and in the first few words of your pitch.

### More Customization

In your pitch, do not tell your whole life story. Instead, say things that are relevant. Position yourself, and tell accomplishments that would be of interest to the organization. You *memorize* your pitch, and then *modify* it depending on whom you are talking to.

Philip, for example, was in marketing and specialized in developing new products. He interviewed at one company that already had dozens of new products. They wanted their products taken to market. Philip had to change his pitch. Instead of saying, "I develop new products," he said, "I'm an expert at taking products to market."

Be sensitive about your target market. Find out its needs, what



they're missing, and their problem areas. Then position yourself accordingly.

**Don't expect the hiring team to figure out something about you. If you have a conclusion you'd like them to reach about you, tell them what it is.**

### Practice Your Pitch

*I know you are asking today, "How long will it take?" I come to say to you this afternoon, however difficult the moment, however frustrating the hour, it will not be long, because truth pressed to earth will rise again.*

*... How long? Not long, because you still reap what you sow.*

*How long? Not long, because the arm of the moral universe is long but it bends towards justice.*

Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.,  
At the end of his march from Selma  
(last lines of his speech)

Most people write out their Two-Minute Pitch, or the key points, and rehearse it in front of a mirror or with their small group.

Alice, a senior human resources executive, landed a prestigious job with a large company. When she reported on her successful job search at the Club, she said that she had met with the president of the company as well as with people on the board of directors and other very senior people. Alice said that she had practiced so much, that she felt as though she were having an out-of-body experience when she gave her Two-Minute Pitch; the words just flowed out of her mouth! You want to get to where the words just flow. And that takes practice.

There are a lot of surprises during interview process, but some things are *certain*. "Tell me about yourself," is *not* a surprise question. The answer to that question is your Two-Minute Pitch.

If you're following the Five O'Clock Club technique, you have highlighted certain accomplishments on your résumé, and the hiring team is going to ask you about them! You know these questions are coming. Make sure your answers are smooth – make sure they flow.

You have complete control over this aspect of the interview. If you do it The Five O'Clock Club way, your résumé will help to guide the interview process and make it more likely that the hiring team will ask you about certain accomplishments.

### They Won't "Get It" on Their Own, So Just Tell Them

Most job hunters think: I'll just tell them my background, and they'll see how it fits in with their needs. But they probably won't see.

If you want them to see how all of your jobs have somehow been involved in international, say, "All of my jobs have somehow been involved in international." Isn't that easy?

If you want them to notice that you have always been willing to move wherever the company wanted you to move, then say just that. If you want them to know that you have done things treasury executives rarely do, then tell them that.

If you want them to see that you have developed intensive product knowledge while handling various operations areas, tell them that. Do you want them to know that FORTRAN is your favorite language? Then don't say, "I have five years of FORTRAN experience." That's not your point. Do you want them to know that you can make computers dance? *Tell* them. Don't make them figure it out for themselves. They won't.

Don't think to yourself, "I thought that if I told them that I had done 12 years of programming, they would just understand that I also know how to manage project teams." No! Tell them what you want them to know and how your background fits in with their needs.

Make your message so clear that if someone says, "Tell me about John," they will know what to tell the other person about you.

### What Will They Say About You When You're Gone?

If you're an accounting manager and your résumé says "Accounting Manager" in the summary, and you're applying for an accounting manager job, chances are good that everyone else they're interviewing is also an accounting manager. When

you leave, the hiring manager is not going to say, "Oh, my gosh! I just met an accounting manager." Instead, you want them to say, "Oh, my gosh. I just met somebody who is an expert in developing new accounting systems. And he worked on a project in our industry doing exactly what we're trying to do."

What do you want them to say about you when you're gone? That's your pitch. Repeat it enough during the interview so that you know how they'll position you to other people after you leave.

### Communicating Your Pitch

Many job hunters try to cram everything they can into their Two-Minute Pitch, but when your pitch is too densely packed, people won't hear what you want them to hear. Think about those who are considered the great communicators today. We judge communicators very differently from the way we did in the past, when the Winston Churchill type was the ideal.

Today, our standards are based on the medium of TV. The best communicators speak on a personal level—the way people talk on TV. Whether you are addressing a big audience or are on a job interview, cultivate a TV style—a friendly, one-on-one conversational style—not a "listing of what I've done" style. Speak the way you would normally speak.

The interviewer is assessing what it would be like to work with you. Make your pitch understandable. Before people go on TV, they decide the three major points they want to make—what they want the audience to remember. For example, don't say,

"I started out in this job as a trainer, where I traveled to x and y and worked on special projects, etc."—if what you really want them to know is "That was a great assignment. My programs accounted for more than two thirds of the company's revenue."

### Depend on Your Small Group

Your group is terrific at giving feedback on the Two-Minute Pitch, both your content and delivery. They can tell if your pitch is clear, if you're being too modest about your accomplishments, or if your pitch is too general. Practice with your small group, and then take it to the world! ●