

MODULE 1: THE WORLD OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE PROFESSIONAL

In module 1 we are going to introduce you to yourself and to the world of the administrative professional.

At the end of this module you will be able to:

- Introduce yourself in different situations using an ‘elevator’ speech
- Identify the skills and knowledge you will need for the future of work
- List the skills, qualities, and attributes of an office professional and explain the importance of each

THE FUTURE OF WORK (VIDEO)

The fourth industrial revolution (4IR) has been a hot topic over the last couple of years and discussed at the World Economic Forum each year. We have been watching technology and its advancement and how it will change the workplace. In 2020 we were put on fast forward with the COVID-19 pandemic and we had to change the way we worked overnight. Technology became our best friend with online meetings using Zoom, Webex, MS Teams and a digital workplace became the norm. What challenges still await us and are we better prepared? Most companies are now looking at digital transformation i.e. how they can transform services or businesses by replacing manual processes with digital processes and new digital technology.

Now is the time to take a good hard look at your personal development program and do a SWOT analysis – your strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Remember to include the technical skills you need to build on for the future. Your technical skills are just as important as your soft skills. Technical skills can help increase your productivity in the workplace.

Do a skills gap analysis and start putting a plan into action to close the gap.

THE ELEVATOR SPEECH: THE FOUNDATION OF YOUR PERSONAL BRAND

WHAT IS AN ELEVATOR SPEECH (PITCH)?

Imagine stepping into an elevator in an office building. As the doors close, the person standing next to you says, “Hi, I’m a recruiter at your dream company. Tell me about yourself.” Are you prepared for an opportunity like this? Could you concisely introduce yourself, your background, and your career aspirations in the time of a quick elevator ride—30 seconds or less?

“Elevator speech or pitch” is a popular term for the basic introduction of who you are and what you are looking for. It can be used in a variety of professional situations such as networking events, career expos, cover letters and formal interviews. (The elevator, of course, is optional.)

In most situations, you will not have time to tell someone your life story or to list every accomplishment on your resume. The best elevator pitches provide enough background information and enthusiasm, so the other person wants to continue a conversation with you.

WHEN AND HOW TO USE AN ELEVATOR SPEECH

- If you are looking for a job, you can use your elevator pitch for potential employers and online in your LinkedIn summary or Twitter bio. An elevator speech is a great way to gain confidence in introducing yourself to recruitment officers and company representatives.
- You can use your elevator pitch to introduce yourself at networking events. If you are attending professional association programs and events, or any other type of gathering, have your pitch ready to share with those you meet.
- Your elevator pitch can be used during job interviews, especially when you are asked about yourself. Interviewers often begin with the question, “tell me about yourself”. Think of your elevator pitch as a super-condensed version of your response to that request.

WHAT TO SAY IN AN ELEVATOR SPEECH

Your elevator speech should be brief. Restrict the speech to 30 to 60 seconds — that is the time it takes to ride an elevator. You do not need to include your entire work history and career goals.

You need to be persuasive – even though it is a short pitch, your elevator speech should be persuasive enough to grab the listener’s interest in your idea, organization, or background.

Share your skills – your elevator pitch should explain who you are and what qualifications and skills you have. Try to focus on assets that add value in many situations. This is your chance to brag a bit — avoid sounding boastful but do share what you bring to the table.

Practice, practice, practice – the best way to get comfortable with an elevator speech is to practice it until the speed and “pitch” come naturally, without sounding robotic. You will become comfortable adjusting the conversation as you practice with it. Try saying your speech to a friend or record it. This will help you know if you are staying within the time limit and giving a clear message.

Be flexible – you are not interviewing for a specific position, so you want to appear open-minded and flexible. It is your chance to make a great first impression with a potential employer.

Mention your goals – you do not need to get too specific. An overly targeted goal is not helpful, since your pitch will be used in many circumstances, and with many different types of people. But do remember to say what you are looking for. For instance, you might say, “a role in accounting” or “an opportunity to apply my sales skills to a new market” or “to relocate to Cape Town with a job in this same industry.”

Know your audience and speak to them – in some cases, using jargon can be a powerful move — it shows your industry knowledge. Be wary of using jargon during an elevator pitch, particularly if you are speaking to recruiters, who may find the terms unfamiliar and off-putting.

Have a business card ready – If you have a business card, offer it at the end of the conversation to continue the conversation. A copy of your resume, if you are at a job expo or professional networking event, will also show your enthusiasm and preparedness.

WHAT NOT TO SAY AND DO DURING YOUR ELEVATOR SPEECH

Do not speak too fast – you only have a short time to convey a lot of information. Do not try to fix this problem by speaking quickly. This will just make it hard for listeners to take in your message.

Avoid rambling – practice your elevator speech.

While you do not want to over-rehearse, and sound stilted, you also do not want to have unfocused or unclear sentences in your pitch or get off-track.

Do not frown or speak in a monotone – here is one of the downsides to rehearsing: it can leave you more focused on remembering the exact words you want to use, and less on how you are carrying yourself. Keep your energy level high, positive, and enthusiastic. Modulate your voice to keep listeners interested and keep your facial expression friendly.

Do not restrict yourself to a single elevator pitch – say you are interested in pursuing two fields — Executive Assistant and Office Manager. Many of your communication skills will apply to both those fields, but you will want to adapt your pitch depending on who you are speaking to. You may also want to have a more casual, personal pitch prepared for social settings.

CREATING YOUR ELEVATOR SPEECH

STEP 1 – KNOW YOURSELF

The first step to introducing yourself effectively is knowing who you are and what makes you unique. Ask yourself the following questions and jot down your answers:

- Which of your previous jobs, even if they were part-time jobs, internships, or volunteer positions, provided you with experience relevant to what you hope to do now? If none, what about your studies or extracurricular activities?
- What are your strongest skills?
- What are your strengths and passions?
- What kinds of jobs, companies or industries would you like to pursue?
- What can you say about yourself that will set you apart from the other? What makes you memorable and special?

STEP 2 – CRAFT YOUR PITCH

Think of your pitch in three parts:

1. **Who are you?** Remember that your goal is to introduce yourself. Share your name and place yourself in context by explaining your qualities and skills or where you currently work.
2. **What are your major accomplishments/passions/unique skills?** Using the skills, you listed earlier, frame them in a way that is meaningful to a potential employer or networking contact. What can you say that will make a someone remember you or a networking contact want to know more about you?
3. **What do you want/Where are you going?** Laura Allen, founder of 15SecondPitch.com, calls this the “call to action.” This is the part of your pitch that lets the other person know what you are looking for and the topic you are interested in talking about. Do not be pushy or aggressive. Do be straight about what you are looking for.

Finally, be sure to adjust your delivery to the interpersonal circumstances of the moment: the goal is to maintain a conversational tone and not sound rehearsed. Think of the above elements as “sound bites” that you can mix, match, and cater to each unique interaction.

STEP 3 – BODY LANGUAGE

The effectiveness of your elevator pitch is not just based on what you say, but how you say it. Did you know it takes only seven seconds for people to make 11 impressions about you? You may be completely serious, passionate, and confident about what you have to say, but your body and clothing may be sending a different message. Image matters. When practicing and delivering your elevator pitch, consider:

- Posture
- Eye contact
- Volume
- Tone
- Facial expression (smile!)
- Clothing
- Handshake

STEP 4 – PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE

Once you are satisfied with your elevator pitch’s content and delivery, be sure to practice it enough to be comfortable and confident. If possible, try to video or audio tape yourself to see if you have any speech tics (like “um” or “you know”) or if you have a nervous habit like putting your hands in your pockets or brushing your hair aside. Your goal should be a natural delivery that feels confident but not too practiced.

Once you are happy with the way your intro sounds to your own eyes and ears, try it with friends, family members and colleagues. Remember that every time you test your introduction and get feedback, you are getting more comfortable talking about yourself.

SKILLS, QUALITIES AND ATTRIBUTES OF AN OFFICE PROFESSIONAL

Employers expect administrative professionals to have the knowledge and skills they need to do their jobs. They also expect employees to have the interpersonal skills needed to work well with colleagues and customers.

Organisations seek employees who are responsible and accountable for completing work assigned to them. They want people who manage their time well, have strong thinking and problem-solving skills and are committed to advancing the goals of the organisation.

Employers look for workers with a combination of skills, knowledge, attitude, and personal traits.

TECHNICAL SKILLS

Technical skill is the ability to apply specialised knowledge and procedures such as the use of specific software to get the job done. In many occupations, the ability to learn new software is essential. Technical skills change, so the employee must be able to adapt and learn new skills.

Administrative Professionals are expected to know how to use word processing, database management, spread sheet, presentation, and online communication software. In some offices, they must be able to use desktop publishing and project management software. Many organisations have proprietary software applications that are not taught in schools and universities but are rather learnt on the job.

As an Administrative Professional, you will be expected to learn new skills based on what you already know. For example, word processing is a basic office skill. You may be familiar with Microsoft Office® 2010 but take a job in a group that uses Microsoft Office® 2016. Your employer will expect you to be able to use Office 2016. You might be expected to use a phone system which you have never used before, but your employer will expect you to learn how to use it quickly with no formal training.

A few other technical skills are required. In addition to having good keyboarding skills, you should be good at spelling, punctuation, and grammar. You will also need to learn to use general office equipment efficiently. You may be expected to troubleshoot problems with peripheral equipment such as scanners, printers, copiers, and fax machines. You might also be expected to train and guide others in their use as well.

INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

Every employee needs good interpersonal skills. One of the most common reasons that people fail to advance in their careers or are let go from their jobs is the inability to get along with others. Good interpersonal skills make the work environment more pleasant, less stressful, and more satisfying.

As an Administrative Professional, you will interact with many people each day – in person, by e-mail and on the telephone. You should treat colleagues and customers with courtesy, respect, and consideration.

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

It is important to develop your effective speaking, listening, writing and presentation skills throughout your career. In survey after survey, year after year, employers rank strong communication skills among the skills they look for most when hiring.

The workplace runs on efficient conversations and e-mails in which ideas are exchanged, questions answered, and decisions made. You need to be able to express your thoughts and ideas effectively when speaking and writing and to be skilled in asking questions. You need to listen well to ensure you understand what others are saying as well as their attitudes and intentions.

TEAMWORK AND COLLABORATION SKILLS

Many tasks in today's workplace are accomplished by groups or teams. An understanding of how teams work and how to be an effective team member will help you in your career.

An Administrative Professional is a team member who helps and supports others. People who choose this occupation generally work closely with one or more people. In addition to this daily supporting role, you may be asked to manage special projects with others. You may serve on teams to solve problems or to complete assignments. Working collaboratively in a group or team requires a set of skills.

CUSTOMER FOCUS

Employers look for employees who are genuinely committed to serving customers. Exceptional customer service turns occasional customers into loyal customers and attracts new business through word of mouth.

Many Administrative Professionals are the face of the office – the first person most visitors meet. How you conduct yourself reflects on the organisation. In every case, you want to appear professional, pleasant, co-operative, and helpful.

PROBLEM SOLVING AND CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS

Every workplace has its problems and challenges. Your employer will expect you to use your critical thinking skills to anticipate problems, so they can be prevented. If they cannot be prevented, you will need to be able to work out ways of solving them.

Versatility and adaptability are also tremendous assets. Employers want employees who accept and co-operate with change as the company grows. The ability to analyse situations critically will help you see the bigger picture – the events that are causing the change – so you can respond positively and productively.

PROFESSIONALISM (A PROFESSIONAL ATTITUDE)

Have you ever had this experience? You walk into a huge discount store and one employee stands out. That person gives you his or her full attention, walks with you to the section of the store you are looking for and smiles at you if you happen to meet again. That employee is a professional.

Professionalism comprises qualities and skills, including good judgement, initiative, discretion, organisational ability, the ability to work independently and a professional appearance (your workspace and you). Professionals are proud of doing their work well and proud to represent the organisation.

PRODUCTIVITY

Employers look for employees who are productive. Productivity is different from being busy or even as completing all the day's tasks. Productivity is not just a matter of quantity of work you do but also of the quality – not just how much you do but how well you do it.

As an Administrative Professional, your role is to support your superior and others to ensure that the office runs smoothly. You need to become skilled at setting priorities, completing the most important tasks first, always meeting deadlines and refocusing on a task after an interruption. All these skills take planning and effort.

You need to develop strategies for avoiding procrastination. Putting off tasks you dislike can lead to a crisis or missed deadline that can cause problems for the people you support.

You need to learn to track multiple projects to make sure you are on schedule and to follow up to ensure tasks are completed correctly.

A STRONG WORK ETHIC

Most employees prefer to employ someone who has a strong work ethic – someone who takes pride in working effectively and efficiently.

Discipline yourself to get to work a few minutes early every morning so that you are settled when the workday begins. You should be at your desk and on task first thing in the morning, and you should stay on task throughout the day, working as efficiently as you can.

Throughout the day, there will be distractions and temptations. At most companies, it is all right to take an occasional brief break to talk with a co-worker about things other than business. You just want to be on friendly terms with everyone. Just keep it short.

EMPLOYER/EMPLOYEE RESPONSIBILITIES

The employer/employee relationship should be a co-operative effort in which you share values and goals and are equally dedicated to meeting the needs of the organisation and its customers or clients. Employees should be committed to helping their employer produce high quality products or service.

As an employee, you owe your employer hard work, loyalty, and goodwill. You are expected to be honest, conscientious, and committed. You should come to work punctually every day with a positive attitude, well rested and prepared to put in a full day's work.

In most organisations, employers and employees support each other. Your employer is making a considerable investment in you. The employer pays you, and many employers offer training and benefits such as health, disability and life insurance, paid leave, and sick days. Employers have overhead expenses, include rent, utilities, taxes, liability insurance, equipment, and supplies. Your work contributes to the profits that pay these expenses. When you work productively, the money spent on your salary and benefits is a good investment.

In many organisations, you will have a formal job description that outlines your duties and your role in the organisation. A job description for an Administrative Professional should end with the words "*other duties as assigned.*" When your manager asks you to do something, you should never take the attitude "*that is not in my job description*" unless the request is illegal, unethical, or completely unreasonable.

Your employer should provide a safe and healthy work environment so that you are comfortable and able to focus on the job. Your employer should give you the tools, equipment and supplies you need to get your work done. Training should be available, usually on the job, to help you master the skills you need to perform well.

A good employer will offer frequent, constructive comments on your job performance to help you learn the job the way the employer wants it done. In many jobs, you will have a formal performance appraisal (typically once a year), to help you understand what you are doing well and how you can improve to become an outstanding employee through training and development.