

CHAPTER TEN

Developing a 30-Second Commercial that Differentiates You from the Competition

“Why not just tell them when we were founded?”

Over the course of your career, you will probably attend more networking events, seminars, conferences, trade shows, and happy hours than you can count. If you are like most of the professionals we have met, you have not given much thought ahead of time to the question of how you will introduce yourself when meeting someone at these events for the first time.

If someone were to walk up to you right now and ask you what you did for a living, what would you say?

Would you begin by talking about when your firm or practice was founded, or about how you chose your particular career path, or what your personal area of expertise is?

How do *you* react when someone begins sharing that kind of information at an event? Does it leave you enthralled? Or does it make you look around the room for someone else who is a better conversationalist?

Here is the real question: how much time and energy have you devoted to *preparing* your elevator pitch or 30-second commercial?

If you are not prepared to deliver a truly powerful 30-second commercial, you may miss out on your chance to convert a conversation with someone into a new client opportunity.

We find that most of the clients we have worked with have many competitors in their marketplace, and one of the biggest challenges they face is the need to differentiate themselves from the competition. If you are not able to differentiate yourself from your competitors within the first 30 seconds of an initial conversation, you will not be able to convert that conversation into a new business opportunity. That is a lost opportunity.

HOW NOT TO MAKE A GOOD FIRST IMPRESSION

Try this exercise. Remember back to the last event that you attended when you were meeting new people for the first time. Think about the other professionals that you met at this event. How did *they* introduce themselves? If you cannot remember, pay close attention to how your peers introduce themselves at the next event you attend.

In general, we find that when most professionals introduce themselves, they talk about the features and benefits of working with them and their firms. They mention attributes such as the size of their firm or company, specialty, location, and services. Most describe themselves as experts in a particular field. They talk about the fact that they are service oriented, and about their ability to deliver good results.

The messages they send are typically very “I-centered.” These messages are all about the person or enterprise delivering the message, and *not* about the person to whom they are speaking. Think about that for a moment. What does that kind of messaging sound like to your audience?

“I offer expertise in blah blah blah...” “We offer affordable yada yada yada...” “We are proud of our record of service to hummanah hummanah hummanah...”

Here is another question: Have you ever heard these people say that they *weren't* an expert, that they *overcharged* their clients, or that they provided *poor* service? You have probably never heard those things. That

would be a memorable 30-second commercial for all the wrong reasons!

So what kind of answer are *you* likely to give when someone asks, “What do you do?” Are you planning to do what everyone does, which is “wing it”? If you do, you will be talking about yourself and your own company, just as everyone else does. Again: Notice that the vast majority of these introductions are I-focused, and are *not* focused on the potential issues that could arise for their clients. If you decide to lump your message in with all the other messages that sound like that — you have a problem!

DOES THIS SOUND FAMILIAR?

A typical commercial heard at a networking event might sound like this:

“My name is Joe Smith, and I am with the XYZ accounting firm. We are a full service firm located in Anywhere, USA. We provide tax services, audit services, and forensic accounting, and we have over 100 professionals in our firm. We provide great service for our clients, and we give them good value for what they pay us. I’d like to talk to you about how we can help you.”

Are you wondering how we knew what you said at these events?

Even worse, are you still wondering what is wrong with that commercial?

The question we would ask is, if there are five other similar firms at this networking event, would the person with this particular commercial stand out?

Many professionals are too broad in describing their services. We have spoken with many attorneys who introduce themselves at an event, and then find that the person with whom they are speaking will start asking about, say, wills — when the attorney’s specialty is in, say, intellectual property or litigation! This is a sign that they need to prepare their 30-second commercial more carefully. Somehow, they need to learn to introduce themselves within 30 seconds or less in a way that will identify the *problems* they can help their clients solve — without getting too specific.

THE NEXT FIVE MINUTES

We have already spoken about the importance of being perceived as a strategic advisor rather than as a vendor. The 30-second commercial is the first tool you will use to shape this perception in your favor.

When you introduce yourself, your goal is to make a positive impact that elicits interest. The reaction you want to generate from the person with whom you are speaking is simply for them to want to continue the conversation with you.

Most professionals are selling complicated services and could never realistically sign up a new client within the initial 30 seconds of meeting someone. That is one of the main reasons that we do not want to “sell” with the 30-second commercial.

The goal of the 30-second commercial is simply to get the person you are in front of to want to speak with you for an additional five minutes.

The analogy we like to use for the 30-second commercial is that of a resume. On its own, a resume is never going to get someone a job. The purpose of the resume is to intrigue your audience enough to bring you in for an interview!

Similarly, the 30-second commercial should get your audience interested enough to keep listening for the next few minutes. That is *all* you want it to do. We suggest to our clients that they should look, sound, and feel different from all of their competitors at all times. You do not want to appear as if you are selling something; you want to be perceived as an expert. The 30-second commercial is the technique that will allow you to accomplish those goals in the very early stages of the conversation.

Standing out from your competitors begins with leaving an outstanding first impression.

Think of yourself as what you are: a problem-solver. It is likely that some potential clients you meet while at an event have issues you are good at resolving, issues that need to be resolved sooner rather than later. When you utilize a well-crafted, effective 30-second commercial,

you immediately present yourself as a problem-solver and advisor who is relevant to that listener's world. The 30-second commercial is designed to engage someone in conversation, and to gauge whether or not he has, or he knows someone else who may have, the types of problems or concerns that you can solve.

IDENTIFYING THE PROBLEM

The best way to begin developing your 30-second commercial is to think about the specific problems that you solve for your clients.

What are the challenges your potential clients might encounter? What types of issues could cost them money, opportunities, or open them up to liability? Are your prospects spending a great deal of their time on issues or projects that you could handle, thereby freeing up their time and allowing them to focus on other, more essential issues?

We suggest that when starting a conversation with people at a networking event or social gathering, you ask them to tell you a little about themselves first. Getting the other person to speak first accomplishes several goals. First, it makes the person with whom you are speaking a lot more comfortable because people like to talk about themselves more than they like to talk about anything else. Second, as they talk about themselves, you can learn a little more about their background, and this will help you to customize your message when you deliver your 30-second commercial.

When discussing the problems that you solve for your potential clients, begin by talking about the big picture problems that you solve. You want to tap into the emotional part of their brain as you do this. We suggest that you utilize emotional words such as frustrated, upset, or disappointed when discussing the problems you can help your clients to overcome because these are powerful emotions that are likely to connect to existing problems you can solve.

In addition, you may want to utilize case studies and third-party stories. The more vivid the story, the more your prospects can see themselves experiencing the same issues.

At the end of your commercial, it is important to ask an open-ended question. You want to get the person with whom you are speaking to self-identify which of the issues that you have mentioned are most relevant.

There is no one right way to do this. To the contrary, there are many different ways to craft a powerful 30-second commercial.

Here is one example of an effective 30-second commercial.

"My name is Evan; I'm with Sandler Training. I work with professionals who, despite their previous successes and current best efforts, are not growing their firms as quickly and consistently as they would like. By helping them restructure and refocus their business development efforts around a few select activities, they're able to identify and develop new business opportunities more quickly and generate referrals more consistently — even if they have limited time to devote to the effort or are uncomfortable stepping into a selling role. How comfortable are you with the results of your business growth efforts?"

Here's another example:

"My name is Evan and I am with Sandler Training. We work with professionals who, despite their best efforts, are frustrated because they just are not developing as much new business as they would like. Some are upset because they spend so much time servicing their clients that they just do not know how they are going to be able to put together a business development plan, make the time to execute that plan and bring in as many new opportunities as they would like. Others are concerned because the tactics and strategies that worked in the past to develop new business are just not working anymore. Others do great work for their clients and are concerned because they are not getting as many referrals as they know they should. Finally, many people are getting squeezed regarding their rates. Which of those issues are you facing?"

A (LITERAL) ELEVATOR PITCH

A good 30-second commercial can be deployed at any appropriate place and time — including the opportunity that arises for a classic "elevator pitch."

CASE IN POINT

Walter is an attorney. One day, Walter was walking into a large office building when a young woman stepped into the elevator with him. Walter had been working with us for a while and was a naturally friendly person, so he asked the woman what she did for a living. The woman told him she

was in real estate and that her company worked on commercial deals. She then asked Walter what he did for a living. Walter shared a powerful 30-second commercial — structurally very similar to what you just read — and mentioned that he was an attorney who helped real estate firms who were frustrated/upset/concerned about various problems he had a demonstrated track record of solving.

The woman told Walter that her company was looking for someone with precisely his experience, and she asked if he would come to her office to meet her boss. Walter walked into the real estate firm's office, and 45 minutes later he walked out with a new client.

Imagine what Walter would have missed if he had not started that conversation ... or if he would have responded with a typical "I-focused" message!

Below is a worksheet you can use to help you put together your initial 30-second commercial. If you are still unclear about what frustrates, upsets, and concerns your best clients, you will want to pay special attention to chapter nineteen, which talks in even more depth about the important topic of pain. For now, consider that the consequences of the *absence* of the features and benefits you provide equals pain.

30 Second Pain-Provoking Commercial Worksheet

Features/Benefits of your Firm's
Service(s)

Consequences of Not Having this
Feature/Benefit = PAIN

My name is _____ with _____ (company/firm).

We are a _____ (two to four word descriptor of
your company or firm) and help clients/businesses
who are concerned about:

(PAIN 1) _____, (PAIN 2) _____, (PAIN 3) _____.

Which of these things should we discuss? OR
Which of those challenges have you faced?

DIFFERENT COMMERCIALS FOR DIFFERENT AUDIENCES

The key to creating a successful 30-second commercial is to understand that you must create different commercials for different audiences.

If you are an attorney, accountant, or consultant with multiple practice areas in your firm, you should create a commercial for your specific practice area, as well as a firm-wide commercial touching on other practice areas.

CASE IN POINT

One of our clients, Mike, is a litigation attorney with a large law firm. Mike was frustrated because he would attend several networking events per month but never found new business opportunities. As we provided coaching for Mike, we asked him to recite the introduction that he used at the events. His introduction briefly mentioned his firm, and then he went into (boring) detail about how he handled litigation for his clients. In other words, he did not stand out.

Once he was done with his commercial, we asked Mike how often he met someone who either had just been sued or was about to be sued by someone. He admitted that it was not an everyday occurrence to meet someone who had an immediate need for a litigator. We then asked Mike how many practice areas existed within his (large) firm. He counted eight different business practice areas. We went on to ask if he ever received origination credit if he brought work into the firm that was completed by attorneys in different practice areas. He told us that he did get credit for business that was completed outside of his department if he originated the work.

We helped Mike build a general, firm-wide 30-second commercial addressing big picture problems that business owners were likely to face, such as:

- Believing they were not getting value for the fees they were paying their current attorney.
- Feeling frustrated because they were using two or three different small specialty firms to handle their matters, which was costing them more money.
- Feeling upset that the attorneys from different firms did not coordinate their efforts to come up with a business-wide strategy for the company.

Over the next six months, Mike developed \$250,000 in new business by using his firm-wide commercial when meeting new people. All of this was new business that he developed for practice areas outside of litigation!

It gets better. Two of those clients ran into issues where they needed litigation over the next eighteen months. That resulted in an additional \$150,000 of work for which Mike was awarded credit.

NOT JUST FOR CLIENTS

Many of our clients will also develop a 30-second commercial to present to potential referral partners and strategic partners. These commercials are not going to sound the same as the commercials you use with prospective clients!

Referral partners and strategic partners have different needs than your clients, so you need to make sure that you talk about the issues that are important to them. Some of those needs might be concern about how their clients and contacts are being serviced, frustration because their referral partners are not providing value or resources for the strategic partner, or disappointment with a lack of communication.

The 30-second commercial is one of the most powerful tools you will learn about in this book, but it will also be one of the most uncomfortable for you to begin to use.

BEYOND THE COMFORT ZONE

Many of us have introduced ourselves in exactly the same way for the last 10, 20, 30 years or more. It will take practice and a conscious effort for you to move out of your comfort zone and begin introducing yourself in a different way. Most of our clients find that they need to practice their new commercial 50-100 times before they are comfortable talking about the problems they solve, rather than listing the services they provide.

Once you do become comfortable with your new 30-second commercial, you will find that more of your initial conversations will convert into new potential client opportunities.

In the next chapter, we will talk more about referrals and how to ask for them.

Recap: The 30-Second Commercial

- It is not about you!
- Do not sell anything. Generate interest for the next five minutes of conversation.
- Identify what initially frustrates/upsets/concerns clients you have helped.
- At the end of the commercial, ask an open-ended question.
- One size does not fit all! Create commercials for multiple audiences.