

What's Your Spiel?

Whether at a cocktail party, a networking event or on a long airplane ride, everyone is eventually faced with the question, “*So, what do you do?*” Although some situations are more high pressure than others, being able to describe your work and organization in a succinct and compelling manner is a vital skill – especially when introducing your work to key audiences.

While your issues may be complex, the policies nuanced and constituents’ needs are huge, developing clear, straightforward language about what you do can help engage audiences and ensure they remember you. It’s not about “dumbing down” your work – it’s about opening it up so that others find it relevant and interesting. With a short, pithy description of your work, you can connect with more potential supporters.

Here are some tips for developing a successful narrative about your work:

Brevity. It’s not just the soul of wit; it’s also the core principle of a good narrative. You should be able to say what you need to say in about a minute. Focus on what’s most important and cut away the rest.

Opening. You want a hook to pique the listener’s interest and encapsulate what you are about to say.

For example: “Utopia for Kids finds solutions to the toughest problems facing our kids and families in our state.”

Problem. Define the task at hand in clear simple terms to illustrate the purpose of your work.

For example: “We believe affordable health care should be within reach for every family in Utopia, but far too many struggle just to have access to basic care.”

Solution. Say what you are doing about the problem, and why your approach is unique. Does your organization’s mission and approach match the scale of the problem you’ve outlined?

For example: “Utopia for Kids worked with a bipartisan group of lawmakers to ensure 180,000 children who were previously uninsured are now covered and able to get the care they need. That means that more children in Utopia have access to affordable health care than ever before.”

Action. Close with an invitation to your listeners to be part of your solution. What can your audience do to engage, assist, or support your work?

For example: “We’re still focused on building support so that we can protect health care for all families in Utopia. Would you help by joining our meeting next month to get more families involved?” Avoid jargon. Steer clear of acronyms, buzzwords and insider-speak to keep your audience engaged.

Passion. Perhaps the most important part is the gusto, enthusiasm and commitment your description expresses. Don’t be afraid to tap into the passion and drive you feel for your work.

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Creating Your Spiel

Audience. Always consider how your description will work with a specific priority audience.

Opening. You want a hook to pique the listener's interest.

Problem. Define the task at hand in clear, simple terms that illustrate your work.

Solution. Explain concisely what you are doing about the problem. What is the unique value you bring to the table?

Action. Close with an invitation to your listeners to be part of your solution. What can your audience do to engage, assist, or support you or your work?