From: Pink, D. H. (2012). To sell is human: The surprising truth about moving others. New York: Riverhead Books.

7.

Pitch

In the fall of 1853, an American craftsman named Elisha Otis, who had found a solution to one of the era's toughest engineering problems, went looking for a grand stage to demonstrate his invention.

At the time, many American buildings had elevators. But the mechanics of how these crude contraptions worked—a combination of ropes, pulleys, and hope—hadn't changed much since the days of Archimedes. A thick cable pulled a platform up and down a shaft, which often worked well—unless the cable snapped, at which point the platform would crash to the ground and destroy the elevator's contents.

Otis had figured out a way around this defect. He attached a wagon spring to the platform and installed ratchet bars inside the shaft so that if the rope ever did snap, the wagon spring safety brake would activate automatically and prevent the elevator from plummeting. It was an invention with huge potential in saving money and lives, but Otis faced a skeptical and fearful public.

So he rented out the main exhibit hall of what was then New York City's largest convention center. On the floor of the hall he constructed an open elevator platform and a shaft in which the platform could rise and descend. One afternoon, he gathered convention-goers for a demonstration. He climbed onto the platform and directed an assistant to hoist the elevator to its top height, about three stories off the ground. Then, as he stood and gazed down at the crowd, Otis took an ax and slashed the rope that was suspending the elevator in midair.

The audience gasped. The platform fell. But in seconds, the safety brake engaged and halted the elevator's descent. Still alive and standing, Otis looked out at the shaken crowd and said, "All safe, gentlemen. All safe."[1]

The moment marked two firsts. It was the first demonstration of an elevator safe enough to carry people. (Otis, you might have guessed by now, went on to found the Otis Elevator Company.) And more important for our purposes, it was a simple, succinct, and effective way to convey a complex message in an effort to move others—the world's first elevator pitch.

In Part Two, we learned how to *be*—the three qualities necessary for sales and non-sales selling. Here in Part Three (Chapters 7, 8, and 9), I'll discuss what to *do* by focusing on three key abilities: to pitch, to improvise, and to serve. This chapter is about pitching—the ability to distill one's point to its persuasive essence, much as Otis did back in 1853. And to understand the dynamics of that process and the purpose of the pitch itself, the place to begin is Hollywood.

Lessons from Tinseltown

At the epicenter of the entertainment business is the pitch. Television and movie executives take meetings with writers and other creative types, who pitch them ideas for the next blockbuster film or hit TV series. Motion pictures themselves offer a glimpse of these sessions. "It's *Out of Africa* meets *Pretty Woman*," promises an eager writer in the Hollywood satire *The Player*. "It's like *The Gods Must Be Crazy* except the Coke bottle is an actress!" But what really goes on behind those studio walls is often a mystery, which is why two business school professors decided to helicopter behind the lines for a closer look.

Kimberly Elsbach of the University of California, Davis, and Roderick Kramer of Stanford University spent five years in the thick of the Hollywood pitch process. They sat in on dozens of pitch meetings, analyzed transcripts of pitching sessions, and interviewed screenwriters, agents, and producers. The award-winning study[2] they wrote for the *Academy of Management Journal* offers excellent guidance even for those of us on the living room side of the streaming video.

Their central finding was that the success of a pitch depends as much on the catcher as on the pitcher. In particular, Elsbach and Kramer discovered that beneath this elaborate ritual were two processes. In the first, the catcher (i.e., the executive) used a variety of physical and behavioral cues to quickly assess the pitcher's (i.e., the writer's) creativity. The catchers took passion, wit, and quirkiness as positive cues—and slickness, trying too hard, and offering lots of different ideas as negative ones. If the catcher categorized the pitcher as "uncreative" in the first few minutes, the meeting was essentially over even if it had not actually ended.

But for pitchers, landing in the creative category wasn't enough, because a second process was at work. In the most successful pitches, the pitcher didn't push her idea on the catcher until she extracted a yes. Instead, she invited in her counterpart as a collaborator. The more the executives—often derided by their supposedly more artistic counterparts as "suits"—were able to contribute, the better the idea often became, and the more likely it was to be green-lighted. The most valuable sessions were those in which the catcher "becomes so fully engaged by a pitcher that the process resembles a mutual collaboration," the researchers found.[3] "Once the catcher feels like a creative collaborator, the odds of rejection diminish," Elsbach says.[4] Some of the study's subjects had their own way of describing these dynamics. One Oscar-winning producer told the professors, "At a certain point the writer needs to pull back as the creator of the story. And let [the executive] project what he needs onto your idea that makes the story whole for him." However, "in an unsuccessful pitch," another producer explained, "the person just doesn't yield or doesn't listen well."[5]

The lesson here is critical: The purpose of a pitch isn't necessarily to move others immediately to adopt your idea. The purpose is to offer something so compelling that it begins a conversation, brings the other person in as a participant, and eventually arrives at an outcome that appeals to both of you. In a world where buyers have ample information and an array of choices, the pitch is often the first word, but it's rarely the last.

The Six Successors to the Elevator Pitch

Elisha Otis's breakthrough had a catalytic effect on many industries, including the business of giving advice. Almost from the

moment that elevators became commonplace, gurus like Dale Carnegie advised us to be ever ready with our "elevator speech." The idea was that if you found yourself stepping into an elevator and encountering the big boss, you needed to be able to explain who you were and what you did between the time the doors closed shut and dinged back open at your floor.

For several decades during the twentieth century, the elevator pitch was standard operating procedure. But times and technology change. In the twenty-first century, this well-worn practice has grown a bit threadbare for at least two reasons. First, organizations today are generally more democratic than they were in the stratified world of the gray flannel suit. Many CEOs, even in large companies, sit in cubicles like everyone else or in open floor plans that allow contact and collaboration. The closed door is less and less the norm. Fifty years ago, the only chance you or I might get to communicate with the company CEO was at the elevator. Today, we can swing by her workstation, send her an e-mail, or ask her a question at an all-hands meeting. Second, when that mid-twentieth-century CEO stepped off the elevator and returned to his office, he probably had a few phone calls, memos, and meetings to contend with. Nowadays, everyone—whether we're the head of an organization or its freshest hire—faces a torrent of information. The McKinsey Global Institute estimates that the typical American hears or reads more than one hundred thousand words every day.[6] If we leave our desk for a few minutes to grab a cup of coffee, greeting us upon our return will be new e-mails, texts, and tweets—not to mention all the blog posts we haven't read, videos we haven't watched, and, if we're over forty, phone calls we haven't returned.

Today, we have more opportunities to get out our message than Elisha Otis ever imagined. But our recipients have far more

distractions than those conventioneers in 1853 who assembled to watch Otis not fall to his death. As a result, we need to broaden our repertoire of pitches for an age of limited attention and *caveat venditor.*

Over the last few years, I've been collecting pitches anywhere I could find them. Based on my research, here are six promising successors to the elevator pitch—what they are, why they work, and how you can use them to begin a conversation that leads to moving others.

1. The one-word pitch

The ultimate pitch for an era of short attention spans begins with a single word—and doesn't go any further.

The one-word pitch derives in part from Maurice Saatchi, who, with his brother Charles, founded the advertising agencies Saatchi & Saatchi and M&C Saatchi. For several years, Saatchi has been touting what he calls "one-word equity." He argues that a world populated with "digital natives"—those under age thirty who scarcely remember life without the Internet—has intensified the battle for attention in ways no one has fully comprehended. Attention spans aren't merely shrinking, he says. They're nearly disappearing. And the only way to be heard is to push brevity to its breaking point.

"In this model, companies compete for global ownership of one word in the public mind," Saatchi writes. The companies' aim, and the aim of this type of pitch, is "to define the one characteristic they most want associated with their brand around the world, and then own it. That is one-word equity."[7]

When anybody thinks of you, they utter that word. When anybody utters that word, they think of you.

If this aspiration seems fanciful, consider how far some companies have moved in this direction. Ask yourself: What technology company do you think of when you hear the word "search"? What credit card company comes to mind when you hear the word "priceless"? If you answered Google for the former and MasterCard for the latter, you've made Saatchi's case.

"Nowadays only brutally simple ideas get through," he says. "They travel lighter, they travel faster." And although Saatchi labels his own concept with two words glued together by a hyphen and followed by a third, he insists that brutal simplicity requires one—and only one—word. "Two words is not God. It is two gods, and two gods are one too many."[8]

It's easy to dismiss the one-word pitch as more simplistic than simple—the ultimate dumbing-down of a message. But that misunderstands both the process of formulating a one-word pitch and the galvanizing effect of its introduction. Reducing your point to that single word demands discipline and forces clarity. Choose the proper word, and the rest can fall into place. For example, in his 2012 reelection campaign, President Barack Obama built his entire strategy around one word: "Forward." Its use yields an important lesson for your own pitch.

One.

2. The question pitch

In 1980, Ronald Reagan was running for president of the United States in a grim economy. Unseating an incumbent, even one as vulnerable as then president Jimmy Carter, who'd been elected in 1976, is never easy. So Reagan had to make the case that Carter's poor stewardship of the economy required the

country to change leadership. In his pitch to voters, Reagan could have delivered a declarative statement: "Your economic situation has deteriorated over the last forty-eight months." And he could have supported the assertion with a slew of data on the nation's spiraling inflation and steep unemployment. Instead, Reagan asked a question: "Are you better off now than you were four years ago?"

As we saw in Chapter 5 with interrogative self-talk, questions often pack a surprising punch. Yet they're underused when we try to move others, despite a raft of social science that suggests we should deploy them more often. Beginning with research in the 1980s, several scholars have found that questions can outperform statements in persuading others. For example, Robert Burnkrant and Daniel Howard of Ohio State University tested the potency of a series of short pitches to a group of undergraduates. At issue was whether universities should require seniors to pass a comprehensive exam as a condition of graduation. When the researchers presented strong arguments for the policy as questions (e.g., "Will passing a comprehensive exam be an aid to those who seek admission to graduate and professional schools?"), the participants were much likelier to support the policy than they were when presented with the equivalent argument as a statement. However, questions weren't always best. The researchers also found that when the underlying arguments were *weak*, presenting them in the interrogative form had a *negative* effect.[9]

The reasons for the difference go to the core of how questions operate. When I make a statement, you can receive it passively. When I ask a question, you're compelled to respond, either aloud if the question is direct or silently if the question is rhetorical. That requires at least a modicum of effort on your part or, as the re-

searchers put it, "more intensive processing of message content."[10] Deeper processing reveals the stolidity of strong arguments and the flimsiness of weak ones. In the 1980 example, then, the question that worked so well for Reagan would have been disastrous for Carter. If he were trying to argue that Americans' economic conditions had improved during his presidency—when for the vast majority of voters they had not—asking them "Are you better off now than you were four years ago?" would have prompted people to think more deeply, leading most to a conclusion different from what Carter might have intended. Likewise, in 2012 when Republican presidential nominee Mitt Romney tried to use Reagan's question in his race against Obama, the tactic didn't work very well. Subsequent polling discovered that while many voters did believe they were worse off than they were four years prior, a greater percentage said they were better off or the same,[11] dulling some of the sharpness of this line of attack.

By making people work just a little harder, question pitches prompt people to come up with *their own* reasons for agreeing (or not). And when people summon their own reasons for believing something, they endorse the belief more strongly and become more likely to act on it. So given your knowledge of the underlying social psychology, the next time you've got a strong case to make to a prospective employer, new sales prospect, or undecided friend, do you think you should skip making a statement and instead ask a question?

3. The rhyming pitch

Lawyers, especially trial lawyers, are in the moving business. They sell juries on verdicts. And integral to their efforts is their closing argument—the final summary of all the evidence that's been presented over the course of the trial. It's the ultimate pitch, days and sometimes weeks of material reduced to its essentials.

In 1995, an American lawyer named Johnnie L. Cochran presented his closing argument in the trial of his client, the former football star O. J. Simpson, who stood accused of murdering his ex-wife and her friend. Among the evidence the jurors had to consider was a bloodstained glove found at the murder scene that prosecutors said belonged to Simpson. To demonstrate that the glove was indeed his, during the trial, prosecutors had asked Simpson to slip it on in front of the jury. Simpson tried, but struggled—and failed to get the glove on. In his closing statement, Cochran made the following pitch for his client's innocence: "If it doesn't fit . . ."

Most Americans who were alive at the time know the rest: ". . . you must acquit." The jury exonerated Simpson—and one reason was Cochran's seven-word rhyme: If it doesn't fit, you must acquit.

Cochran, who died in 2005, was probably operating on instinct and experience, but his technique has ample support in the social science literature. For instance, in a 2000 study, Matthew S. McGlone and Jessica Tofighbakhsh of Lafayette College presented participants with a list of sixty aphorisms and asked them to rate whether each was "an accurate description of human behavior."[12] Researchers included existing aphorisms that rhymed along with modified versions that did not, as you can see on the next page.

Original, rhyming version	Modified, nonrhyming version
Woes unite foes.	Woes unite enemies.
What sobriety conceals, alcohol reveals.	What sobriety conceals, alcohol unmasks.
Life is mostly strife.	Life is mostly struggle.
Caution and measure will win you treasure.	Caution and measure will win you riches.

Participants rated the aphorisms in the left column as far more accurate than those in the right column, even though each pair says essentially the same thing. Yet when the researchers asked people, "In your opinion, do aphorisms that rhyme describe human behavior more accurately than those that do not rhyme?" the overwhelming answer was no. Participants were attributing accuracy to the rhyming versions *unconsciously*. Only when they were explicitly instructed to disentangle the meaning from the form did they rate the statements as equally accurate.[13]

What's going on? Rhymes boost what linguists and cognitive scientists call "processing fluency," the ease with which our minds slice, dice, and make sense of stimuli. Rhymes taste great and go down easily and we equate that smoothness with accuracy. In this way, rhyme can enhance reason.

That's one explanation for why Haribo, the German candy company best known for its "gummy bears," uses a rhyming pitch in every country where it operates and in each of those countries' languages.

For example, its pitch in English is: *"Kids and grown-ups love it so—the happy world of Haribo."*

In French it's: *"Haribo, c'est beau la vie—pour les grands et les petits."*

In Spanish it's: *"Haribo, dulces sabores—para pequeños y mayores."*

Haribo is acting on knowledge that you, too, can use in your work and life. If you're testifying before your city council, summarizing your main point with a rhyme gives council members a way to talk about your proposal when they deliberate. If you're one of a series of freelancers invited to make a presentation before a big potential client, including a rhyme can enhance the processing fluency of your listeners, allowing your message to stick in their minds when they compare you and your competitors. Remember: Pitches that rhyme are more sublime.

4. The subject-line pitch

E-mail has become so integrated into our lives that, as Xerox PARC researchers describe, it has "become more like a habitat than an application."[14] But as with any habitat, the more deeply we're immersed in it, the less we notice its distinctive features. That's why many of us haven't realized that every e-mail we send is a pitch. It's a plea for someone's attention and an invitation to engage.

Whether somebody accepts that invitation, or even opens the e-mail at all, depends most on who sent it. You're more likely to look at a message from your boss or your girlfriend than from a company you've never heard of promising a product you'll never need. But the next most important element in e-mail engagement is the subject line—the headline that previews and promises what the message contains.

In 2011 three Carnegie Mellon University professors conducted

a series of studies examining why some subject lines are more effective than others. In one experiment, they used the "think-aloud method," wherein participants worked through their e-mail inboxes and narrated their decisions about what they read, replied to, forwarded, or deleted. The researchers discovered that participants based their decisions on two factors: utility and curiosity. People were quite likely to "read emails that directly affected their work." No surprise there. But they were also likely "to open messages when they had moderate levels of uncertainty about the contents, i.e. they were 'curious' what the messages were about."[15]

Utility and curiosity were about equally potent, but they seemed to operate independently of each other. Utility worked better when recipients had lots of e-mail, but "curiosity [drove] attention to email under conditions of low demand." One explanation for the different behaviors under different conditions was the motives behind each choice. People opened useful messages for extrinsic reasons; they had something to gain or lose. They opened the other messages for intrinsic reasons; they were just curious. Ample research has shown that trying to add intrinsic motives on top of extrinsic ones often backfires.[16] As a result, say the Carnegie Mellon researchers, your e-mail subject line should be either obviously useful (*Found the best & cheapest photocopier*) or mysteriously intriguing (*A photocopy breakthrough!*), but probably not both (*The Canon IR2545 is a photocopy breakthrough*). And considering the volume of e-mail most people contend with, usefulness will often trump intrigue, although tapping recipients' inherent curiosity, in the form of a provocative or even blank subject line, can be surprisingly effective in some circumstances.

Along with utility and curiosity is a third principle: specificity. Indeed, Brian Clark, founder of the popular Copyblogger copywriting website, recommends that subject lines should be "ultra-

specific."[17] Thus a mushy subject line like *Improve your golf swing* achieves less than one offering *4 tips to improve your golf swing this afternoon.*

Tapping the principles of utility, curiosity, and specificity, if I were to send you an e-mail pitch about the preceding five paragraphs, I might use this subject line if I suspected your inbox was jammed: *3 simple but proven ways to get your e-mail opened.* But if I thought you had a lighter e-mail load, and you already knew me well, I might use: *Some weird things I just learned about e-mail.*

5. The Twitter pitch

Each year the Tippie College of Business at the University of Iowa receives more than three hundred applications for roughly seventy spots in the coming year's MBA program. Applicants submit their university grades, scores on the standardized business school admission test, letters of recommendation, and several essays. But in 2011, Tippie added a contest to its process, one intended to test the pitching prowess of the future business leaders it would be educating. The school asked a fairly standard essay question: "What makes you an exceptional Tippie full-time M.B.A. candidate and future M.B.A. hire?" But it told applicants to respond in the form of a tweet—a micro-message of 140 or fewer characters.[18]

Meet the Twitter pitch, which uses Twitter as a platform and its character count as a limit on loquaciousness. One of the pioneers of this form is Stowe Boyd, a programmer, designer, and investor. In 2008 Boyd was heading to a conference and planning to meet with some start-up companies. To avoid getting buried beneath a sandstorm of eager entrepreneurs, he required any start-up seeking a meeting to send him its pitch via Twitter. This approach, said one commentator, is "quick, painless, and to-the-point. It cuts

through the PR babble and forces companies to summarize what they do in 140 characters or less."[19] As Twitter insinuates itself more deeply into our lives, Boyd's "twitpitch" has become another important tool in everyone's persuasion kit.

The mark of an effective tweet, like the mark of any effective pitch, is that it engages recipients and encourages them to take the conversation further—by responding, clicking a link, or sharing the tweet with others. The few scholars who have studied this new medium with any rigor have found that only a small category of tweets actually accomplish those goals. In 2011, three computer scientists from Carnegie Mellon, MIT, and Georgia Tech undertook the first systematic look at what they call "microblog content value." They set up a website called Who Gives a Tweet and invited Twitter users to rate other people's tweets in exchange for subjecting their own tweets to reader evaluations. After analyzing more than forty-three thousand ratings, the investigators found a communications medium that a secondary school guidance counselor would say wasn't living up to its potential. Readers rated only 36 percent of tweets as worth reading, a surprisingly low figure considering that they were evaluating tweets from people they'd chosen to follow. They described 25 percent as not worth reading at all. And they rated 39 percent as neutral, which, given the volume of our daily distractions, is tantamount to declaring those, too, not worth reading at all.[20]

The types of tweets with the lowest ratings fell into three categories: Complaints ("My plane is late. Again."); Me Now ("I'm about to order a tuna sandwich"); and Presence Maintenance ("Good morning, everyone!").[21] But three of the categories rated the highest provide some insight on pitching via this new medium. For instance, readers assigned the highest ratings to tweets that asked questions of followers, confirming once again the power of

the interrogative to engage and persuade. They prized tweets that provided information and links, especially if the material was fresh and new and offered the sort of clarity discussed in Chapter 6. And they gave high ratings to self-promoting tweets—those ultimate sales pitches—provided that the tweet offered useful information as part of the promotion.[22]

Which leads back to the University of Iowa's venture into Twitter self-promotion. The winner of that first contest was John Yates, who crafted his winning entry in the form of a haiku (even including the syllable count of each line) to emphasize his previous work experience in Asia:

> Globally minded (5)
> Innovative and driven (7)
> Tippie can sharpen (5).

No, it doesn't make one's heart swell. But it's engaging and provides relevant information. And it secured the applicant a spot in Tippie's incoming class, along with a scholarship package worth more than $37,000. Given his ability to earn more than $600 per character, and more than $3,000 per syllable, young Mr. Yates might have a future in the new world of selling.

6. The Pixar pitch

Four hundred miles north of Hollywood, in a small city along the eastern edge of San Francisco Bay, sits the headquarters of an unlikely entertainment colossus. Pixar Animation Studios, in Emeryville, California, opened in 1979 as the geeky computer graphics division of Lucasfilm. Thirty-five years later, it's one of the most successful studios in movie history. Starting with *Toy Story* in

1995, Pixar has produced thirteen feature films that together have grossed $7.6 billion worldwide, an astonishing $585 million per movie.[23] Six Pixar films—*Finding Nemo*, *The Incredibles*, *Ratatouille*, *WALL-E*, *Up*, and *Toy Story 3*—have won the Academy Award for Best Animated Feature, just a few of the twenty-six total Oscars the studio has taken home.

How does Pixar do it? Success has many parents—the foresight of Steve Jobs, who invested in the company early; the distribution and marketing muscle of the Walt Disney Company, which struck a development deal with the studio early on and acquired it in 2006; the meticulous attention to detail for which Pixar's army of technical and artistic talent is renowned. But an additional reason might be the stories themselves.

Emma Coats, a former story artist at the studio, has cracked the Pixar code—and, in the process, created a template for an irresistible new kind of pitch. Coats has argued that every Pixar film shares the same narrative DNA, a deep structure of storytelling that involves six sequential sentences:

> *Once upon a time* ______________________.
> *Every day,* ____________. *One day* __________
> __________. *Because of that,* ______________.
> *Because of that,* ________________. *Until finally*
> ______________.

Take, for example, the plot of *Finding Nemo*:

> Once upon a time there was a widowed fish named Marlin who was extremely protective of his only son, Nemo. Every day, Marlin warned Nemo of the ocean's dangers and implored him not to swim far away. One day in an act of

defiance, Nemo ignores his father's warnings and swims into the open water. Because of that, he is captured by a diver and ends up as a pet in the fish tank of a dentist in Sydney. Because of that, Marlin sets off on a journey to recover Nemo, enlisting the help of other sea creatures along the way. Until finally Marlin and Nemo find each other, reunite, and learn that love depends on trust.[24]

This six-sentence format is both appealing and supple. It allows pitchers to take advantage of the well-documented persuasive force of stories[25]—but within a framework that forces conciseness and discipline.

Imagine you're a nonprofit organization that's created a home HIV test and you're looking for funders. Your Pixar pitch could go something like this:

> Once upon a time there was a health crisis haunting many parts of Africa. Every day, thousands of people would die of AIDS and HIV-related illness, often because they didn't know they carried the virus. One day we developed an inexpensive home HIV kit that allowed people to test themselves with a simple saliva swab. Because of that, more people got tested. Because of that, those with the infection sought treatment and took measures to avoid infecting others. Until finally this menacing disease slowed its spread and more people lived longer lives.

> It's even possible to summarize this book with a Pixar pitch:

> Once upon a time only some people were in sales. Every day, they sold stuff, we did stuff, and everyone was happy.

> One day everything changed: All of us ended up in sales—and sales changed from a world of *caveat emptor* to *caveat venditor*. Because of that, we had to learn the new ABCs—attunement, buoyancy, and clarity. Because of that, we had to learn some new skills—to pitch, to improvise, and to serve. Until finally we realized that selling isn't some grim accommodation to a brutal marketplace culture. It's part of who we are—and therefore something we can do better by being more human.

To see each of the six pitches in action, imagine that you live in the fictional town of Beeston. The bridge that spans the nearby Girona River and connects your town to the larger city of Arborville has grown rickety—and you're leading a citizen campaign to replace the structure with a modern four-lane bridge. You've got many people to persuade—the town government, the citizens of Beeston, maybe even people in Arborville. And you'll need to do considerable work, figuring out how to finance the bridge, assessing its environmental impact, deciding who will design and construct it, and so on. But each of the six pitches offers a way to begin the conversations that will lead to the outcome you seek.

Your Pixar pitch, for instance, could be:

> Once upon a time it was difficult and time-consuming to get from Beeston to Arborville. Every day, people tried to cross the old bridge, but it took them a long time and some didn't even bother because of the delays and safety concerns. One day citizens came together to finance and build a new, modern bridge. Because of that, people in Beeston wasted less time and their families felt safer. Be-

cause of that, more were able to work and shop in Arborville, which helped that economy flourish. Until finally the new bridge became such a fixture in our lives that we wondered why we had waited so long to build it.

Your Twitter pitch could include an online link to an artist's rendering of the bridge along with a list of its benefits and entice people to click it with: *See what tomorrow's Beeston and Arborville can look like & why we need to create that future.*

If you're sending information to your fellow Beeston citizens, your subject line pitch could be: *3 reasons why Beeston families support a new bridge.*

Your rhyming pitch? *Opportunities are wide on the other side.*

Your question pitch could help people think through their own experiences: *Should it be such a pain to get to Arborville?*

And your one-word pitch could explain the reason for your efforts (not to mention an indispensable lesson of this chapter): *Connect.*

SAMPLE CASE

Pitch

Practice your six pitches.

There are three ways to learn and perfect the six pitches: Practice, practice, practice. Here's a place to begin. (You can also find extra copies of this practice sheet at http://www.danpink.com/pitch.)

1. **The One-Word Pitch**

   Pro tip: Write a fifty-word pitch. Reduce it to twenty-five words. Then to six words. One of those remaining half-dozen is almost certainly your one-word pitch.

   Your try: ______________________________.

2. **The Question Pitch**

   Pro tip: Use this if your arguments are strong. If they're weak, make a statement. Or better yet, find some new arguments.

   Your try: ______________________________?

3. The Rhyming Pitch

Pro tip: Don't rack your brain for rhymes. Go online and find a rhyming dictionary. I'm partial to RhymeZone (http://www.rhymezone.com).

Your try: ________________________________.

4. The Subject Line Pitch

Pro tip: Review the subject lines of the last twenty e-mail messages you've sent. Note how many of them appeal to either utility or curiosity. If that number is less than ten, rewrite each one that fails the test.

Your try: ________________________________.

5. The Twitter Pitch

Pro tip: Even though Twitter allows 140 characters, limit your pitch to 120 characters so that others can pass it on. Remember: The best pitches are short, sweet, and easy to retweet.

Your try: ________________________________.

6. The Pixar Pitch

Pro tip: Read all twenty-two of former Pixar story artist Emma Coats's story rules: http://bit.ly/jlVWrG

Your try: Once upon a time ____________________. Every day, ______________. One day ______________. Because of that, ______________________. Because of that, ____________. Until finally ______________.

Answer three key questions.

As you prepare your pitch, whichever variety you choose, clarify your purpose and strategy by making sure you can answer these three questions:

After someone hears your pitch . . .

1. What do you want them to *know*?
2. What do you want them to *feel*?
3. What do you want them to *do*?

If you've got strong answers to these three questions, the pitch will come together more easily.

Collect other people's pitches and record your own.

How do artists get better at their craft? They practice, of course. But they also pay attention. A painter visits galleries to view other artists' work and to make notes about their technique. A singer records an early version of a song, listens to it several times, and devises ways to improve it. Pitches are an art form of their own, so you, too, should act like an artist.

For example, keep a pitch notebook. With a small notepad or on your smartphone, jot down the great pitches you hear as you're moving through the world—a shrewd advertising tagline, a mom's request to her kid, a colleague's plea for a new assignment. This

exercise serves two purposes. It will make you aware of all the pitches in your midst. And it will help you see which techniques move others and which merely drift into the wind.

Also, try recording your practice pitches. Call yourself and leave a voice mail with your pitch or dictate it using a smartphone dictation app. Then listen. Does what you're saying make sense? How's your tone? Your rate of speech? Listening to your own voice can be painful, but it's a smart way to practice—and to spare yourself even more pain in the future.

Add a visual.

It's the saying every writer detests: "A picture is worth a thousand words." Although this aphorism doesn't rhyme, it still contains a few morsels of truth. In almost every pitch, the main ingredients are words—or in the case of one type, *a* word—but you can flavor certain varieties with images. For example, you can enliven question pitches, one-word pitches, and rhyming pitches by accompanying them with a single photograph or illustration that captures your idea. As digital communication relies less on text and more on images, your subject line and Twitter pitches can link to a compelling visual. You can even use props. For instance, if George Akerlof, the economist I discussed in Chapter 3, were pitching his idea about the cascading consequences of information asymmetry, he might hold up a lemon.

Likewise, video offers a way to combine the efficiency of electronic communication with the intimacy of seeing another person's face and hearing her voice. One excellent technique on this front is sending short video messages by e-mail, which you can do almost

effortlessly, and usually for free, on QuickTime (get the details at: http://www.quicktime.com).

Experiment with *pecha-kucha*.

PowerPoint is like the weather or reality TV: Everybody complains about it, but nobody does anything about it. No matter where we work or learn, we must endure the blatherings of people who anesthetize us with bullet points and then, in the dark of a conference room, steal our souls and bake them into 3-D pie charts.

Three cheers, then, to Mark Dytham and Astrid Klein, Tokyo-based architects who've brewed an antidote to awful PowerPoint presentations. They call their creation *pecha-kucha*,* which is Japanese for "chatter."

A *pecha-kucha* presentation contains twenty slides, each of which appears on the screen for twenty seconds. That's it. The rules are rigid, which is the point. It's not nineteen slides or twenty-one seconds. It's 20 x 20. Presenters make their pitch in six minutes and forty seconds of perfectly timed words and images. Then they shut up and sit down. The format promotes clarity through constraints. And because the slides advance automatically, presenters must convey their message with both elegance and speed.

Since its introduction in 2003, *pecha-kucha* has spread like a benevolent virus and metamorphosed into an international movement. Several organizations now use it for internal presentations. And Klein and Dytham have established a foundation that operates free PechaKucha Nights in 547 cities around the world. Visit

*It's pronounced "puh-CHOCK-chuh."

one to see how it's done. Then try it yourself. For more information, go to http://www.pecha-kucha.org.

Pay attention to sequence and numbers.

The social science literature is full of interesting (and sometimes contradictory) findings about how sequence and numbers affect pitches. Here are two general rules that are backed by sound evidence. (I've included a link to the research papers themselves for those who want to dig deeper.)

1. *Go first if you're the incumbent, last if you're the challenger.* In competitive sales presentations, where a series of sellers make their pitches one after another, the market leader is most likely to get selected if it presents first, according to Virginia Tech University researchers. But for a challenger, the best spot, by far, is to present last (http://bit.ly/NRpdp6). How widely this applies to other settings isn't clear from the research, but in general, the middle is the place you're most likely to get run over.
2. *Granular numbers are more credible than coarse numbers.* A University of Michigan study asked participants to estimate the battery life of two GPS devices. One device claimed to have a battery life of "up to 2 hours"; the other had an identical, but more finely grained claim of "up to 120 minutes." Participants estimated the first battery would last 89 minutes, but the second would last longer—106 minutes (http://bit.ly/yapcPA).

Ask people to describe your invisible pitch in three words.

We don't always realize it, but what we do and how we do it are themselves pitches. We're conveying a message about ourselves, our work, or our organization—and other people are interpreting it.

Take some time to find out what they think you're saying. Recruit ten people—a combination of coworkers and friends and family. Then ask them which three words come to mind in response to one of these questions: *What is my company about? What is my product or service about? What am I about?* Make it clear that you're not asking them for physical qualities ("tall, dark, and handsome") but something deeper.

Once you gather these words, look for patterns. Many people are surprised by the disconnect between what they think they're conveying and what others are actually hearing. Knowing is the prelude to improving.