

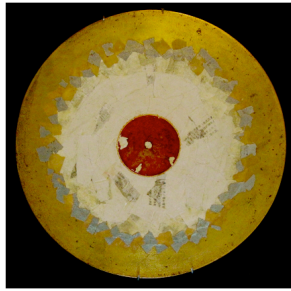
*Continuous Improvement*

The Newsletter of Oroborora

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# Getting Alice

by Steve O'Keefe

"You can get anything you want at Alice's Restaurant." So goes the tune by Arlo Guthrie. Anything, that is, "ceptin' Alice." This newsletter is about one technique you can use to get anything you want. Including Alice. Especially Alice.

If you could spend five minutes talking with anyone alive today, who would it be? I would spend my five minutes talking with *you*.

You are among a very small group of people whose opinions I value so highly that I pour myself into this newsletter just so I have an excuse to communicate with you. I don't charge for it and I work hard to not waste your time.

I firmly believe I'll be able to accomplish my goals in life much more quickly if I could just get five minutes with you. I also believe you will be able to make progress on your life goals more quickly if you spend five minutes reading this newsletter.

That's because no matter how fantastic a person is, there's only so much one can do alone. Most likely, none of us will be able to accomplish our most important life goals without assistance from others. So it pays to learn how to ask for help.

If you look at my LinkedIn profile, folks think I'm better at pitching than anything else. There was a five-year stretch in my life when my team launched campaigns for 200 new products a year! That's a new pitch every Monday, every Tuesday, every

Wednesday and every Thursday, every week of the year for five consecutive years!

What follows is the Four-Part Pitch that resulted from this crucible. It can be used as an email pitch for just about anything: clients, customers, collaborators, donors even dates. Today, I often cook it down to one or two sentences or a tweet.

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## Stroke

The Stroke is the opening of the Four-Part Pitch. The Stroke is not about me; it's about you. Almost all pitches make the mistake of starting with the pitch. Mine almost always start with something I know about you that took some effort to acquire.

If you're pitching a prospective customer, start your pitch by talking about or asking about him or her. If you don't know the name of the person you're pitching, don't pitch. Companies don't read pitches; people do. If you don't know who you're talking to, shut up until you do.

For example, if you're pitching a publisher, that means you're pitching an editor or an agent. How does your proposal make sense for his or her career? I'm forever grateful to coach Jim Fannin for teaching me to assess another person's state of mind before launching into my own concerns.

Looking for work? Instead of telling a potential employer all about your qualifications, take a moment

to mention *their* accomplishments. Here's the stroke from a job hunting pitch that worked for me: "You are the manager of 150 people responsible for marketing, sales and customer service. I bet you could use some help with that."

A good stroke shows that you know who you're talking to, you did your homework, you know something about what they do, possibly their most important successes and challenges. You can then show how your proposal makes sense given their background.

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## Pitch

*After you have stroked*, state your request as briefly as possible. People read pitches with one finger on the Delete button, ready to move along at the slightest whiff of bunk.

This lesson came to me from Mike Hoy, proprietor of a publishing house where I read dozens of pitch letters from wannabe authors every week. He said the objective of all writing is to keep people reading. If they stop, it doesn't matter how well you wrote the rest.

The stroke works because sincere flattery is irresistible and insincere flattery is not bad. The stroke gets the reader to the pitch and the pitch had better be tight or the reader's not going any further.

<Going further? Turn over.>

<Continued from other side.>

If you want someone to review your product or service, for example, it's easier on them if you just come out and say that up front rather than at the end of a long list of benefits.

I've graded over a decade's worth of student pitches and they simply have a hard time coming out and saying what they want. The pitch is often buried and sometimes missing. Don't waste people's time.

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## Credentials

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After the pitch, the next logical question is "Why?" You've got about 10 seconds to nail the answer.

The best answer is that you've done this before and there's a track record. Another good indicator is you've won an award. If your own credentials are thin, lean on an endorsement.

One insight I've gained from being rejected ten thousand times is to not oversell the goods. Lots of pitches engage in hype that's hard to live up to. But the people being pitched have a greater fear of failure than lust for success. They're already successful. They don't want to lose it.

Your great idea for a book is less important to a publisher than your experience hitting deadlines. A mid-list book from a large publisher represents a six-figure investment. They are more concerned with getting their six figures back than making seven figures.

Another way of looking at that came from an interview I did with publisher Peter Workman. He said it takes dozens of people many years to create a successful publishing company but only one bad book to destroy it.

Rather than selling the upside in your proposal, try eliminating the downside. You always get to "yes" if there is no good reason to say "no." Isn't that right, Mom?

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## Action Alternatives

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You don't want to force a "yes" or "no" answer. You want to provide as many reasonable alternatives as you can think of.

Most importantly, if the reader is not the right person for the pitch, you want them to suggest whom to send it to. If they give you a name, you now have the stroke for your next pitch: "I was referred to you by Big Shot."

If you are sincere in your request, you did your homework and kept it short, a lot of readers will point you to someone. Very often, that is the someone who opens the magic door.

That's why I'd rather spend five minutes with you than anyone else. You're likely to think of the name of someone who is important to me. For some reason neither of us may understand, that person is often the key to my mission. Please take a moment to send me that name!

Action alternatives keep the door open and the request alive and moving forward. Things you might ask for include a phone call, a meeting, an interview, a referral, an endorsement — even Alice.

That's the Four-Part Pitch: Stroke, Pitch, Credentials, Action Alternatives. SPCAA. Think of it as the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty when Asking for Anything!

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## Leaving Room

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When I was a teenager, I petitioned for the Libertarian Party on the University of Michigan Quad in Ann Arbor. I received 25 cents for every signature on my clipboard. I was so good they sent me to Rome, Georgia, where I stood on blacktop in 100-degree heat for 12 hours/day begging people to sign.

You get good at pitching under those conditions. My magic word was "please." If I got that word out, people would give me six seconds before bolting for the store or the car. A petitioner from Chicago had great success with the opener, "Hey, slim." A two-word stroke. Beautiful!

I later did some fundraising for the Libertarians because no one else wanted to ask for money. I got over my fear when I realized it was a lot easier to get money for an idea than something tangible. An idea can be anything the receiver sees in it. So don't oversell your pitch. Leave room for the receiver to tell you how they see your idea unfolding. Try to bend your proposal to fit their vision.

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## Getting Alice

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I soon quit the Libertarians and joined up with an outlaw publisher. I couldn't get our books into stores because *How to Steal Food from the Grocery Store* was just one of similar titles we published. We had a PR problem.

I had heard this publicist, Alice Acheson, at an industry event and I set my mind to get her to help us. When she won an award, I took the opportunity to send a note.

"Dear Alice," my pitch began, "Congratulations on your recent award as Publicist of the Year! You might remember me from your class at Book Expo. I need help getting our books into stores."

And that's how I got Alice, my mentor! She taught me all the rest of this stuff. If you get anything out of this newsletter, please Go Tell Alice <[aliceba7@gmail.com](mailto:aliceba7@gmail.com)>, because she's the nicest person I've ever met next to you!

