



slack

VARIETY PACK

Episode 5: Lift Pack

Narrator: You are listening to the Slack Variety Pack. A collection of stories about work, life, and everything in between. Brought to you by Slack. If you don't know what Slack is, head over to Slack.com and change your working life forever. Here are three quick pitches for stories on this episode. It's the Apple Watch meets The Great Gatsby.

Smart Watch Guy: In the early 1900s, both Packard and Graves became obsessed with owning the most complicated watch ever.

Narrator: It's a Dear John letter, on voicemail.

Voicemail Guy: I'm calling to say that I think we're done.

Narrator: It's A League of Their Own meets the social network.

Kimberly Bryant: Creating the next black female Mark Zuckerberg; I think that's possible.

Narrator: But first, it's Entourage meets Silicon Valley. Slack Variety Pack? Yeah. Cool. Making work less worky. From Twitter to texting, it's more important than ever to get to the point and communicate ideas clearly, cleaning, and most importantly, quickly. It seems like our entire life is a series of elevator pitches, to grab the attention of others. Where did this microcommunication trend start? On the ground floor, with Ilene Rosenzweig, trying to advance your boyfriend's career.

El Operator: Everyone in? Okay. First floor. History of the elevator pitch.

Ilene: I suppose I coined the term "elevator pitch" back when I lived in New York ... I guess that was in the '90s, and was a journalist, and was dating another journalist, Michael Caruso, who was a senior editor at Vanity Fair, at the time. It was a very exciting job because Tina Brown was Editor-in-Chief. She was an ambitious editor who was always trying to pitch her stories, but she was always on the move and he would try to snag her to get a story pitch out and sometimes the only way he would be able to do it is to jump into the elevator with her, when she was on the way out to her Town Car, and literally in just four floors to be able to sum up an entire potential 15,000-word story idea. When he would come home, it eventually just became, "So, how was your elevator pitch today?"

I think the funny thing about the expression "elevator pitch" is the times have changed since the '90s, where things become so fast-paced. You just have to catch people on their way from one place to another in order to be able to get face time with them. People are doing elevator pitches all

the time, whether you're sending a text or an email. You're not having a deep, long conversation so much anymore to explain an idea. People have the impression that if you can't distill it into two sentences or less that it's flabby. People are definitely in a mode now of trying to capture somebody's attention in a very short amount of time. Maybe the next generation of elevator pitch would be the Uber pitch, a pitch that you would conduct in the time that it takes you between texting for your Uber and it arriving; which is I guess about, probably 90 seconds?

Narrator: The elevator pitch is now standard currency in Silicon Valley. Legend has it that you are fired if you couldn't explain what you did at Apple during an elevator ride with Steve Jobs. Today, start-ups are pitching themselves to venture capitalists with an even newer type of elevator pitch; Hollywood style.

El Operator: 27th floor, the new elevator pitch.

Startup Guy: The biggest elevator pitch for your start-up may be to just combine two things that already exist. You know, it's the Tinder of blank. It's blank meets Instagram. It's a kind of shorthand that people can use to refer to your company. I found dozens of examples of these in recent blog posts and news articles, so here are 28 real elevator pitches and two fake ones: Uber for massages, Uber for tailors, the Uber of bodyguard, the Tinder of real estate, the Tinder of cuddling, the Tinder of baseball recruiting, the Tinder of pet adoption, Facebook for clinical researchers, the Minecraft of underwater exploration, the Candy Crush of data, the Instagram of recipes, the Snapchat of email, the Snapchat of money, Gmail for photos, the Pinterest of dating, the Warby Parker of hearing aids, the Warby Parker of mattresses, the Shazam of cinema, the Craigslist of breast milk, the Craigslist of crap, the Craigslist of the vaping community, the LinkedIn of YouTube, the LinkedIn of supply chain, the Fitbit of baby monitors, the Airbnb of parking lots, the Airbnb of home-cooked meals, the Airbnb of bikes, the Airbnb of boats, the Twitch of mobile gaming, the Yelp of hospitals.

Can you tell which ones were real? I lied earlier. They're all real. If you want to see which companies we're talking about, head over to [Slack.com/varietypack](https://slack.com/varietypack).

Narrator: All this talk about elevator pitches got us wondering about elevators in general. What is it about those things that make us so socially awkward when we're inside them? Let's go up a few floors and find out.

El Operator: Top floor. Men's shoes, hardware, and elevator awkwardness.

Elevator Report: Well, here I am, in the elevator again. The other guys just moved from the center to the back corner, so okay, I'll go into my corner, dude. Look at the ceiling, look at the ceiling, look straight ahead. Five more floors. Another one getting in, turning, smile, she's looking at the ground like you don't exist. Am I gassy? Or am I ... What's happening here? "Excuse me, why did you move to the far back corner?"

Guy in Elevator: I don't know. I guess it's a comfort thing. Same as why guys stand ... Don't pick your nose right beside one another.

Elevator Report: Why are you moving far away from me?

Elevator Girl 2: Just being polite, giving people their space.

Elevator Girl 3: Because you put a mic in my face.

Elevator Report: Okay, she's right about the mic, but how has the elevator evolved into such an unpleasant social experience?

Dr. Lee Gray: We don't talk to each other in elevators. We're happy to look at something, but conversation is very awkward.

Elevator Report: Dr. Lee Gray is a professor of architecture and an elevator book author, who knows these things so well, he's known in America as the elevator guy.

Dr. Lee Gray: We have a very large sense of personal space. The elevator is such a tiny little room, that we try to quite literally distance ourselves from the second passenger to get in and you can watch this ripple effect as more passengers get into the elevator.

Elevator Report: He says elevators never really used to be that awkward. The first passenger lift came to us in a New York Hotel almost 150 years ago, and it wasn't that bad. In fact, it was kind of a comfy place to hang out.

Dr. Lee Gray: The initial elevators were introduced into large urban hotels and they were, in fact, little rooms. They had cushioned, upholstered seats, mirrors on the walls, gas chandeliers hanging down from the ceiling, and the car did not move until all of the passengers were comfortably seated and then the operator would take the car along its way. The initial experience was very different than today.

Elevator Report: But good things weren't meant to last.

Dr. Lee Gray: As the elevator moved into the office building, then it, no pun intended, picked up speed, lost the bench, and we began standing rather than sitting.

Elevator Report: It's precisely this helpless, unnatural standing around strangers that gives us social anxiety as we ride up and down, up and down. It sucks. For human interaction ...

Dr. Lee Gray: In an elevator, there's only so far you can move, so you can make someone quite awkward if you wanted to.

Elevator Report: Personal space.

Dr. Lee Gray: If it's one person, we stand right in the center and that space is ours. When someone else enters, often you'll see people move to a corner or move to one side.

Elevator Report: A normal conversation.

Dr. Lee Gray: If two people are having a conversation and they get onto an elevator and there's a third person there that they do not know, often that conversation will stop.

Elevator Report: So what's being done to make this elevator experience way less painful? I attended an annual elevator convention. Yes, an elevator convention, to get some insight. A little surreal. Hundreds of people from all over the world, schmoozing, schwagging, and selling elevator stuff. Beyond the mechanical booths of springs and buttons and wires, a lot of these people were selling aesthetics. Jonathan Nadir owns an elevator interior renovation company that uses design to distract us.

Jonathan Nadir: In our industry, on the interior side, it used to be all elevators had seven-panel configuration; three vertical panels on the back wall, two on the side walls. Very boring and uninteresting. Now we do a mass of high-resolution graphical panels with backlighting and granite floors and all kinds of really beautiful things that were never possible in the past.

Elevator Report: Music, menu postings, viral videos; it's all there to mask our helpless feeling of being stuck in a box with strangers. In an elevator, we'll take anything over human interaction.

Jonathan Nadir: Cell phones have given some passengers an easy out. They'll just stand there and stare at their cell phone. Even if they're not really doing

anything, that allows them to pretend, well, I'm busy, therefore I don't have to talk to someone.

Elevator Report: If distraction is the answer to elevator awkwardness, then Gray doesn't really foresee a sudden shift into social graces.

Dr. Lee Gray: It would be very difficult to change. In some ways, I suppose if one in ten people decided that's their mission in life, to engage their fellow human beings in the elevator, then maybe that would gradually change and we would become more comfortable, but some of the conversations would last all of 25 seconds.

Elevator Report: Me, I still believe there's hope. I have a couple floors to go, would you like to chat?

Elevator Girl 1: I'm good, thanks.

El Operator: Thanks for riding with us today.

Narrator: Slack variety pack. You didn't think this whole episode was about elevators, did you? On with the show.

Voicemail: This person cannot be reached at the moment. Please leave a message after the tone.

Voicemail Guy: Hey, it's me. Look, I know this is kind of weird to do over voicemail, but I'm calling to say that I think we're done. This really shouldn't come as shock because I think we both know that we've been drifting apart for a really long time. I haven't even checked in with you for like a month. Don't get me wrong; we have a lot of good years. I think about all those times that I'd write a silly song for you or make jokes for you and we'd share them with everyone and people thought we were hilarious. You remember that? Every time I get a message from you, I get this knot in my stomach because I know that I'm going to have to call in, wait for it to ring, listen to some stupid message, enter my password, hit one, listen to a long, rambling message, and hit 7, 9 or 12; I don't even know, just to delete the message. The thing is, I don't even need to listen to it because I can see who called. I guess what I'm saying, Voicemail, is I'm breaking up with you. It's not me, it's definitely you.

Voicemail: To confirm, press one. To listen again, press two. To [crosstalk 00:12:40]
...

Voicemail Guy: What? This is exactly why I'm dumping you. Shut up!

Narrator 3: Channel change. The many complications of the very first Smart Watch.

Smart Watch Guy: What can your Smart Watch do? Measure your heartbeat, your footsteps, your movements, your golf swing. It can notify you of messages, sports scores, weather anywhere in the world. It communicates, it takes notes. It will replace your credit cards and hotel room keys. It does thousands of things, maybe millions, but let's go back before watches got smart, before they even got digital.

About a hundred years ago, in the time of wool bathing suits and unironic mustaches, in kangaroo boxing and slow zooms into Sepia photographs, back before this kind of music was only heard on ice cream trucks. Back then, two men competed for thirty years and spent enormous amounts of money to build the most technologically advanced watch ever. The result was a pocket watch that could do not millions or thousands of things, but 24 different things.

One of these men was James Ward Packard, from the tiny town of Warren, Ohio. He was an engineering prodigy during the time when the newest gadgets were things like phonographs and bicycles and cameras. When he grew up, he started Packard automobiles, America's first luxury car company. The first cars with steering wheels, which seems kind of obvious, now. His rival was Henry Graves, Jr., who came from one of the richest families in the country. He attended auctions in New York and collected art and coins and furniture. His collections were guided by one principle: If it's not the best, it's not worth owning.

In the early 1900s, both Packard and Graves became obsessed with owning the most complicated watch ever. In a world of mechanical watches, you know, old-timey watches, the kind you wind, with the big hand and the little hand, anything a watch can do beyond telling time is known as a complication. It's essentially an app, but the thing is, complications make everything complicated. How do you move all the gears and wheels at the right speeds based off a single power source? How do you cram all those extra components into the watch case? Figuring that out can be pretty expensive.

The problem with trying to buy the most complicated watch in the world was, it didn't exist. You had to send your idea for the watch to the watch maker, pay the equivalent of \$30,000 or \$40,000 dollars, in today's money, then wait months and years as they designed and built it. It all started in 1905, when the car maker Packard commissioned Switzerland's Patek Philippe to build a watch with four complications. A perpetual calendar, a minute repeater that chimed the number of minutes passed

on demand so that you could hear the time, even in the dark, something like what you're hearing right now, and two more chimes for the full and quarter hours.

Graves got the same company to make his watches, but he was always a step behind. Packard was an engineer. He could envision the mechanics of these watches and he knew what to ask for. Graves had all the money in the world, but he didn't have the vision. The funny thing is, these guys never met. They only knew what the other was up to through rumors in the watch community. The other funny thing is that they were rich, like so rich. The idea of someone having a million dollars was still pretty new and both of these guys had many, many millions of dollars. The reason that that's funny is because when you're that rich, you don't actually need a watch. You never even need to be on time. People will adjust their schedules to you.

By 1916, it was pretty clear Packard was wiping the floor with Graves in this secret competition. That's the year Packard received another masterpiece, this one with an astonishing 16 complications; bells, phases of the moon, you know, useful stuff, all in one device. Graves hated coming in second, but what was he going to do? Just ask for a watch that had everything Packard had, plus one? That's kind of what he did.

He set up a secret meeting to commission a watch with the simple, explicit instructions that it have, in his words, "The maximum possible number of complications and, in any case, certainly more complicated than that of Mr. Packard." It took three years to design, five years to build, and when it arrived in 1933, Graves' super complication, as it's known, was the size of a hockey puck and had 24 complications, including a perpetual calendar, the time of the sunrise and the sunset in New York, two stop-watches, chimes, and a moving map of the night sky, as seen from Central Perk ... Oh wait, Central Park. Although that would've been amazing. Ross and Joey and the gang, Gunther. This watch remains, to this day, the most complicated mechanical watch every built without computer assistance. In 2014, it sold at auction for \$24 million, US. That's a million dollars per complication, so don't feel bad about spending a couple bucks on an app.

Narrator: To see what the world's first Smart Watch looked like, head to [Slack.com/varietypack](https://www.slack.com/varietypack).

Narrator 3: Channel change, big picture channel, Black Girls Code.

Kaya Thomas: I really started coding only about a year and a half ago, actually.

- BGC Report:** Meet Kaya Thomas, a second-year computer science student at Dartmouth College. She taught herself how to code after watching an inspiring talk by her soon-to-be mentor.
- Kaya Thomas:** What inspired me to start coding, I saw a TED talk given by the founder of Black Girls Code, Kimberly Bryant.
- Kimberly Bryant:** I always like to say Black Girls Code is a movement. [crosstalk 00:18:59] ...
- Kaya Thomas:** As she talked about how a lot of women of color, specifically, are consumers of technology but often not creators of technology. That really lit a spark and I said, "Why aren't I actually creating the technology that I use every day?"
- BGC Report:** Silicon Valley has a diversity problem. It's an issue that's finally getting the attention it deserves, but there's still so much that needs to happen to increase diversity hires and make the tech sector an appealing place to work for everyone. Fortunately, there are some people working hard to change the current state of the industry and change the perception that women don't code. Kimberly Bryant I the founder and executive director of Black Girls Code, a nonprofit organization that gets girls of color interested in technology careers. We caught up with her recently on the streets of New York.
- Kimberly Bryant:** My inspiration for founding Black Girls Code started with my daughter, who was a middle schooler. She was really a heavy video game player and just wanted to really become a video game tester when she grew up. I was looking for a way to redirect her, something that would put her in the creator's role as opposed to a consumer, and found an opportunity for her to do a summer camp and learn about game development and design. Looking around that classroom, it wasn't very diverse and I wanted to create an organization that would help her to find her place in the world, find other people that look like her that were interested in the same thing and not be discouraged.
- BGC Report:** What started off as a pilot project of 10-12 girls in 2011, Black Girls Code now has over 3,000 students with seven chapters across the US and one in Johannesburg. It's making a difference.
- Kimberly Bryant:** I see so much impact from the work that we've done, even in just three short years. From our students, I'm seeing girls that are coming into the program with very little access to coding and very little experience at Computer Science and they're going on and taking the little bit that we teach them to learn even additional languages, to create apps. Even

students that started a little bit later in the program that are now decided to go to college and major in Computer Science and then are coming back into the valley and taking internships at some of the tech companies in the area. I just think Black Girls Code is changing the conversation.

BGC Report: Kaya Thomas learned how to program in Python and built an app called We Read Too.

Kaya Thomas: I've loved books, as a kid and even as a teen, I was always in the library, but then as I got older and I started really thinking about my identity, I kind of felt left out in the books that I was reading. I didn't see myself or even some of my friends in these books, so then I started searching for these books and I saw that there are a lot of books out there. They just weren't at the top of the bestseller, at the bookstores and stuff like that. I said, "Why isn't there a central resource where I can find these books that have been written by authors of color and the characters inside the books are also people of color? Let me try to make an app and put all these books in one place so that kids like me and parents, educators, can find these books for their students." I wanted these books to be available and known to more people.

BGC Report: We Read Too has been downloaded around the world and it's even being used by one of the most influential people in the world.

Kaya Thomas: I had the wonderful honor of being awarded by First Lady Michelle Obama at the Black Girls Rock Award for the work with my app and also my work with Black Girls Code and different education initiatives.

Michelle Obama: You are brilliant! You are funny!

BGC Report: Despite her recent recognition, Kaya wants her coding chops to come first.

Kaya Thomas: I think it's great, yeah. I want companies to be excited to hire more black women on their teams, but I do want to be known for the work that I'm doing, rather than not just, "Okay, let's hire her because she's a black woman." I want them to hire me because, "Wow, look at all the awesome things she's done, and yes, she's a black woman."

Michelle Obama: Let me tell you, I am so proud of you. My husband, your president, is so proud of you.

Kimberly Bryant: My long-term vision from a numbers perspective is to be able to reach a million girls of color, teach them how to code, by the year 2040, but

really, ideally, I want to see girls and women of color taking leadership roles, starting companies that are really the big tech companies in the next couple decades that we see and we talk about. I always kind of joke, but not really joke about creating the next black female Mark Zuckerberg. I think that's possible, because many of the women that I talk to, that maybe had an interest in the industry as a young girl, somewhere along the way lost that interest or just were discouraged from going into the field. I think we have an opportunity to change that dynamic with the organization.

BGC Report: Could Kaya Thomas be the next black female Mark Zuckerberg? She's on her way. In fact, there was a time in the early years of computing, where women dominated the software development field. Ever heard of Jean Jennings Bartik? One of the creators of the ENIAC computer back in World War II? What about Grace Hopper? One of the first programmers of the Harvard Mark I computer in 1944, she created the programming language COBOL, coined the term debugging, and liked to use wires to demonstrate how fast a nanosecond could travel.

Grace Hopper: Finally one morning, in total desperation, I called over to the engineering building and I said, please cut off a nanosecond and send it over to me.

BGC Report: Margaret Hamilton? She led the software engineering division for the Apollo 11 mission and her team's work prevented an abort of the Apollo 11 moon landing.

Astronaut: [inaudible 00:25:00] the eagle has landed.

BGC Report: Then there's Ada Lovelace. She wrote the very first computer algorithm, making her the first computer programmer ever and dreamed up the concept of artificial intelligence, way back in the 19th century. She defined the digital age. Listen up, Silicon Valley, last fall, for the first time, students of color became the majority in American public schools. This is the workforce of the near future and the next Ada Lovelace could be coming out of one of the chapters of Black Girls Code.

Kimberly Bryant: I didn't want to say, "Black Girls Maybe Can Code," or, "Black Girls May Like Coding." It was really specific that I wanted to say, "This is something that girls of color do. This is something that girls of color can do well."

Narrator: That's it for the lift episode, number five of the Slack Variety Pack.

Narrator 3: Next episode.

Narrator: Learn insider secrets to make your passwords unhackable.

Speaker 1: I think that merging data passwords is one way of increasing the complexity.

Narrator: Meet a man who learned about leadership by diving to the bottom of the sea.

Speaker 2: We survived because we were two guys who were inhabiting each other's minds and had this technical empathy for the problem.

Narrator: Thanks to today's tech-driven economy, there's a whole generation of parents who have no idea what their kids do for a living.

Parent 1: What do you mean, "What does he do?"

Parent 2: I have no idea.

Parent 3: I know he posts stuff on Facebook or for iPods ...

Parent 4: He implements a form of business.

Narrator 3: The details.

Narrator: Elevators, pitches, watches, voicemail breakups, Black Girls Code. All the stories in this episode have their own sound cloud files, so you can share them easily with friends. Information about this podcast is on [Slack.com/varietypack](https://slack.com/varietypack). Check out our nifty infographic that matches elevator-style elevator pitches with the real companies that use them. Subscribe to this podcast on iTunes, or wherever you get your podcasts. Voicemails may be dying, but we still like listening and playing yours. 415-992-7561. To take us out, here's Rich Aucoin with Are You Experiencing?, from the album Ephemeral. Thank you for listening. (singing) Slack. Making work less worky.