Keep Your Bio Short and Sweet

Some speakers believe calling attention to the degree behind their name, citing their numerous awards, and outlining their life’s work is vitally important. But long biographies have a chilling effect on an audience, for various reasons:

- Focusing on academic achievements portrays you as a “know-it-all.”
- Audiences wonder if the rest of the presentation is going to be as boring as your biography.
- People don’t want to hear, “Look at me. I’m what’s important here today.”
- Time spent on the bio subtracts precious time from the topic of interest.

Ask the host to keep your introduction short: “The next speaker is so-and-so, from the Cooperative Extension Service. She is here to speak on the topic of...” However, it is okay to share information that the audience would find interesting, such as your personal hobby or something funny that happened recently. For instance, a master gardener was introduced as “so-and-so from the Extension Service, who loves gardening. He grows roses, hostas, and hydrangeas.” The focus was on his interests and his personal background, not his Ph.D.

Think about sitting in the audience, listening to a moderator reading a prepared statement on a speaker’s life history: things he’s done, the committees on which he’s served, the papers he’s written, the degrees he’s earned, etc. What’s the mood of the audience after being told how qualified the speaker is? Irritated due to the introduction? Not the best way to start any program! Avoid tiresome, lengthy introductions that set up the audience to be bored and unimpressed.

Many speakers prefer not to be billed as the expert. This works well, because most audiences could not care less about your educational background, whether you have a Ph.D. from a well-known university or from the school of hard knocks. What they want from a speaker is information they can understand and put to use. The message is what counts.

A biography targeted toward a specific audience can really help a speaker. A 4-H extension educator was addressing a group of extension homemakers. He instinctively knew that they were questioning what he could possibly say that would be of interest to them. He deliberately stated in his short bio that he was a fifth grade 4-H cornbread champion. The brick walls crumbled, and the sound could be heard around the room. The homemakers were hooked.

Source: Purdue University Extension (The Making of ... Effective Extension Presentations)