

The speech template

1. Open light, about 20 seconds

Acknowledge the awkwardness of the format. Everyone's standing in a semicircle holding paper plates.

"I was told this would be informal, which I've taken to mean nobody will notice if it's bad."

Don't open with "well, three years". Don't open with an apology.

2. What you'll actually miss, about 45 seconds

Specific and slightly odd beats sincere and general.

"I'll miss the walk from the station. I'll miss whatever is wrong with the second-floor coffee machine, which I've come to think of as a personality. I'll miss the fact that nobody in this room has ever once let me get away with anything."

That third item is the move: start with the small physical things, land on the one about the people. It earns the sincerity by not opening with it.

3. The turn, about 10 seconds

"Mostly, though, it's this lot."

Short. This speech doesn't have room for a graceful transition and doesn't need one.

4. The people, about 60 seconds

Name three or four. One specific thing each.

"[Name] trained me and has never once made me feel stupid for asking. [Name] and I have had the same argument every Tuesday for two years and I've enjoyed all of them. [Name] covered for me in March and knows exactly what I mean."

Pick at least one person who won't expect it. Everyone thanks their manager and their closest colleague. Thanking the person from another team who quietly helped you is the line that gets talked about after you've gone.

5. The exit, about 30 seconds

Say where you're going, in one sentence, without making it sound better than here. Then land and stop.

"I'm off to [place] on Monday. It's closer to my house, which is the entire strategy. Thank you, genuinely, and I'll see most of you on LinkedIn, immediately."

Have a last line. The most common failure in this speech is trailing off into "so, yeah" and a shrug.

Getting the material you need

You have less to work with than a retirement speech and that's fine, because this speech runs on specificity, not volume.

The technique

You need three or four names with a real detail each. You almost certainly have them already; what you don't have is the detail, because you've never had to articulate it.

Spend twenty minutes writing down everyone who made your job easier and what they actually did. The list will be longer than you expect and the details will surprise you.

Four questions to ask before your last week

1. Who trained me, actually, as opposed to officially?
2. Who covered for me when I needed it?
3. Who made a bad week better without being asked?
4. Who would nobody else think to thank?

Question four is the one worth acting on.

What to do with what you get

Three or four names, one detail each. One small physical thing you'll miss. One line about where you're going.

That's the whole speech. If it's taking longer than three minutes, you've added a story that doesn't need to be there.