

The speech template

1. Open on the room, about 30 seconds

Not on yourself. Open by noticing who's here.

"I want to start by saying that I count at least four people in this room who I was told, at various points, would be the death of me. It's good to see you all still here."

The joke can be soft. What matters is that the first thing you do is look outward.

2. The arc, not the CV, about two minutes

Pick the change, not the chronology.

The question to answer isn't "what did I do?". It's "what's different between the first day and this one?" Sometimes that's the industry, sometimes the organisation, sometimes you.

"On my first day here we had one computer, and it lived in a locked room. I was told not to touch it. I have obeyed that instruction with a consistency I'm quite proud of."

Two or three concrete details from the early years, chosen because they show the distance travelled. Specific objects, specific rules, specific prices. Concrete beats reflective every time.

Then one sentence on what the work was actually for. Not the mission statement, but what it meant to you.

3. The turn, about 20 seconds

From the work to the people. Let the sentence carry it rather than announcing it:

"None of which is the reason I've enjoyed it. The equipment got better. That was never the point."

4. The people, about two minutes

The heart of it, and where most retirement speeches go wrong by thanking departments.

Name individuals. Three to five, each with one specific thing. Not "thanks to the whole warehouse team". Thanks to the person who did the specific thing you still think about.

"[Name] taught me how to do this job in about four days, in 1997, and has never once mentioned it since. [Name] covered for me during a fortnight I'd rather not go into. [Name] has argued with me every week for eleven years and been right about half the time, which is a better record than mine."

Two rules: pick people the room will recognise, and make at least one of them someone junior. Naming a person nobody expected to be named is the most generous thing you can do with sixty seconds.

If someone should be there and isn't, whether retired, moved on or died, one plain sentence. Don't dwell.

5. The sign-off, about 30 seconds

You don't have to be profound. You have to be finished.

The strongest sign-offs do one of three things: hand something to whoever's staying, say what you're going to do next in concrete terms, or land a small joke and stop.

"I'm told I'll miss it. I'm told this most insistently by people who haven't left yet. I'll report back."

Then thank them, and sit down. Don't trail off looking for a bigger ending.