

The speech template

1. Open on them, about 30 seconds

Not on the occasion, not on yourself, not on how quickly the years pass.

"[Name] has worked here for [number] years, and in that time has developed a genuinely world-class ability to arrive at a meeting seventy seconds late while giving the impression the meeting started late."

One affectionate, specific observation. It signals immediately that you know them, which is the whole currency of this speech.

2. Who they actually are here, about 90 seconds

Not their job description. Their function in the room.

Most people have an unofficial role: the one who knows where things are, the one who says the thing everyone's thinking, the one who calms it down, the one who trains everybody and never gets credited. That's what people will miss, and naming it is the most useful thing you can do.

"Officially [name] has been in [role]. Unofficially [he/she/they] has been the person you go to when you've done something wrong and you don't want to tell [other name] yet. That service is now withdrawn and I'd ask everyone to plan accordingly."

One story here, not three. Choose the one that demonstrates the role rather than the one that's funniest.

3. The turn, about 15 seconds

From the character to the substance. Don't announce it:

"All of which is very funny until you try to work out who's going to do it on Monday."

4. The specific thing they did, about 60 seconds

The part that makes it a real speech.

One concrete accomplishment, told with actual detail: what the situation was, what they did, what happened. Not "always went above and beyond". A thing, with facts in it.

"In [year], when [specific situation], [name] spent three weeks doing something nobody asked [him/her/them] to do, and the reason we still have [outcome] is that [he/she/they] did it. I don't think it's ever been mentioned in a meeting."

If you genuinely can't find one, you haven't asked enough people. Page 5.

5. The hand-over, about 30 seconds

End by giving them the floor or giving them something.

"[Name], we got you [thing]. I'm told you'll hate it. Thank you for [number] years, and now I'd like to hear from the man himself, who has assured me he's prepared nothing."

For a leaving send-off, close lighter and faster. For a retirement, allow one genuine sentence before the joke, but only one.