



[your company name here]

How to give a great celebratory work anniversary speech

Writing and giving a speech can be intimidating, especially if that's not a typical part of your job, but by following this step-by-step guide you'll be able to craft a memorable speech you can give with confidence.

Your speech's objectives

Every great speech has clear objectives, and a celebratory work anniversary speech has these two objectives:

- Making the long-serving employee feel special and appreciated
- Helping those listening to the speech feel a deeper connection with the long-serving employee

Keep the goal of maximizing these objectives in mind as you choose what to include in the speech and what to leave out.

Preparation

Your knowledge and view of the long-serving employee is just one perspective. You can add to the richness and depth of your speech by reaching out to others who know the employee and can provide additional perspectives. Try to get to as many of the employee's past managers and *their* managers as you can, and get in touch with colleagues the employee is

close to. If people from the employee's personal life will be there for the speech, reach out to them too.

Here are five great questions to ask about the employee, some of which will obviously be more relevant to some of the people you talk to than others:

- What would you consider their biggest accomplishments since they joined?
- What's your favorite memory of working with them?
- What do you appreciate most about them?
- Do you have any photos of them or their accomplishments? *(If you're talking to their friends or family, ask for personal pictures of them, maybe with pets or engaged in their hobbies or even embarrassing photos from their youth)*
- Who else would be good to reach out to with these questions?

The answers to these questions will help you gather raw material for your speech.

Your speech's structure

The person organizing the event should be able to give you an idea of how long the speech should be, but remember that shorter is generally better. Leaving people wanting more is preferable to overstaying your welcome. Don't be afraid to cut good material to bring more attention to the great material. The times in parentheses are just guidelines, assuming a five- to ten-minute speech.

Here's a recommended structure:

1. **Start by thanking your audience** – Thank them for joining you to honor and celebrate the past however many years the honoree has been with the organization—if the organization has a clear and well-communicated mission or purpose, be sure to mention that it's about more than just time spent; it's also about contributing to the mission or purpose *(15–30 seconds)*
2. **Show the photos from their personal life** (if you have them) – Your primary goal in this part of the speech is to help the audience get to know the employee better—if something from their personal life can in some way be connected to their accomplishments at work, mentioning that is fine, but it's not necessary *(0–2 minutes)*

3. **Mention their start date and year** – Share a photo depicting them when they started or a photo representing the organization, such as the original building, product packaging, or company logo from the year they started, or if you can't find those, share images from pop culture that year, like movies or songs *(15–30 seconds)*
4. **Tell the story of how you met them** – Share an old picture of the two of you, share a first impression that foreshadows their future contributions, and/or joke about how you doubt either of you were expecting or thinking about this moment back then, which can be a fun lead-in to mentioning how honored you are to be the one chosen to give the speech *(1-2 minutes)*
5. **For the bulk of the speech, mine the accomplishments, memories, and what colleagues appreciate most that you captured in the preparation** – Showing any related pictures adds to the interest level *(3-6 minutes)*
6. **End with heartfelt gratitude** – Once again, thank the employee for their contributions to the organization and for enriching the lives of so many people, and close by asking for a round of applause *(30 seconds)*

What not to do

For those of you who find comfort in cautionary advice, here are the three things to avoid:

- **Don't make divisive or insensitive comments** – Unless you've run it by and got the okay from at least two folks who are more easily offended than you—avoid politics, race, religion, gender, and sex
- **Don't make anyone feel bad** – For example, don't dwell on big mistakes that the employee cleaned up or mention who the employee beat out for a promotion
- **Don't end by mentioning your desire for the employee to stay for a long time** – No one knows what will happen in the future, and the employee may well be thinking of moving on—the speech is meant to be a celebration of the past, not an attempt to influence the future

Practicing

Amazing speeches happen not because the speaker was especially talented at giving speeches but because they *practiced*, probably a lot. Celebratory work anniversary

speeches may not be high stakes, but you'll honor the long-serving employee more—and look better yourself—if you practice.

Here are a few things to keep in mind when practicing:

- **Slow down.** Most people speak too fast when speaking publicly, which makes their words hard to understand and their thoughts hard to follow. Your speech is important. You want people to be able to *relish* it. Don't rush, be sure to enunciate clearly, and pause after particularly powerful statements.
- **Time your speech.** It's probably longer than you think, especially if you succeed at slowing down your speaking. Remember, shorter is better.
- **Ask whoever is listening for ideas for improvement more than once.** The first time, most people will say something encouraging but unhelpful like "It was great!" Let them know you're genuinely interested in making it better and would appreciate their honest thoughts on what to improve.

It's highly recommended that you practice a couple of times on your own and then practice a couple of times in front of at least one other person. Think the speech is too long for that? Then maybe make the speech shorter.

You're going to do great!

Public speaking can be nerve-racking for people who don't do it often, but remember that everyone is rooting for you to succeed. *The audience is on your side.*

I've spoken to hundreds of people about their best and worst work anniversaries. Having heard many, many heartwarming stories, I can confidently say:

**You very well might create one of the
most memorable highlights of someone's career**

Have fun, and good luck!