

Transported

This will lift
your elevator ride.

By Guest Contributor
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Friday afternoon. You're tapping your toes, waiting for the elevator to arrive. The double doors finally slide open and reveal—praise be to God!—an empty chamber. Could it be?

You're about to enjoy the brief, yet oh so simple, pleasure of having the whole elevator to yourself. You step aboard and stretch your arms out wide—whirling around in the empty space, letting out several yelps that have been brewing all day. (Well, maybe you don't whirl or yelp, but I'm betting you exhale a relieved sigh at the very least.)

Just as the doors begin to close, however, a sneaky little hand slips between the bumpers and sends them opening once again. A colleague—the resident Willy Loman, let's say—steps into the elevator and all but ruins your peaceful afternoon ride. A forced, awkward conversation ensues.

"How was your day?" asks Willy.

"Oh, it was fine."

"TGIF, am I right?"

"You're telling me," I reply.

If you're like me—and for simplicity's sake, let's say you are—then the exchange

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is downright torturous. If only there were a way to spice things up, you wonder. Well, hear ye, hear ye, I believe I've discovered one or two ways to make your dream come true.

First, it seems to me that tepid elevator banter results largely from two main flaws in the elevator's design: the total entrapment and consequential claustrophobic anxiety of its passengers, and the chamber's austere and therefore uninspiring décor. The first flaw can't be easily remedied. The second, however, can be improved with a few simple alterations.

How about a 360-degree mural of any of a variety of tropical or exotic locales painted on the elevator walls and doors? Each elevator car could have its own theme: the Serengeti, replete with zebras and lions mid-chase in the distant desert plain. Or, the Caribbean, which might feature an endless stretch of turquoise ocean and a sandy beach lined with palms. Or perhaps the oft-overlooked upper Midwest, with walls of corn fields or snow, depending on the season.

Or what would you say to a giant *Where's Waldo?* on one or all of the elevator panels? A simple improvement like that would not only make the ride more entertaining, but it also might elicit more interesting conversation. *There he is!* someone might exclaim. *I found Waldo!* And you could respond, *No, that's just his doppelganger. You can tell because the real Waldo wears the patented red-*

striped shirt. You could even digress thusly: *I think I saw it for sale one time in a boutique along the Champs-Élysées.*

And so on and so forth.

The other solution to tepid elevator talk is to take a moment to preempt whatever stock comment you're on the verge of saying, by inserting some intentionally oddball gem. If you're lacking for material, cues can be taken from *Seinfeld*. In one episode, for example, Jerry greets a woman at a party by saying, "You wouldn't know it by looking at me, but I can run really fast." Now, if that's not a conversation starter....

Whatever your character, whatever your demeanor, whatever your comedic or conversational ability might be, *do not* settle for plain old elevator conversations when something much snazzier is within colloquial reach.

I've offered a few suggestions, but don't be limited by them. Instead, I challenge you to go forth and create your own ways of engaging in witty, wacky, or any other flavor of banter but plain. With a little effort and creativity, we can all make our elevator rides just a bit more fun.

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