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Give the toast of the town

Tips offered on how to avoid embarrassment when raising your New Year's Eve glass

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The easy part of the New Year's Eve get-together tradition is raising your glass in toast. The hard part is saying something coherent.

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Don't worry; there's plenty of advice out there.

Keep it short, don't offend anyone, use humor sparingly and rehearse, say the wits at eHow.com.

In other words, you don't want to be toasting the virtues of family or loved ones if your best friend's wife just filed for divorce.

Be sincere, be sensitive to your audience and avoid clichés, is the advice from Toastmaster's International.

"The best toasts are heartfelt," said Janice Oakley, vice-president of education for Santa Rosa's Downtown Toastmasters Club. "The nicest toasts are those that are personalized by the giver."

Another no-no is singling out individuals and talking about what's coming up in the New Year for them, or what happened to them in the past.

Examples: "So and so had such a bad year, this year has to be better," or "Hey Jim, maybe you'll get over something this year, versus last year," according to Tracy Goodwin, a self-professed public speaking expert with a series of YouTube videos.

A New Year's Eve toast ideally is a blanket statement that everyone in the room can relate to, she said.

"Who's my audience and what will they connect with?" is how to approach the toast, said Bob Bergman, a retired educator and official with Santa Rosa's Downtown Toastmasters Club.

Begin with finding some good quips and quotes to personalize your toast, Bergman said. It's not stealing, per se. More like borrowing the tried and true.

There are a number of these witticisms in the public domain, such as "The New Year is like a new baby: many changes will be necessary, some of which will be neglected."

And, "What the New Year brings us will depend a great deal on what we bring to the New Year."

Of course for many, 2009 has been rough and wishes for a better, more prosperous year are in order. With that in mind, here are some bon mots that can preface your own comments, or stand on their own. They may not gleam with originality, but they won't embarrass you either -- maybe.

So, just raise your glass and smile.

"Here's to the bright New Year

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"Here's to the bright New Year

And a fond farewell to the old;

Here's to the things that are yet to come,

And to the memories that we hold."

-- Irish toast

"May the best of this year be the worst of next"

-- Irish toast

"May all our trouble during the coming year be as short as your New Year's resolutions."

-- Irish toast

"Cheers to a New Year and another chance for us to get it right."

-- Oprah Winfrey

"Stir the eggnog, lift the toddy,

Happy New Year, everybody"

-- Phyllis McGinley

And no mention of New Year's toasts would be complete without one for New Year's Day:

"Here's to the good time I must have had"

-- George Burgess

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