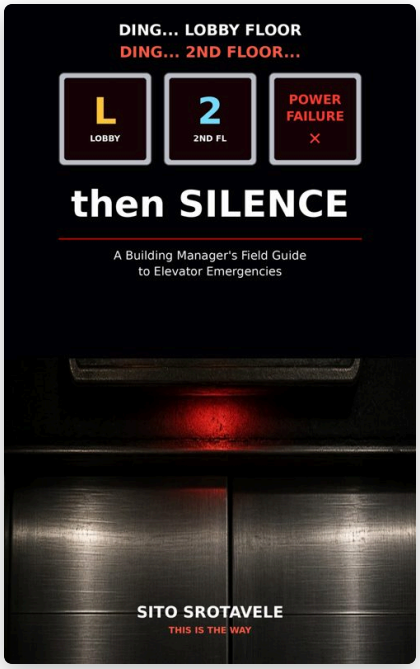


# Ding... Lobby Floor, Ding... 2nd Floor... then Silence

*A Building Manager's Field Guide to Elevator Emergencies*

by Sito Srotavele

FREE SAMPLE · CHAPTER 1

The car was running yesterday. Today it is stuck between floors with people inside, and the whole lobby is looking at you. This sample is Chapter 1 — the Friday nobody plans for, and the calm steps that keep people safe.

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*For building managers, property managers, engineers and front-desk leads. Not elevator mechanic training.*

**Safety First — This is the Way.**

# Chapter 1: When the Ding Stops

## THE STAIRS WORK

Yes, they do. Until they don't.

Say that sentence the next time someone shrugs at an elevator that is down. The stairs work — for the young, the healthy, the unburdened, and the lucky. They do not work for your grandmother with the new hip, the father carrying a sleeping child, or the woman in the wheelchair on the sixth floor. For them, the elevator is not a convenience. **It is the building.**

**Protect the machine that makes your building reachable.** Nobody thinks about the elevator on the thousand trips it works. They think about it once — on the trip it doesn't.

* * *

## The Friday Nobody Plans For

It's 4:30 on a Friday afternoon, and Marcus has been general manager of this eight-story hotel for exactly four days.

The lobby is buzzing. There's a wedding today, the ceremony starts at 5:00 in the garden courtyard, and white chairs and flower arches have been going up since noon. Marcus ducks into the back office to look, one more time, for anything useful his predecessor left behind. Old banquet menus. A broken stapler. A key ring with nineteen keys and not one label.

Then the front desk phone line on his desk lights up, and over it he hears something else.

A bell. Sharp, metallic, ringing out past the lobby. It stops. Then it starts again, longer this time, and it doesn't stop.

He steps out. A crowd is already forming by the two elevators. The car on the left has its floor indicator frozen. No number. No arrow. Just dark.

He presses close to the doors. Voices behind the steel, muffled and overlapping. Someone pounds three hard thumps that echo up the shaft.

"Hello? Can anyone hear us? We're stuck!"

"I'm here," Marcus says, louder than he means to. "I'm the general manager."

"It's the bride! We were coming down for the ceremony. It jerked and stopped. There are four of us."

Behind that voice, another one, thin and shaking. The bride. "Not today. Not *today*. My makeup is ruined, I can't breathe in here, what time is it? It's almost five. Please, please get us out."

A bridesmaid is saying, "Breathe, honey, breathe," in a voice that sounds like she needs it too.

Marcus feels his heart pound. "Hang on. I'm getting help." He hurries back to the office.

Get help. *From who?*

He yanks open the desk drawers. Nothing. No service contract. No binder. No sticky note with an emergency number. The filing cabinet holds vendor folders for linens, laundry and the pool company, and nothing that says "elevator."

4:39.

The front desk agent leans in, phone pressed to her chest. "It's the groom's mother. Third call. She wants to know why the bride isn't downstairs."

His own phone buzzes. Eleven percent battery. He forgot to charge it at lunch.

Back in the lobby, the wedding planner is waiting for him, clipboard in hand, voice tight. "Are you in charge? I have a hundred and twenty guests seated, a string quartet, and an officiant who has another wedding at seven. What is happening, and how long is this going to take?"

"I'm working on it."

"Working on it *how*? Who did you call?"

Marcus has no answer. Guests in suits and dresses drift in from the courtyard, phones up, whispering. Somebody says the word "fire department." Somebody else is filming.

His mind is racing. *Do I pry the doors? One of these nineteen keys has to fit. Do I call 911? Is a stuck wedding party an emergency? What if they run out of air? What if the car drops?*

The bell keeps ringing. The pounding starts again. Through the steel doors comes the sound he will remember for years: the bride sobbing, deep and ragged, loud enough that the guests nearest the elevator go silent. "I waited my whole life for today," she cries. "Please. Somebody. Please." The word "ceremony" keeps breaking through.

4:47. Then 4:52. Out in the courtyard, word is spreading from row to row. The string quartet falters mid-phrase. One violin trails off, then the cello, until the music simply stops, and a garden full of wedding guests sits in a hush that drifts all the way into the lobby. His phone drops to nine percent.

Marcus pulls the key ring from his pocket. Nineteen keys, not one label. He looks up at the small round hole near the top of the elevator door, the one he's seen mechanics use. One of these might fit. He could pop the doors, reach in, pull them out, and be the hero who saved the wedding.

His hand rises toward the door.

*Should I?*

* * *

**Stop right there.**

**Never try to open the elevator doors yourself.** Not with a key, not with a pry bar, not with your hands, not for a bride, not for anyone.

Take a breath, because Marcus is about to make the most common mistake in this whole book. That key ring is not the answer. Prying the doors is not the answer. Panic is not the answer.

Here's the good news: the people in that car are, in almost every case, **safe where they are**. An elevator that stops between floors is designed to hold. Its safety systems have done their job by stopping. What happens next is your job, and your job is not to rescue anyone. Your job is to stay calm, keep them calm, and get the right people moving.

You can do this. Here's how.

* * *

## The Calm Steps: This Is the Way

### Step 1: Talk to Them First

Before you dial anything, go to the elevator and make contact. Find the floor where the voices are loudest (or the lobby, if the car is near it) and speak clearly through the hoistway doors.

Say something like this:

> "I can hear you. My name is _____, I'm the manager on duty. You are safe. Help is on the way. Please stay calm and do not try to open the doors."

Then ask three questions:

1. **How many people are inside?**
2. **Is anyone hurt, sick, pregnant, or having trouble breathing?**
3. **Does anyone need medication they don't have with them?**

If someone is panicking, give them something to do. Ask them to sit down (yes, even in a wedding gown) and to take slow breaths together. Ask the calmest person to help the others. Tell them there is fresh air inside the car; elevators are not airtight. A calm voice from outside is the single most powerful tool you have in the first five minutes.

And tell them clearly: **do not force the doors, and do not try to climb out.** If the car is between floors, an opening can lead straight into an open shaft.

### Step 2: Call 911 When It's a True Emergency

Call 911 right away if:

- Someone is injured, ill, or having a medical crisis.
- There is **smoke, fire, burning smell, or unusual heat**.
- There is water pouring into the shaft or the car.
- The car has no lights and you can't reach anyone inside.

Firefighters are trained in elevator rescue. If you call them, meet them at the front door and tell them exactly which car, which floor, and how many people.

If nobody is hurt and there's no smoke or heat, your next call is to the elevator company. You can still call 911 at any time if things change.

### Step 3: Find and Call the Elevator Service Company

This is where Marcus got stuck, and where you won't. Even with no files, the number is usually close by. Look in these places:

- **Inside the other car.** The conveyance certificate (the operating permit) is usually posted in the car or in the building office. It often lists the owner and sometimes the service company.
- **The car's emergency phone.** Elevators are required to have two-way emergency communication in the car (ASME A17.1, 2.27.1.1). In many buildings that line rings straight to the service company's dispatch center or a monitoring service. Ask

the passengers whether they pressed the phone button and whether someone answered.

- **The machine room or controller.** The controller cabinet often has a sticker with the service company's name and phone number — ask the mechanic or the company to read it for you. **Machine-room rule, the same in every chapter of this book: never enter the machine room alone or unescorted, never touch the equipment, and only go in with a licensed elevator mechanic or with your elevator company's explicit authorization for that visit.**
- **Your accounts payable files.** Search for elevator invoices. Whoever you paid last month is likely who you call today.
- **Staff who've been there longer.** Your chief engineer, night auditor or longtime housekeeper may remember "the elevator guy."

When you reach dispatch, tell them:

- Building address and which elevator.
- **"This is an entrapment."** Use that exact word. It moves your call to the top of the list.
- How many people, and any medical concerns.
- Your callback number. (Charge that phone now.)

Ask for an estimated arrival time. Write it down.

If you truly cannot find the company, call the fire department's non-emergency line, or 911 if time drags on and people are struggling. Never leave people waiting while you hunt for a number for an hour.

### Step 4: Never Attempt a Rescue Yourself

This is the hardest step, because every good person wants to *do something*. But untrained rescues are how people get hurt and killed around elevators.

**⛔ NEVER DO THIS**

- Never pry or force the elevator doors open.
- Never use a hoistway door key unless you are trained and authorized. That little hole at the top of the door is not for you.
- Never tell passengers to climb out of a car stopped between floors.
- Never enter the hoistway or the pit.
- Never reset breakers, flip switches, or "try turning it off and on" in the machine room — and never recycle (turn off and back on) the main line disconnect hoping the elevator will reboot.
- Never let anyone ride the car again until a mechanic clears it.

**Leave the main line disconnect alone.** When an elevator faults, the controller records error codes — the machine's own account of what went wrong. If anyone other than a licensed elevator technician recycles the disconnect, those codes are often wiped, the real cause may stay hidden, and the car can trap people again. Leave power exactly as you found it, note the time and anything you saw or heard, and hand those notes to the technician. Chapter 2, Never Do #6, covers this in full.

Opening the doors does not make anyone safer. It can expose an open shaft, cause the car to move unexpectedly, or put someone halfway in and halfway out of a moving car. The people inside are safest exactly where they are until a trained mechanic or firefighter arrives.

### Step 5: Stay With Them

Don't call and walk away. Go back to the doors and stay.

- Tell them who you called and when help is expected.
- Check in every few minutes, even if nothing has changed. "Still here. The mechanic is about twenty minutes out."
- Keep the lobby calm. Clear guests away from the doors and post a staff member at the entrance to wave in the mechanic.
- Give one person the job of answering the front desk phones and family calls with the same short, honest update: "Everyone is safe, help is on the way, and we'll let you know the moment they're out."
- Talk to the planner or event lead privately. Give them the arrival time so they can adjust the schedule. Don't argue in front of guests.
- Point guests to the other elevator or the stairs, but only after the mechanic confirms that car is unaffected.

- Never promise a time you can't keep. Honest updates build trust.

Silence is what scares people in a stuck car. Your voice fills that silence.

### Step 6: Keep It Out of Service

When the mechanic or firefighters free the passengers, the event is *not* over.

- Make sure the car stays out of service until the mechanic says it's safe.
- Put up "Out of Service" signs at every floor's landing, or at least the lobby and the floors people use most.
- Don't let anyone talk you into "just one more ride." An elevator that trapped people once can do it again, or worse.
- Ask the mechanic what caused the stop and what repairs are needed. Write down the answer.

### Step 7: Write It All Down

While it's fresh, record:

- The time the alarm started and the time you first made contact.
- The names and room numbers or contact info of everyone trapped (with their permission).
- Any injuries or medical concerns.
- Who you called, at what time, and when they arrived.
- The time the passengers were released.
- The mechanic's name, company, and what they found.

This record protects the passengers, the building, and you. It also starts building the files your predecessor never left you.

**Safety First — This is the Way.**

* * *

💡 **MONEY SAVER**

**Know your contract before the alarm rings.** Many elevator service contracts cover entrapment callbacks, sometimes even after hours, at no extra charge. Others bill overtime rates for every after-hours call. If you don't know which you have, you could pay for a callout that was already covered, or approve extra work you didn't need.

**Keep one contact card.** Calling the wrong elevator company can mean a crew shows up, can't work on equipment they don't service, and bills you for the trip, while your passengers keep waiting. Tape the right company name, phone number, and contract or account number inside your office door and save it in your phone today.

* * *

## Monday Morning: Building What You Never Had

Back to Marcus. Picture the same Friday, but this time he does it right. He puts the key ring in his pocket and talks to the bridal party through the doors. He finds the number on the controller sticker, calls in an entrapment, and hands the front desk a script for the groom's family. He gives the planner an honest arrival time, and then he stays at the doors.

The mechanic arrives, the doors slide open, and four women in silk and tulle step out into the lobby to applause. The car goes out of service with signs on every floor. Twenty-five minutes behind schedule, makeup touched up in the lobby restroom, the bride walks down the aisle. Nobody remembers the delay. Everybody remembers she made it.

On Monday morning, Marcus makes sure there will never be a "Friday like that" again. Here is the short list we'll build together in the coming chapters:

1. **A contact sheet.** Elevator company, dispatch number, account number, fire department, building owner, and backup contacts, posted in the office and saved in your phone. (Chapter 3)
2. **A copy of the service contract.** Know what's covered, what response times are promised, and what costs extra. (Chapter 6)
3. **The Maintenance Control Program records.** The safety code calls for a written maintenance program and maintenance records kept on site for each elevator

(ASME A17.1, 8.6.1.2.1 and 8.6.1.4.1). Find out where they are and who keeps them. (Chapter 7)

4. **A written entrapment plan.** One page that tells anyone on duty, from the front desk to the night auditor, exactly what to do when the ding stops. (Chapter 11)

Four simple things. One morning of work. And the next time the bell rings, you won't be digging through empty drawers. You'll be the calm voice at the door who already knows the number by heart.

When every guest walks out safe and the celebration goes on, that's not luck. It's preparation. And that's how you turn the worst Friday of your career into the moment your hotel learns it's in good hands.

**This is the Way.**

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## Want the rest of the guide?

The full book covers who to call, what never to do, your elevator's birthdate, the service contract in plain words, the maintenance binder, inspections, outages, fire service, and ready-to-copy checklists.

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