

“that’s what she said”

a ford & harrison blog about the popular television series “the office”

All’s Fair in Love and War

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Litigation Value: Dunder Mifflin seems to have escaped the week without major liability. But that doesn’t mean that everyone behaved.

Another week, and Andy is still looking for ways to motivate and inspire his team. You’ve got to hand it to him: his analogy of business as war is, at least, more logical than most of the stuff Michael used to come up with. In an effort to bring the office together and get them motivated to attack their competition with renewed vigor, Andy organizes a trip to Gettysburg, complete with pink hats that read, suggestively, “DM does GB.” (This might have been more obviously obnoxious to someone who doesn’t work in D.C. I’m a bit desensitized to tour groups with bright matching apparel.) About half of the office decides to accompany Andy on his meticulously researched battlefield tour... but, as usual, there’s plenty of strife to go around.

Dwight accuses the Gettysburg staff of covering up information about the northernmost battle of the Civil War, the Battle of Schute Farms. As he regales Erin with stories of his interpretation of Civil War history, Oscar admonishes Dwight not to fill “the poor girl’s head” with nonsense because “she doesn’t know any better.” Fortunately, Erin missed the snarky comment – but I didn’t. This isn’t the first time that Oscar has behaved in a condescending manner toward his coworkers. In an earlier episode, Jim mentioned that Oscar is known around the office as “Actually,” due to his penchant for correcting people. Oscar, a little friendly advice: sure, there’s no law against being a know-it-all, but you might want to consider playing a little bit nicer with your co-workers. For instance, what if you ever wanted to jump ship and find a new job? Plenty of employers will reject an otherwise qualified applicant because they don’t think that the applicant’s personality would mesh with the office, or they believe the applicant would be unpleasant to have around all day.

<http://blogs.hrhero.com/thatswhatshesaid/>

And that's not unlawful. You catch more flies with honey than with vinegar, Oscar.

In the end, while Oscar and Dwight bickered over whether there really was a Battle of Schrute Farms, they were both vindicated. According to a Gettysburg archivist, there was indeed such a "battle" – but it's not what you may think. No, much to Oscar's delight, the "Battle of Schrute Farms" was a code name for an artistic community that grew up on the farm, thanks to the kindly Schrute family – a place where artsy folk could gather, away from the bloodshed, to put on plays and write poetry. Dwight was clearly shocked, and Oscar was overjoyed – as was I. I might get irked by Oscar's high-handedness, but I loved seeing Dwight's illusions about the bloodshed at Schrute Farms come crumbling down.

The day ended with Andy trying to engage his coworkers in a game of "capture the flag" – which some objected to as offensive, in light of the fact that people died on the battlefield – and then chastising Jim for his sarcasm. Jim, to his credit, recognized that Andy was insecure and hastened to reassure him that the staff likes him as a manager. After all, they were all wearing bright pink, vaguely dirty, hats for him. Here's hoping Andy will take some confidence from that and use the staff's goodwill to motivate them.

While half the office was learning and bonding at Gettysburg, the rest of the staff stayed behind to goof off (which, in Meredith's case, means falling asleep with her hand down her skirt – lovely) but were interrupted by Robert California. Finding Andy out, Robert decided to involve the employees in a brainstorming session and challenged each of them to come up with "game changing" ideas. Now, don't laugh at me, but I kind of liked Ryan's presentation on "Origami – the sushi of paper." But it was Kevin's comment that intrigued Robert the most. Kevin pointed out that everyone thinks that A1 is the best spot on the vending machine, but really it's level D – eye level – so that's where the chocolate chip cookies should really be placed. Robert considered Kevin's comment a brilliant analogy about product placement and pushing the most popular products. Kevin went on to explain that no one likes oatmeal cookies, and Robert asked the staff to name the oatmeal cookie of paper – the product no one wants. (Hey now, I like oatmeal cookies – better than chocolate chip.) Robert, thinking Kevin to be a brilliant sales strategist, continues pumping him for ideas until Ryan exposes the fallacy of this impression by getting Kevin to share his plan for getting a free Big Mac. When Robert realizes that "it was always just about cookies," he is disappointed. Robert, you've got a lot to learn about Dunder Mifflin.

So, this week, two Dunder Mifflin employees had their intelligence mocked. While neither Kevin nor Erin seemed to notice – Kevin, in particular, is used to it – I was disappointed in the lack of respect. Workplaces function best when the people in them feel valued and appreciated by their colleagues. Whether their colleagues like it or not, Kevin and Erin are part of the team – unless and until Andy or Robert decides otherwise. So, Oscar and Ryan, I have some advice for you. It's more kindergarten than legal advice, but it's good to remember anyway: if you don't have something nice to say, don't say anything at all.