



“that’s what she said”

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

Behind the Scenes

December 01, 2010 - by: [Matt Rita](#)

Those who didn’t succumb to tryptophan-induced slumber last Thursday may have noticed that The Office was not part of NBC’s holiday lineup. Although the devoted viewers among you could have switched over to TBS to catch some older episodes, Turkey Day provided no new material for this blog. So, instead of quantifying hypothetical litigation value, this post will draw upon the spirit of Thanksgiving and mention some things (and people) deserving of gratitude. Wait, don’t surf away yet! This actually has a lot to do with our favorite sitcom, as well as TWSS.

At the end of this blogger’s last [entry](#) in October, a cryptic reference was made to “where he look[ed] forward to spending some time later th[at] month.” Whether or not the “gilded cage” metaphor was apt (apologies to both my favorite Canadian band and the English painter Evelyn De Morgan), that location can now be identified as the set of The Office in Van Nuys, California! Thanks to the generosity of [Rainn Wilson](#) — who donated a two-person set visit to charity — and [Glenn LaForce](#) of LexisNexis — who shared his silent-auction spoils — I was fortunate to witness in person the filming of an upcoming episode. Even if that behind-the-scenes experience doesn’t improve the quality of my posts, it certainly left me with a much greater appreciation for how the production process works.

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No, I can't divulge any information about the episode's storyline or other details that haven't yet aired. (It's a lawyer thing.) And I won't bore you all with a sycophantic litany of my and Glenn's encounters with various cast members, or a description of the eponymous quip this blogger shared with one of them. However, having seen firsthand how the fictional offices of Dunder Mifflin/Sabre are in and around the real-world offices of the many folks who help create the show, I can offer this non-exhaustive list of reasons for workplace thankfulness:

Coordination. In any enterprise involving multiple people and lots of moving parts, it's critical to have someone responsible for making sure the trains run on time. As far as the set visit was concerned, that role belonged to Jacqueline Ariel, who is the assistant to one of the show's producers, Randy Cordray. Jackie deserves both plaudits and thanks for making the experience so enjoyable, while ensuring that the presence of outsiders didn't disrupt anyone's work.

Planning. In an employment setting, managers and human resources personnel often get ready to deal with challenging situations by preparing scripts or talking points. An analogous form of preparation was evident on the set of *The Office*, where written sheets (called "sides") mapped out not only the lines to be used by the actors, but also when and where each scene would be shot, and who needed to be on site at different points during the day.

Flexibility. Of course, to make room for creativity to flourish, any workplace needs to allow for some deviation from the formal plan. As takes (and retakes) were shown in the green room, it was interesting to watch the actors improvise. Sometimes a word or two was changed, and at other times an inflection or facial expression was altered. But at all times the common goal remained the same: to give the editing team quality choices when putting together the final version of each scene and the episode as a whole.

Judgment. Speaking of the editors, one of them (Dave Rogers) was kind enough to take time to explain his job and play some out-takes from the [episode](#) he was in the process of finalizing. The clips had us laughing out loud, which made us wonder why they hadn't made the final cut. That in turn made us realize how difficult it must be to judge which of many funny segments should be included in the limited air time (barely more than 20 minutes) available for each show. As with any occupation, someone has to make the tough calls.

Attention to Detail. While walking around the set of *The Office*, one cannot help but notice that even small matters are not overlooked. For example, while checking out the office of the [building's owner](#) (which features a handsome boar's head), I noticed that the walls behind the bookshelves are made to look scuffed — much as they would be in a real work area in which furniture is moved around over time. Also, down in the main Dunder Mifflin space, we were told that a crew member is responsible for ensuring that the locations of the bric-a-brac on the various characters' desks are consistent among shots. That's a good thing, because Glenn and I may have "accidentally" handled some of those items during our tour. (But we didn't take any of the M&M's out of Kevin's candy jar, and we didn't dare break the seal on that giant container of cheese balls that's long been atop the refrigerator in the kitchen.)

Recognition. Since the set visit, my colleagues and I at Ford & Harrison have learned that for the fourth year in a row, *That's What She Said* has been selected by the editors of the [ABA Journal](#) as one of the 100 best legal blogs. We are grateful for that recognition, and we shamelessly encourage all of our readers to vote for us — early and often, even if you're not from Chicago — in the "[For Fun](#)" category. No matter the final tally, we'll appreciate the support and echo last winter's heartfelt [Entschuldigung!](#) Or, as a merchant (pretending to be) from the Cyclades might say, "Ευχαριστώ!"

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