

“that’s what she said”

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

It’s a WUPHF World

November 20, 2010 - by: [Jaclyn West](#)

Litigation Value: Probably no liability to Sabre, although several employees stood to lose their investments in Wuphf.com.

This week’s episode of “The Office” focused on Dunder Mifflin/Sabre’s own budding social media king, Ryan Howard. We first learned about Ryan’s new social media company, WUPHF, last season when the most recent IT guy, “Glasses,” [mined the employees’ hard drives](#) and we all discovered how many ways Dunder Mifflin employees have dreamed up to waste company time. Well, it looks like Ryan has continued to work on his personal dream of further expanding the social media landscape and creating a world where none of us is ever safe from Kelly’s calls, IMs, Tweets, Facebook messages, and LinkdIn invitations. Ryan’s goal of creating a social media empire has continued to evolve on company time and using company resources, much to Erin’s chagrin. (Was I the only one who LOL’ed when Erin whispered “All that color” with intense emotion after Ryan unveiled his WUPHF posted, created on Sabre printers, no doubt?)

But wasting company time and resources isn’t what I want to talk about today, although I could write a novel about the ways Scranton employees have come up with to put Dunder Mifflin’s resources to unsanctioned use. (My personal favorite — the Dunder Mifflin Olympics from Season 2. I dream of medalling in Flonkerton.) And that

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certainly was on my mind as I watched this episode — after all, Jim devoted a large chunk of the episode to adapting Jo’s book into a way to torture Gabe over the phone. Jim did have a good point: Changing the policy to put a cap on commissions did remove his incentive to work hard, once he had reached the cap, and Gabe’s failure to recognize the possible productivity issue may come back to bite the company later. But we can talk about that another time, since I expect Jim’s reign of unproductive terror is not over.

No, what I want to talk about is the dynamics of Ryan’s enlisting Michael to help him recruit the employees to invest in WUPHF. First of all, Pam made a good point and I think she did a commendable job of gently explaining to Michael that Ryan was using him. Michael has always adored Ryan, and Ryan has always found ways to exploit Michael’s personal feelings when he wants to. It was about time Michael realized that Ryan didn’t have as much at stake in their “friendship,” and I think Pam was the perfect person to explain that, understanding Michael as she does.

But more concerning to me is this: It may not be true at Dunder Mifflin Scranton, because the employees pretty much tune Michael out after all these years, but a boss peddling investments to his subordinates would be seriously problematic at many workplaces. Michael’s standing up in front of the staff and pushing them to invest in Ryan’s company would be pretty darn coercive if the employees had any respect for him or felt that their jobs or work environment might be at stake if they didn’t invest as he wanted them to. (Oh, and shouting “SEX!” to get everyone’s attention? Not good, Michael, not good. But that goes without saying at this point.)

We saw last week that even Dunder Mifflin employees aren’t immune to pressure from “the boss,” when Kevin mentioned that they felt they had to go to Gabe’s party because [Gabe is their boss](#). Michael might not command the same respect or intimidate the employees, but he still shouldn’t abuse his position by forcing investment opportunities on them. If an employee invested in WUPHF because

Michael pressured him to, and then lost his investment, a serious workplace dynamic would result, even if it didn't cause actual liability for Sabre. Fortunately, Ryan eventually did decide to sell his domain name, much to everyone's relief. And I'm sure he will find more ways to waste company time in the future. Jim may have some good ideas for him...

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