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## ETHICS IS PERSONAL

### A SAMPLE HOLLYWOOD SCRIPT TO LIVE BY

**B**esides being an author, I'm a human resources executive. I've spent a good part of my career close to television production, both at Paramount Pictures and Nickelodeon. People often ask me what it's like working in "TV land," and I always say how much I've enjoyed it. But people are people—plain and simple. In fact, few know this, but at the beginning of every new production season, the casts and crews of all your favorite TV productions have to undergo "respect in the workplace" training (that is, antidiscrimination and antiharassment overviews). Everyone in the industry knows that working on a "toxic set" can be a miserable way to make a living and even lead to high-profile publicity and lawsuits. Studios have figured out that placing antiharassment training at the beginning of each new production season is smart business because it sets the guidelines clearly and simply from day one—getting everyone on the same page right from the start in terms of behavioral expectations and land mines that should be avoided at all costs.

Usually an attorney leads the training (it's California, after all!), with production leadership sitting right in the front row to chime in when necessary. Some attorneys and production heads do this

type of presentation better than others, but here's one that I heard that always left an impression on me. It was from my days on the Paramount lot, and while this isn't a word-for-word translation, it's from the notes I took listening to a production head who was clearly an outstanding leader. Listen in and see if you can adopt a similar tale to share with your teams that they can relate to and make their own.

Everyone, I want to chime in here as the executive producer. The broader question that I want to tag on our attorney's wisdom and guidance is what can be done about a toxic work environment? Seriously. Not just the proverbial "memo from the front office" telling us how we should get along and accept one another's differences, opinions, and "worldviews." Not just the in-house or visiting employment attorneys who lead the preproduction antidiscrimination/sexual harassment training on the production sets at the start of every new TV season. They present facts. This needs to be about spirit. This needs to register on an emotional level to make a true difference. Addressing it proactively can make a real and lasting impact. If we're going to do this right, it has got to become personal. It needs to emanate from your very being as a leader and role model, which each person in this room is. It's got to be addressed verbally today but written in stone in your heart. And it's got to remain a check-in topic from time to time, not just something we address annually or at the start of a new production season.

First, a quick tale. Many of you may remember the TV shows from the '70s *Happy Days* and *Laverne and Shirley*. (Those of you too young to remember can watch them in syndication.) Both were produced by legendary TV guru Garry Marshall. They were shot right next door to one another on Stages 19 and 20, respectively, here on the Paramount lot. Laverne, Penny Marshall, was actually

Garry Marshall's sister in real life. So you'd think he'd have a preference for *Laverne and Shirley* over *Happy Days*. It turns out that wasn't the case at all. In his book, *My Happy Days in Hollywood*, Garry describes how well everyone got along on the set of *Happy Days*. Ron Howard was like a son to him, the younger actors respected the older ones like parents, and everyone had one another's backs. Set visits were encouraged for publicity reasons, and the cast got along about as well as any team in Hollywood TV history.

Not so with *Laverne and Shirley*. The two leads were self-described prima donnas; they cursed like sailors, they fired the writing team, only to hire and fire another, until it got to the point where no one wanted to be associated with that show or its cast for fear it could damage them professionally. Set visits were avoided because the next blowup was always right around the corner, and the drama never ended. Suffice it to say they were successful despite the toxic environment that everyone had to endure. I want our production to mirror *Happy Days*, not *Laverne and Shirley*.

I want us to enjoy coming to work. I want us to create memories for ourselves and for one another that we'll be celebrating twenty and thirty years from now. I want you to be able to live and experience Andy Bernard's greatest quote from the last episode of *The Office*: "I wish there was a way to know you're in the good old days before you've actually left them." It all starts with you and the expectations you should have for yourself and for everyone else on our team.

It's that simple. I can't mandate happiness and that people like one another, but I can set a very high bar in terms of the ethical behaviors and conduct that I expect from everyone on this crew in terms of how you treat one another. You're all exceptionally talented to make the cut and be part of this team, but talent and hard work alone are only half of what you'll need to be successful and

remain here. You're equally responsible for ensuring that the entire team enjoys working with you and seeks out your guidance when they have questions or need help. That's the standard I'm looking for. No other behavioral traits are necessary or needed from this point forward as part of this team. Simply throw any misconceptions out of your head, remove them from your toolbox, and determine how you can be part of the solution in terms of creating a friendly, inclusive, and fun work environment.

While I appreciate the formal legal training and the memo regarding policy acknowledgment that you all have to sign, I want you all to hear directly from me on this first day of production that nothing less than professionalism, respect, and selfless leadership is what I expect to see each day without exception. Seeing how well it works, seeing how much productivity and creativity springs from a healthy work environment where you can do your best work every day, will help us stand out now and help you all flourish in your future.

Let's have fun. Let's keep it light. Let's not fall into the trap of taking ourselves too seriously. But most important, let's make sure that everyone feels like they've got a seat at the table—no matter what their role. We're all one team. One production. One class that's wise enough to follow the professor's lead when it comes to something as important as our behavior, conduct, and attitude. Now you've heard what I expect of you. Now you know. Does anyone have any questions or suggestions at this point? [*No.*] Great.

Then combined with the antidiscrimination training that we've all received and that memo from the front office in which you have to acknowledge that you're required to follow specific policies, know that our verbal agreement right now sets the tone for the whole season, lifts us up to do our best work and bring our best game to this set every day, and helps us create our own happy days that we'll be able to celebrate for the rest of our lives.

Simply stated. Simply put. An ethical commitment like this from any leader in any environment will go a long way in creating and sustaining a healthy culture and work environment that everyone can be proud of. There is no need to make this any harder or more complicated than by simply voicing your commitment and making it a basic part of your team's belief system. Respect begets accountability. Accountability feeds commitment. Commitment drives results. And you can have fun along the way.