

The Office
Season 1-3
Composite Review

What's good about The Office?

I found the romance between Jim and Pam compelling and streamed through the first three seasons in a week based upon this hook. As is typical of this genre, they love each other, but can't quite seem to get it on or even admit that they are in love. As a consolation prize of sorts, Jim and Pam come together to play tricks on Dwight, the office idiot. The pranks are fun and perfectly executed. Between Jim and Pam's romance, and the college style pranks that they play on Dwight, you have two thirds of an excellent show. Unfortunately the last third sucks. Michael the boss is incompetent. Just like clockwork, he does something that would get anyone in the real world fired every episode. He is directly and personally responsible for massive property damage, personal injury to his fellow workers, and countless labor standard infractions. The company loses money left and right due to this moron.

Question: Why don't they fire him?

Answer: Because he is the lead character. There is no other reason.

So expect long, emotionally painful and disturbing sequences of Michael repeatedly stepping over random social boundaries. Unfortunately I didn't find these segments, which form the backbone of nearly every episode, to be amazingly funny. Painful is the right word for it. So is Disturbing. It's like watching a train wreck in slow motion. Oddly, the whole thing with Michael would have worked much better if they had simply written him in as the boss's son or idiot son-in-law. It would explain why he doesn't get fired, and actually has a management position in the first place. Nobody would hire this guy in the real world. He can't even get through a phone call without putting his foot in his mouth... repeatedly... excessively... predictably... till its no longer funny...

just painful... and it just goes on and on... till you wonder what's the point... what's the gag... but still he goes on... and on... and on... and on.

I'm sure others are going to say I don't get it, which is true, but every other character on the show except for Michael suffers real world consequences for real world actions. The show is shot as a semi-documentary (with cameramen that follow the characters into the restroom, and who always seem to be around when you need them). And it focuses on topical subjects - gays, women, violence, etc. -- in the workplace. The show wants to come off as a parody of cutting edge realism, but as long as Michael has a job, the effect is diminished. Please don't think I'm overplaying this. Michael's behavior is a jarring disconnect from reality that takes place every moment of every show. It's annoying and makes the show darn near impossible to watch.

The good news is that Michael mellows out a tad after the first few shows and becomes less painful to watch, but as the third season progresses, it seemed to me that most of the good stuff slipped away as well. I mean, after three years I've gotten over Jim and Pam, and the pranks have become something that the characters do, rather than something that is central to the plot. It's the difference between watching a show about pranks, and watching one in which a few -- minor, insignificant -- pranks are played here and there. And since Jim and Pam don't get it on -- we can't have that now, that's our hook -- by the end of the third season it seems like the entire office is dating one another --everyone but the two that you're rooting for. It's a complex web of interoffice romance as the bit characters come into their own. I don't mind a little soap opera. Maybe it wouldn't be so bad if Michael, the boss, didn't stay the star. Quite frankly, he's not a compelling character, and at this point it's a mistake to keep him on the show.

I give it three stars, let's add them up.

1 star for Jim and Pam's compelling romance.

2 stars for well executed pranks against Dwight.

3 starts for innovative documentary style.

It doesn't get the fourth star, because Michael is hard to watch. He is simply not funny.

And it doesn't get the fifth star, because in the end its not the least bit realistic and that was the whole point of the innovative documentary style. Wasn't it?

Or if you don't like that explanation lets just say the show is not quite a documentary and not quite a sitcom, which is to say it is not quite realistic and it's not quite funny. Close, but no cigar. Watch it for the romance and the pranks. Fast forward through Michael's shenanigans.

{I'm looking forward to watching the latest season of Archer whenever I get the chance. Has nothing to do with The Office, but there it is. Oh, and I like the American version of The Office a lot better than the British version.}

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