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Scriptwriting and Production • Video, Audio, Film

Script for

Cable Television Administration and Marketing (CTAM)

Seminar Session

on:

**COUNTRY COUNTY CABLE:
TIMELINESS OF SERVICE CALLS**

Produced and presented for CTAM 90, San Diego

Background for this script

This script is intended to give a slice of life in a rural cable television station beset by a typical range of problems that need some creative management for their solution.

The audience for the video are executives of the cable television industry at a national conference in San Diego.

Based on a case study all attendees will be given to read, the video is designed to be the stimulus for a panel discussion. Hence, the video offers no solution; rather, it provides an opportunity to observe and discuss work-a-day life at a typical cable station in a rural environment.

NARRATOR ON-CAMERA - OPENING COMMENTS:

Studio setting

The case study you're about to see takes place in an aging suburban cable system we call Country County Cable.

Because of the poor reception of off-air networks, basic coverage is high and continues to remain steady at 95% of the community, although the pay-to-basic ratio has been declining over the past six months.

As you'll soon see, the major problems at Country County Cable stem from the poor technical condition of the cable plant, which has been in operation for about fifteen years.

Since the head office will not invest the capital for new equipment for another three years, local management must deal with the dramatic increase in the number of service calls over the past several years -- and especially, with the length of time it takes to respond to customers' calls for service.

EXT.

SURBURBAN LANDSCAPE

DAY

From a wide-open sky, we PAN across the not too distant mountains, which soon give way to patches of uniformly constructed homes located on their own fair-sized lots, all so orderly, yet not too crowded.

We pick up some transmission wires emanating from the residential community and follow them along.

We catch sight of another set of transmission wires (or a micro wave unit) and follow them into the building complex housing the local cable station.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT.

CUSTOMER SERVICE DEPARTMENT

DAY

The room is ablaze with noise as phones ring incessantly and the dozen or so customer service reps are engaged in constant conversation. We DOLLY across the room and come to rest at one of the CSR's as she tries to handle a call from an irate customer as best she can.

CUSTOMER SERVICE REP (CSR) #1
Yes, sir. I understand what you're saying. I know what you mean...

CUSTOMER
(phone filtered)
Lady, if you really knew what I meant, you people would do something about it, instead of just making excuses and telling me you can't send anybody to fix the damn thing until next Wednesday. That's five days away! I'll miss the playoffs.

CSR #1
I'm sorry, sir, but all our technicians are busy until then.

CUSTOMER
Well, what time on Wednesday will your technician be here?

CSR #1
I can't tell you exactly, sir. We can't make any guarantees. They'll be there sometime between nine and six.

CUSTOMER
(sarcastically)
Oh, great. So I suppose I'll have to hang around the house all day Wednesday. Are you guys going to give me a day's pay?

CSR #1
(innocently, but flustered)
Yes, sir, I mean No, sir, we can't do that. But we'll be there Wednesday. You know, sir, I wonder if you've heard about this month's special. You can get an extra premium service for just...

CUSTOMER
You want me to get another channel when I can't even see the ones I have? You just make sure that a technician gets out here as early as possible on Wednesday. Understand?

CSR #1
Of course, sir. I'll get right on it.

CUSTOMER
Good. All I can say is you people are lucky you have a monopoly in this town. Fifteen years ago when you applied for your franchise, you promised better service than this. You tell your bosses it's about time they delivered. Or we'll get someone who will.

CSR #1
Yes, sir. I will, sir. Thank you for calling Country County Cable.

CUSTOMER
(thoroughly fed up)
A-a-a rrr-ggghhhh!
(He abruptly hangs up phone.)

The customer rep is so jarred by the abrupt hang up that she jumps slightly. A second customer rep, working alongside, notices her reaction.

CSR #2
Rough call?

CSR #1
That's the fourth one like that this morning.

CSR #2
I know. I had three myself. Kind of gives you an idea what it feels like to be on the front lines of a war, doesn't it? And then they expect us to sell, too?

CSR #1
Yeah, it's tough to sell when you're on the defensive all the time. We're the ones who have to take all the heat. These people blame us for things we have no control over.

CSR #2
(nodding in agreement)
You're right. I just wish the head office would do something about this system before it completely falls apart -- and me with it.

Their phones ring. They glance at each other and smile that suffering smile which all workers who do routine jobs come to understand and accept as part of the territory.

CSR #1 and CSR #2
(simultaneously)
Here we go again!

They answer their phones sweetly and professionally.

CSR #1 and CSR #2
(simultaneously)
Country County Cable. This is Louise/Sarah. How may I help you?

EXT.

EMPLOYEES' PARKING LOT

DAY

TECHNICIAN #1 (TOM) wearily carries his clipboard of service call orders to the Company van in preparation for making a service call. As he's loading up the van, TECHNICIAN #2 (LARRY) pulls alongside him with his van.

TECHNICIAN #2 (LARRY)
Hey, Tom, how's it going? You on overtime again?!

TECHNICIAN #1 (TOM)
(weary)
Can't help it. They give me so many calls to make,...

He shows him the thick sheaf of orders on his clipboard.

TECHNICIAN #1 (TOM)
...I just can't get to them all in a normal day. This job's really getting to be a drag, you know.

TECHNICIAN #2 (LARRY)
Tell me about it.

TECHNICIAN #1 (TOM)
I mean, the money's not that great. And the wife's getting pretty sore I'm not spending any time with her and the kids.

TECHNICIAN #2 (LARRY)
I know. I feel the same.

Tom starts to drive off, then he checks himself.

TECHNICIAN #1 (TOM)
Hey? Larry, how about you? Aren't you scheduled for overtime, too?

TECHNICIAN #2 (LARRY)
Not tonite. Tonite's my bowling night.

TECHNICIAN #1 (TOM)
Hah-hah, that's a good excuse.

TECHNICIAN #2 (LARRY)
You got that right! Besides, if I don't show up tonite, the guys'll kick me off the team.

TECHNICIAN #1 (TOM)

I should do something like that. Take classes or something. I can't hack this much longer. I rush here, I rush there, and all I ever run into is one thankless jerk after another, griping at me because they had to wait around all day for someone to come and fix their problem. The nerve of some people!

TECHNICIAN #2 (LARRY)

Hey, believe me, I know just how you feel.

TECHNICIAN #2 (Larry) closes his fist like a hitch-hiker thumbing a ride, and he makes a face while shaking his thumb in the direction of the bosses' offices.

TECHNICIAN #2 (LARRY)

Dealing with those guys in the front office is no picnic either. They're only concerned with catching up on their orders, so they dump all these calls on you, and there's never enough time to do a decent job on any one of them.

TECHNICIAN #1 (TOM)

(as if he's confiding a secret)
I tell you, when I'm in the field, if I ever see something wrong that's not included in these reports, I'm a blind, deaf, and dumb monkey.

(cover his eyes)

I didn't see it...

(covers his ears)

I didn't hear about it, and...

(locks his mouth and throws away the key, with a 'kiss-off' flourish)

I sure ain't going to tell anyone about it.

TECHNICIAN #2 (LARRY)

(laughs)

Especially those CSR's. They don't know nothing anyway. The more they think they know, the worse it is. Heck! Half the calls I make, there's no real problem to begin with, or the situation could've been handled over the phone! Save us all this time and trouble.

TECHNICIAN #1 (TOM)
(tapping his clipboard forms)
I'd be satisfied if they'd just give
me the correct information to begin
with.

TECHNICIAN #2 (LARRY)
(shaking his head in commiseration)
Aggghr same old story. Who needs
all this aggravation, right?

TECHNICIAN #1 (TOM)
Exactly.
(sighs)
Oh, well. I better be going.
Somewhere out there lurks a customer
who thinks he's the only one with
with cable TV problems

TECHNICIAN #2 (LARRY)
I got news for you. They all think
that way.

Technician #1 (Tom) laughs weakly in agreement. He knows
all too well the truth of his co-worker's insight.

TECHNICIAN #1 (TOM)
Yeah, well, I don't know about you,
but if things don't get better soon,
I'm going to pack it in. Life's too
short.

He drives off, waving an anemic good-bye. Technician #2
(Larry) watches him drive off, shaking his head in the
realization that there goes another potential deserter
from the cause.

TECHNICIAN #2 (LARRY)
(to himself)
Yep, I know what you mean.

INT.

GENERAL MANAGER'S OFFICE

DAY

A hand knocks on the door of the General Manager's office, just beneath the title plate:

HARVEY STARR
GENERAL MANAGER

We PAN OFF the door into the office as HARVEY STARR, seated behind his desk, beckons CHUCK LINEMAN, the Chief Technician, to enter and sit down.

AT HARVEY'S DESK

Chuck enters the office and sits down in front of Harvey's desk. Harvey searches among the papers on his desk for a report, and after he locates it, he slides a copy across the desk for Chuck to look at.

HARVEY

Chuck, I'm worried. We've got some big problems on the technical side of things.

CHUCK

What do you mean, Harvey. What kind of problems?

HARVEY

Aw, c'mon, you know our customers are really upset about the time it takes us to respond to a service call.

CHUCK

Hey, my guys are really busting their chops out there to complete their quotas. Just look at the volume of calls we have to take care of.

HARVEY

I know. And that bothers me, too. It's getting way out of control.

CHUCK

Aw, c'mon Harvey, that's not our fault. The system's too old. We need new equipment. Why, we're still using the same gear you did when you were an installer nine years ago.

HARVEY

Maybe so, but you're still going to have to make do with what you've got. The Company simply can't afford to rebuild the plant for three more years.

CHUCK

I know, I know. You've told me that before. It's just that I'm going crazy with all the service calls those gals in customer service keep giving us. I feel like we're on a tread mill, and we're never going to catch up.

HARVEY

Now, now, don't start picking on customer service again. They're only trying to do their job.

CHUCK

Awwww, I'm not so sure. If they only knew what they were talking about, they could handle more things over the phone, instead of sending the guys on wild goose chases half the time.

HARVEY

(sympathetic, soft, political)
Listen, Chuck, I know it's been a rough year for you. You've lost most of your experienced technicians right?

CHUCK

(nodding, sighing)
Yeah. Most of the crew now are installers that I promoted. They're good. They just need some seasoning.

HARVEY

I know that. But our customers don't. They only care about how long it takes us to respond their calls for service.

CHUCK

Hey, we're doing the best we can. You know, it seems to me that maybe our customers ought to be a little more reasonable.

HARVEY
(excited and getting angry)
Reasonable?! Chuck, look at these reports. On average, you're taking four-and-a-half days to get a tech to a customer's home....

As Harvey gets angry, the meeting escalates into a squabble where each one fights to get a word in edgewise, stepping on the other's lines, not listening fully to what the other is saying.

CHUCK
(exasperated, holding hands out)
What do you expect from me? I only have a seven-man crew, and most of 'em are new...

HARVEY
New crew or not, that's just not good enough....

CHUCK
. ..Look. the guys are overworked and we run them all over the place for this, that, and the other...

HARVEY
. ..You've got to get the response time down to twenty-four hours -- thirty-six hours tops!
Understand?...

CHUCK
. ..I still don't see how it's my responsibility to reduce the waiting time for service calls.

HARVEY
. ..These delays are killing us....

CHUCK
(Shaking his finger, pointing the blame)
I tell you, Harvey, it's those babes in Customer Service. If they'd only...

HARVEY
. ..Our customers aren't happy!

FREEZE FRAME as the two of them are locked in the argument, the composition featuring Chuck with his finger-pointing, blame-throwing posture.

TRANSITION TO NARRATOR.

NARRATOR ON-CAMERA - CLOSING COMMENTS:

Studio setting

Cable television is a complicated business. When things don't go as well as we want, the reasons are sometimes hard to find. One department may blame another; old ways of doing business might not work any longer; perhaps customers have come to expect more -- like having us meet their schedule, instead of them meeting ours.

If we intend to compete in the rapidly changing world of cable, we must look beyond the symptoms to the causes which underlie them.

As you discuss the issues of this case with your facilitator, look for the root causes of the problems presented. Try to see with a fresh perspective -- as if you were a customer, looking at cable for the very first time. After all, seeing ourselves as our customers see us is the only sure path to ultimate success.