

*-The Script Department-
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Type of Material:	Script	Title:	CONFIDENTIAL
Number of Pages:	113	Author:	CONFIDENTIAL
Coverage type:	Jr. Story Notes	Circa:	Present
Payment type:		Location:	Indeterminate US
Coverage Date:		Genre:	Comedy
Analyst:			

LOG LINE: CONFIDENTIAL

	Excellent	Good	Needs Work	Rethink
Idea			X	
Overall execution			X	
Narrative/Structure			X	
Characters/Dialogue			X	
Effective Scene work			X	
Professional appearance: grammar, spelling, typos		X		
Commercial potential			X	
Readiness for Market				X

Scouting Recommendation:	
Yes	
Not at this time	X

Overview

Doug – thank you so much for letting me read your script. You definitely have a funny bone and I like the way you lampooned office politics and particularly funny – office-speak. That was really cute. The script in some ways reminds me of OFFICE SPACE – which is both good and bad. Good because that was a funny movie but bad because it came out ahead of you and I think it quite likely your script would be compared to it. OFFICE SPACE raised the bar pretty high in terms of lampooning this subject matter.

However, the script has many miles to go before it really nails the heights of comedy you are striving for. Right now, this draft has an episodic structure and narrative; all the characters need more work, especially Jack; your page count for this genre is a good 13 pages too long; many scenes do not move the story forward; and I found several typos and misspells. Not to worry, let’s do this – let’s examine the elements that I feel need your attention and then make a laundry list so you can have a sense of redirection in your rewrite.

Character

Probably the biggest problem with the script is that Jack really isn't relatable or three-dimensional. I think I can actually say that of all the major players in this broad gross-out comedy genre: sophisticated, subtle characters are not usually much in evidence, so that's okay – to a degree. But not for your main character. Jack is front and center – this is his story and his character arc. Right now, Jack is somewhat of a blank slate. In fact, he's tough to understand.

But. Here's the good news – with some work and hopefully with the help of these notes, you can take Jack to another, funnier, more relatable level as a character. Right now, you've given him a flaw, but unfortunately it's an utterly passive flaw. The flaw of the main character drives the plot in that it affects their every decision and keeps raining misfortune down on them. Here, you've given Jack the flaw of not standing up for himself. And then a bunch of stuff keeps happening to him, but not really in a way that links to his character arc. Bad stuff happens – a lot of bad stuff happens – and in the very end, pretty much out of nowhere, Jack stands up and gets counted.

Here's the area where you need to dig deeper into Jack: WHY does he never stand up for himself? What happened in his backstory that made him that way? I don't see the connection between his father's shameful criminal activity and Jack not standing up for himself. I like that Steve has this ironic, subversive, and in some ways realistic view that working hard is not the answer – it's about being clever and cutthroat. So I'm going to throw an idea at you and you may hate it – what if you collapsed Steve and Jack into one character and have Jack be the promotion coach? Because, you see, because his father was a crook, Jack has grown up his whole life to prove to his dad that hard work and honesty ARE the correct ways to go about working. But then, at the very beginning of the script, Jack does NOT get the promotion he wants. And that's it – he cracks. And decides to start learning to become as underhanded and crafty as his dear old dad was since although it may be illegal, goddammit, dad had some dignity. Or whatever. So what if Jack, not only not promoted but demoted, starts fomenting all these evil ideas and someone says hey, I'll pay you to help me get promoted and Jack says fine and accepts the money. Then he starts becoming the resident expert until he gets caught up in his own doings and gets fired at a crucial moment. Now Jack has to go back to his former, hard-working ways – not to get unfired but just because that's the right thing to do. Maybe he even helps out Brad, a former enemy.

But let's return to **Jack's flaw and backstory** again. I really urge you to move away from his flaw being that he doesn't stand up for himself. It's passive, it's clichéd and it's not that interesting. One of the funniest aspects of comedy in a movie like this is watching a character finally CRACK. So how funny would it be if Jack went from Dwight Schrute on steroids to a pissed off saboteur whose larger character arc and decision is – screw being the nice guy, it gets you nowhere. So you have a lot more comedy here – Jack and his love life, Jack and the girl at the yogurt shop, Jack and the guy at the dry-cleaner. Suddenly – he's a pushy jerk. But his life does start to really be successful as he makes under-the-table cash helping employees kick it up a notch.

Now, the direction I am suggesting might be absolute anathema to you and that's fair play; it is your story. So let's do something different – let's take exactly what you have and talk about that. Jack is most definitely missing a back story, character arc, motivation and clear goals. If he

wants to be promoted so badly, why does he sit at his desk playing Sudoku all day? He appears not to have any real goals or interests other than in just generically being promoted. Can you dig deeper – what does being promoted really signify for him? Is he at a stage in his life when he feels that he can't move forward, get married, buy a house and all that unless he's more successful? Does he work in a field he's interested in at all? I really got zero sense of who Jack really is. What does he do in his free time? What is he really passionate about? He seems to just want a promotion for promotion's sake but beyond that he is a bit of a cipher.

Additionally, you could dig deeper into Jack's girlfriend and write a more organic, quirky, three-dimensional character. Brad Stone too. I would suggest doing some character exercises for all of your characters – even if you're striving for a flat-affect lampooning of generic office workers and office work as in OFFICE SPACE, you still need quirky, believable characters within that template. Remember “32 pieces of flair” from OFFICE SPACE? And the guy who just loved his red Swingline stapler? There is a book I highly recommend called *Inside Story: The Power of the Transformative Arc* by Dara Marks.

Narrative and Structure

In this draft, a lot of stuff happens but there is no real build in the narrative. This produces a script which is episodic. Meaning one thing *sort of* leads to another but there really isn't any build or tension. We never wonder – WOW how will Jack get out of THIS one? You have gag after gag after setpiece but the comedic timing necessary to really pull this comedy off is missing. Comedy isn't comedy if we don't care about the characters and we don't feel a growing sense of urgency – a ticking clock, an end goal that is clear to us. You have to ask yourself, in terms of the narrative (and resulting structure) that you have chosen to use – why does the story start JUST when it does? What is going on in Jack's world that makes this distinctly inconvenient? Remember, the journey your character takes has to have an inverse relationship to the character's flaw. In other words – why is it that this couldn't be a WORSE journey for Jack to have to undergo? When you dig deeper into the character, you will be able to come up with not only more than multitudinous gags and riffs but also a dramatic and comedic shape to hang that all on. Remember, in screenwriting, we jump into scenes late and get out of them early. Always. How does one event build on the last and intersect with Jack's character flaws? The reason I suggest that it is perhaps Jack who teaches *Promotions for Dummies* is that it gives him a much neater and interesting character arc and a tighter, more compelling narrative. He sees that people get promoted for baloney reasons – he doesn't get a promotion for which he worked long and hard. The resulting disappointment puts him right over the edge – he snaps. Now Jack will use his demotion (see how that extra sting raises the stakes for his ego?) to teach people all the low-down, dirty tricks to which he himself fell victim. But of course – what will happen? Jack will fall victim to his own, dubious success in helping people get promoted. And at the end of his arc, when he's lost everything because of it – he will face a crisis – finally, he can get the promotion of his dreams but he has two choices – do it the dirty way or the ethical way. And what does he stand to gain? The job. But what might he lose? His self-respect. And when Jack makes the right choice, and returns to an ethic of working hard and taking pride in his work – then and only then will he be rewarded at the end of the script. Do you see how a storyline like this (and surely, there are many offshoots of it that we could and will brainstorm when we talk) has a distinct shape to it?

And that distinct shape dictates a structure that works – with growing stakes, with tension and comedy arising from causally linked situations and with a comedic and emotional payoff in the end.

World

I am not sure if the tone of this script is really focused enough. It's clear there's an OFFICE SPACE vibe going on and more than a little lampooning, but you haven't quite nailed that one way or the other. Sometimes things in the office seem rather normal – other times I had a really hard time buying that Monroe would give Brad the promotion simply because he brought food in at a good moment. In terms of the believability of this world – how is it *possible* that this is a successful company, a company that hires, fires and promotes people – if the boss makes his decisions in this way? I didn't believe it.

I am not sure if you ever watch 30 ROCK but the Alec Baldwin character is a quirky, somewhat shallow guy – however, he is indeed the boss and no matter how petty or odd he can sometimes be, it's clear that he knows how to run the company. With Monroe and with the world you're setting up, I'd like to you to slow down and take much more time to establish what, exactly, this company does, where they are located, and what the larger world looks like. Is there a competitor that is threatening to take them down at the knees? Are they a new company or a granddaddy? Is Brad Stone married? How long has he been at the company? In tv's THE OFFICE, the company is located in a sort of funny place – Scranton, PA. It's snowy and slushy outside; the show is knowingly and wittily set in an environment with a depressing sense of blandness – perfect for the show. It wouldn't be nearly as funny if it were set in San Diego. Because the place outside the walls give us a sense of the people within the walls.

Theme

Theme is often best expressed in terms of an “entertaining question” that is asked and answered on every page through every character, throughout the script, until the end, when the writer gets to answer the question with finality. Theme really is a conversation that runs along underneath the scenes and sequences. What do you want to talk about here in your script?

In other words, far beyond that it's funny to see a man attacked by the less-than-attractive daughter of the boss or get usurped by a chimp – what is it that you are trying to say? That an office environment is absurd? That a guy just can't get ahead? You need to build on that and express and articulate your theme in an entertaining way in every scene of the script. Because again, comedy without context doesn't come across as all that funny.

In Summary

I think you have a good head start here but this script is not ready to send out. The good thing about having as much material as you do is that you don't have to start from scratch – but I do think this script needs a page one rewrite. You need to express an entertaining, unique premise and enact that premise with three-dimensional characters with arcs of change, resolution and growth. The world needs to be trued up and the theme is currently missing altogether. So set aside your comedic set pieces and do some hard work on evaluating a more distinct story arc for Jack that embodies a theme and a message that is important to you. Because of the success of

OFFICE SPACE and THE OFFICE, you have some work to do before this material will appeal to an executive looking for something new and fresh in the office environment.