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More Cinematic Ticklers for the OM Classroom

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- FORCED TO TEACH FOUR-HOUR LONG classes to evening MBA students?
- Tired of competing with the latest version of MechWarriors in getting the interest of your undergraduate students?
- Falling asleep during your own lectures?
- Searching for new tips and advice in using videos in your classroom?
- Looking for replacements for those videos we told you about last year (*Decision Line*, Vol. 28(1))?

If you've answered yes to any of these questions, we are back again with an update on the use of "cinematic ticklers" in the classroom. In this column, we will briefly review basic uses of ticklers, provide some pointers for using them, and close with a new list of ticklers that you can use either as additions to those from our previous article, or as replacements. Over the course of the article, we will use some of our new suggested ticklers as examples.

Cinematic Ticklers

Cinematic ticklers are brief excerpts from movies and popular television programs (Brown et. al, 1997). In contrast to educational videos, which are often 30 minutes or more in length, ticklers are brief excerpts that can serve several purposes in the classroom.

First, as *icebreakers*, ticklers provide a visual anchor and brief humorous or dramatic introduction to a new topic. For instance, in George Lucas' science fiction classics, *Star Wars* and *The Empire Strikes*

Back, Darth Vader demonstrates new ways of ending conflict among team members and motivating under-performing officers by strangling team members using the mystical "power of the force." These clips make great beginnings to sessions on team dynamics and project management. We introduce the icebreakers with a short comment. For example, "Today we begin our discussion of managing the project team. As a way of getting started, let's look at how one manager motivates his team to meet high performance goals." After showing the icebreaker, we segue to the main material of the session with a comment such as, "Darth's approach is a bit radical. Our discussion today will reveal some more promising and practical strategies for managing and motivating the project team."

Second, ticklers can also serve as *point-makers*, to illustrate underlying course concepts, as precursors to student discussion, or as a means to engage critical analysis. In contrast to the *icebreaker* clips with Darth Vader, we've used point-making ticklers from *Dave* and *Heaven Can Wait* to initiate discussion about problem solving and effective team meetings. In both films, the central character of the film, (Kevin Kline as the look-alike stand-in for the real U.S. President, and Warren Beatty as the temporary resident of a millionaire's body) uses a disarming, almost naïve style to cut through the malarkey and solve two large business problems. In our classes, we show these two clips without introduction and then ask students the following questions:

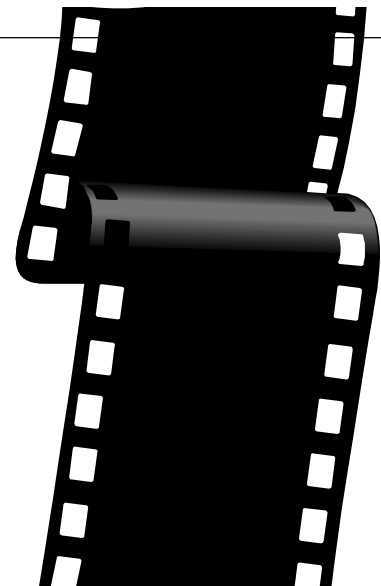
Source of Tickler	Start Time	Finish Time	Topic(s)
ICE BREAKERS			
<i>The Best of Red Green</i>			
Red adds gull wing doors to Ford with duct tape.	44:19	47:31	Product design quality
<i>Falling Down</i>			
Michael Douglas loses it as he orders breakfast in a fast food restaurant. (Thanks to Bill Ruch for this suggestion.)	26:08	28:38	Service quality, customer service
<i>Five Easy Pieces</i>			
Restaurant scene. (Thanks to Jim Evans for this suggestion.)			
<i>Star Wars</i>			
Darth Vader throttles team members.	45:15 48:00	47:38 49:30	Service quality Conflict resolution
<i>Empire Strikes Back</i>			
Darth Vader kills team members by strangling them.	29:00 to 1:19:00 to	30:00 1:19:50	Conflict resolution
POINT MAKERS			
<i>Apollo 13</i>			
Fabricating new carbon dioxide filters. (Note: there are two segments to this tickler.)	1:19:50 to 1:27:00 to	1:21:00 1:32:55	Component part commonality, disaster recovery, innovative problem solving
<i>Big Night</i>			
Italian immigrant chef maintains classic values of his cuisine, despite the voice of the customer.	2:05	7:05	Voice of the customer vs. voice of the designer
<i>Dave</i>			
Kevin Kline, as the impostor President of the United States holds a meeting to cut the budget to save a school's program.	55:00	59:00	Holding effective meetings, problem solving
<i>Harvey Girls</i>			
Judy Garland and colleagues demonstrate the Harvey way.	29:30		Service and operations design
<i>Heaven Can Wait</i>			
Warren Beatty, as Joe Pendleton, solves problems in disarming fashion in a meeting.	35:00	39:00	Holding effective meetings
<i>The Hudsucker Proxy</i>			
Tim Davis posits the Hula Hoop, and an "interesting" product design and development process ensues.	1:03:20	1:12:35	New product development, voice of the customer

Table 1: Suggested ticklers.

1. What do you recall from the scenes that we just viewed? Which phrases or scenes do you remember best?
2. How would you have felt as a participant in either of these meetings? What did you like or dislike about Dave and Joe Pendleton (Mr. Farnsworth) as meeting leaders? In your own experience, have you participated or led a similar meeting?
3. In what ways did these two examples challenge some of the characteristics we generally associate with good meetings?

Point-making ticklers are usually most effective when they are followed by a structured discussion organized around carefully conceived, thought-provoking questions. A well-planned and executed discussion also sends the implicit message that this is a serious activity, and not a sell-out to commercialism and "edutainment."

Thirdly, ticklers can increase the impact of a topic when they are used to make particularly important points. For instance, we have found that the tickler from *The Hudsucker Proxy*, introduced in our previous article, can be used throughout a



discussion of the new product development process. In that tickler, the seemingly silly idea for the hula hoop turns into a surprise commercial success, despite a total lack of consideration of the voice of the customer throughout the development process and a poorly conceived pricing approach. (About the only thing the product had in its favor was a lucky choice of product name.) Thus, the tag line for a poorly designed and controlled development process throughout the remainder of the course can be, "Did they *hula-hoop* it?" The film provides student with a vivid metaphor of the poorly conceived and managed development process. Metaphors and analogies can provide yet another means to create and utilize knowledge in the classroom and the organization (Nonaka, 1994).

Selecting and Using Your Own Ticklers

We suggested four basic principles for the selection and use of ticklers in our first article, and our continued use of ticklers has enforced their importance.

Use good taste and be sensitive to the diversity of your audience. For instance, the ticklers (see the list of suggested ticklers at the end of the article) from *Big Night*, *Five Easy Pieces*, and *Falling Down* all provide graphic illustrations of an organization's failure to respond to the voice of the customer in designing its products and services. However, each tickler also contains graphic language that you or your students may find unsuitable. You might chose to carefully edit that language out with the "mute" button on your VCR, while still maintaining the point of the tickler.

Look for positive examples where possible. We find it relatively easy to find examples of poor service (the *Five Easy Pieces* chicken salad sandwich scene with Jack Nicholson is a classic) but there are good service examples, as well. One of our favorites comes from *The Harvey Girls*, most notable for its debut of the song *On the Atcheson, Topeka and the Sante Fe*. A portion of the film depicts the system that Fred Harvey used for ensuring fast turn around time in his train stop restaurants. Train passengers reviewed Harvey's menus enroute, then had their orders telegraphed to the restaurant. The meals were on the table when the train arrived, thereby mini-

mizing on-site processing time and maximizing restaurant revenue in a short period of time. Incidentally, because clients could complete their meals quickly, they were left with a few minutes to shop in the gift shop that adjoined the restaurant. Judy Garland et al put the entire description into an entertaining song and dance. The clip is effective in demonstrating how an operating system can be designed around a particular competitive priority, and also underscores the idea that process effectiveness is not a new idea. Fred Harvey had this system in place 100 years ago, long before Ray Kroc or Dave Thomas utilized a production-line approach to service at McDonald's and Wendy's.

Watch the tickler a number of times before you use it, both to evaluate its suitability, and to carefully consider how much of the film you should show. Our students often beg us to show all of *Apollo 13*, for instance. We try to show just enough to evoke discussion, but not so much that terminating the viewing elicits unhappiness.

Purchase the film. You avoid copyright violation and set an example for students when you buy your own copy. All of the films and TV episodes cited in this article are available either in the collections of video or media stores, or from on-line sources on the Internet. For instance, we were able to find *The Best of Red Green* tape that many colleagues have been unable to find locally on-line at www.reel.com.

Queue the tape up and test the equipment before class begins, to avoid mishaps.

During the past three years, we have facilitated a workshop at the DSI Annual Meeting. We have shown some of the example ticklers, demonstrated their use, and listened to the experiences and suggestions of other colleagues who have used this approach in teaching their classes. We have learned that ticklers can be yet another successful tool in gaining student interest, but more importantly, providing them with metaphorical anchors for what they learned during their courses. Students often mention ticklers positively in instructor evaluations, and we have yet to experience criticism of the technique as a poor use of class time. If you haven't tried this approach, we strongly recommend it. If you have used them, and have ticklers

to suggest to others, let us know, and we will include them on the cinematic ticklers web page, which may be found at:

<http://www.cob.asu.edu/users/faculty/DSDaniels/cineexam.htm> ■

References

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