

# HR in popular culture

By Anthony Sills

There is a long tradition of bashing management and human resources in popular culture. Whether portrayed as ineffectual, incompetent, or downright evil, HR seems to be cast either as the heavy or the punchline. Hopefully, that trend may change soon but in the meantime, here are the top five examples of human resources in popular culture.



## The Top 5 List: HR in popular culture

1. Dilbert—Scott Adams' long-running comic strip (first published in 1989) is probably the most well known example of human resources in popular culture. Dilbert appears in 2000 newspapers worldwide in 65 countries and 25 languages in addition to spawning a TV series, video game, merchandise, and books. Catbert is Dilbert's company's evil feline Human Resources director. He is buddy-buddy with the Pointy Haired Boss and loves to watch employees worry about their jobs and potential layoffs.
2. *Office Space*— Peter Gibbons reports to eight different bosses and is sick of hearing about cover sheets and TPS reports so when two management consultants are brought in to cut expenses by downsizing, hilarity ensues. Mike Judge's 1999 directorial debut has achieved cult status over the years. In

2008, *Entertainment Weekly* named *Office Space* one of "The 100 best films from 1983 to 2008."

3. *The Office* (U.S. version)—This Emmy award-winning TV show continues the tradition of bashing human resources in popular culture with Toby Flenderson as the human resources representative for the Scranton branch of paper distributor Dunder Mifflin/Sabre. Michael Scott, played by Steve Carell, probably shows the most disrespect for Toby and the HR function, constantly telling everyone in the office that HR's job is to make the office 'lame'. Typical comments include, "Toby is in HR, which technically means he works for corporate, so he's really not a part of our family. Also, he's divorced, so he's really not a part of *his* family."

4. *Horrible Bosses*— This black comedy, which stars Jason Bateman, Charlie Day, Jason Sudeikis, Jennifer Aniston, Colin Farrell, Kevin Spacey and Jamie Foxx, is about three friends who (instead of just quitting their jobs) decide to murder their bosses. Contrary to *Office Space*, in this film the *employees* hire a consultant—a murder consultant. According to IMDB, Warner Bros. set up a 12-foot Voodoo doll resembling a corporate boss in downtown Montreal to promote the movie. People were given the chance to vent their frustrations on the doll by stabbing and hitting it with large needles.

5. *Human Resources*—This movie, actually titled *Ressources Humaines*, premiered at the 1999 San Sebastian Film Festival, where director Laurent Cantet won the New Directors Award. It is a drama about a recent college graduate (Jalil Lespert) who lands an internship at the plant where his father (Jean-Claude Vallod) has worked for years. The young man is the liaison between management and labor as the plant switches to a 35-hour workweek (A government-mandated 35-hour work week was introduced in France in 1998 to allow more people into the workplace by reducing the time each employee worked — 39 hours at the time.) but when the company uses the

intern's data to recommend the firing of many long-time employees, including his father things really get interesting.