

Enjoy

The

Film

Diary of a Popcorn Monkey

2008

Introduction

Late in 2007 I found myself struggling to afford my mortgage. As well as working as a manager I took a job with a top cinema chain as a multifunctional. By day I manage a budget and negotiate targets; by night I serve popcorn and implore my customers to “enjoy the film” as part of making the customer experience special. That way, at the weekend, I can provide for my son and not need to find the cash to go to the flicks with my mates - because I’ve seen the film already. But the real show goes on “noises off” behind the scenes. As I change my tie for a baseball cap I mix with young people instead of managing them. I adopt a different persona and count the hours till clocking off time.

Enjoy The Film

1 March, 2008

Enjoy The Film. That's what we say: after every sale and after every encounter. Make it special for the customer. We are different because we focus on that customer experience. That way we can improve the 'spend per person'. If they are happy customers they will come back. We can upsell and "suggestive" sell of additional products. They might even treat themselves to the VIP box. Enjoy the film.

Late last year I found myself struggling to afford my mortgage. As well as working as a full-time manager I took a part-time job with a top cinema chain as a multifunctional. By day I manage a budget and negotiate targets; by night I serve popcorn and implore my customers to "enjoy the film" as part of making the customer experience special. That way, at the weekend, I can provide for my son and not need to find the cash to go to the flicks with my mates - because I've seen the film already. But the real show goes on "noises off" behind the scenes. As I change my tie for a baseball cap I mix with young people instead of managing them. I adopt a different persona and count the hours till clocking off time.

This blog is a diary of my journey in to new territory: the cinema, a new state of the art venue, a new group of young people entrusted with giving the customer the highest quality experience and the success of the company's reputation in the town. It's an adventure for everyone and it's not going to plan - even before the cinema has opened.

Recruitment for the Love of It

2 March, 2008

The recruitment process for becoming a Multifunctional is spread over three stages. The first stage is the group interview where the interviewer sifts out those that cannot communicate or communicate so badly they cannot be put in front of a customer. The five minute chat serves no other purpose than information giving. About a hundred hopefuls apply. Competition is actually tougher for the company as there is already a local cinema and also a whole new mall open with top brand name stores competing for excellent customer service skills.

The next stage is the one to one interview. Reaching the destination was a challenge as the office complex gates had been kept locked that morning preventing entry. The interview itself took less than fifteen minutes with the interviewer using up most of the time to repeat the information given to us in the group interview. I was asked two questions and then it was his show. Why was I applying? Yes it was okay to need the money and to choose a cinema because I love films. How was I going to cope with working a sixth day of the week? The interviewer listened to my robust response and then answered the question himself by emphasising how easy the work is. But I was not sure that answer was really directed at me. He seemed to imply the work was easy but the ability of some of the applicants to focus was questionable. Perhaps more difficult questions could filter them out? Dealing with difficult customers? Handling complaints? What is customer service?

The third stage is the training. Its length (three weeks) and assumption of knowing nothing beforehand could potentially put off the good ones. In fact there are drop outs straight away. It is not gruelling but some will still fail.

This is not highly paid work. The premium offered over the local rival cinema generates no desertions. The apparent depressing atmosphere at the local Sainsbury grocery store is a big driver. But Tesco pay substantially more and have no vacancies. Ken Livingstone spoke this week of over £7 an hour as a minimum wage - way more than what we are being paid. What is the benefit of a real minimum wage? How about real evidence of lower turnover and higher job satisfaction? That's a win-win and what these young people want more than seeing a film for free.

Dysfunctional Training

11 March, 2008

Training to be a Multifunctional is a long drawn out affair. Three weeks to be precise. No stone is left unturned: cash handling, box office, food hygiene....We are trained in a local football club conference room because the new site is being built. The group is in its early twenties and multicultural reflecting more the educational and life chances facing young black and Asian people than the makeup of the area.

A quiet Year to be paying off the loan

12 March, 2008

It's not a vintage year (Check Semi-Pro) to be opening a state of the art cinema in a small town with an existing rival cinema. Unfortunately this one missed the sleeper hit Juno and the mammoth hit No Country for Old Men. There are no sure fire sequels, no new certain barn stormers every one will be talking about. It's an in-betweenie year with 2007 stacking up the hits and, hopefully, 2009 will explain why 2008 is such a miss. Despite how poor Shrek 3 and Pirates 3 were, how worn Spidey 3 was, they were bankers. There are films such as The Mummy 3 can shine. The year's profits rely on Indiana Jones with an ageing star. It needs to be to the standard of the first Indiana Jones and not the dross that followed it, to save the year. Kids win the most with sequels to Madagascar and a new Pixar flick with Wally. I had concerns that a Kung Fu fighting panda might typify the year but if it keeps the kids quiet...and looks choc full of references for the adults. The year ends on a high with both James Bond and Harry Potter (now there's an interesting combination in one film) - but the year is over by then, and they are not confirmed yet. Where are the profits going to come from to pay for the new cinemas? Apart from popcorn we are not sure.

2008:

- Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull
- 10,000 BC (already failed)
- Dark Knight
- Mamma Mia
- Narnia 2
- Wally
- Madagascar
- Mummy 3
- James Bond
- Harry Potter

So will 2009 explain why 2008 is so quiet? There are a lot of sequels and stuff which begs the question why?

- Terminator 4
- X-Men
- Night of Museum 2
- Transformers 2
- Ice Age 3
- Pirates 4
- Bourne 4

And another “why” is why are there are not more films like Avtar on the horizon?

Building Site

16 March, 2008

There is only a number of days to go before the site is open to the public. Seven in fact. The first day is for family and friends. The second day is for VIPs. The third day is the soft launch and the fourth day is the media launch. But you'd never guess it from looking around the site. First off is that it's not all open to us the workers. The builders are still building. Next off the site is quite simply full of stuff. Stock and equipment is everywhere sharing space with the builders tools and rubbish. A consequence of this is that no one knows where anything is or even if it has arrived. Carlsburg, Ben and Jerrys, and Coffee Republic are on site to train us but it's not that easy. The East European trainer for Ben and Jerrys is missing equipment. The French coffee trainer is also missing equipment. The Cheshire know-it-alls from Carlsburg have a leaking bar. But they can't even turn that into a decent joke.

So as we weave round the site dodging various hazardous piles and grinding in the muck and dust in to the new carpets (not that all the screens have new carpets yet) we suspend our disbelief that this site will really be ready. But, hey, the kids don't care because they get to line their stomachs with delicious Bohemian Rhapsody ice cream.; the Carlsburg training is a damp squib as they want to drink the beer not the wine (those that do drink - as well as religious reasons some just don't - good on them); the coffee training (the man spent an hour teaching us what can be reduced to pressing a button, these kids are the internet generation for heavens' sake) is hilarious as the kids will only drink the hot chocolate.

Popcorn training? Box Office training? Forget it - the popper is stuck in customs and the box office is, well, it just isn't ok?

VIP Day

21 March, 2008

It's VIP day, the third of three dry runs before the official launch. Already the managers have been given a full dressing down. They may talk the talk with the kids on the floor but really they are making it up as they go along. The supervisor – only one on the payroll – is pulling her hair out. The conflicting decisions from the operational managers' give unclear instructions to the kids what to do. My fear is if the deputy manager lets rip on the managers they will take it on the kids. Not that that will do some of them any harm; one rolled in three hours late today, another decided to take his tea break in an auditorium with the customers.

There is only so far down you can go with having rules. There are colour-coded gloves depending on which room you are in; colour-coded cleaning paper depending on whether you are in the toilets or auditoriums. Toilets are checked and signed off every 10 minutes. This is not going to teach me anything about running a cinema but it sure does create more administration than common sense dictates.

Only four of the twelve screens were open today. Once all of them are open the whole operation needs to be taken to a higher level. That's tomorrow and that's when the fun really starts. It's the day before and the site deputy manager is not happy. While she reads the riot act to her operational managers and sorts out the cash the kids get to grips with life on the floor. There are no sheets for us with the complete film times so we are working half blind when films end. There are no previews or adverts, so everyone is confused until one person finally sounds convincing when he says he knows they are not showing them until launch day. There are no keys for the toilet roll holders in the cubicles until one manager finds one on his fob at the end of the night. The beer pourers on the bar break down. These are minor niggles we are told as we assist with adding the final touches to the site. We are still waiting for that real fire alert we have been told will happen.

There is fun all over the place - children screen jumping and hiding in emergency exits to watch the movies, other children putting up the tensile barriers to close all the men's toilets. More popcorn is on the floor than in their mouths. We watch a group more interested in checking out the other teens in the cinema than actual watching the movie.

The highlight of the evening is a messy fight outside the site in the shopping mall. We watch from the first floor above as two drunks are literally thrown down the escalators and pushed out of the mall. The police are being quite restrained as the idiots attempt to fight back. Most onlookers would like to see them decked. The one saving grace about the mall is that there are no bars in the immediate vicinity other than within the bowling alley. Somehow anti-social behaviour looks likely to be a regular late night weekend feature right here by the bowling alley. Safety for multifunctionals is a concern with the cinema entrance next to the

bowling alley and the box office outside the entrance to the right. The staff were left for a long time on their own tonight with groups of youths teasing them.

The managers have to get it right before the cinema (and the mall) gains a reputation. Once they stop chasing their own tails and working with the multifunctionals as a team they might make a difference. The kids still don't feel it's their cinema, it's still all about rules and regulations. And common sense is not coming through with consistent direction. Until they do there will be this drain of staff leaving.

Anarchy on Legs

22 March, 2008

It was anarchy on legs. I had just checked every screen's fire exits, came out of the final screen to be confronted by a confused and annoyed mob of parents with their children blocking the whole corridor. Some had tickets, some claimed they were told by box office they did not need them. All thought it was a mess. We had no radios to ask anyone. We didn't have managers at first. The customers were crowded outside one screen for three different films. And for no obvious reason. What was going on at the drop box? Why were they not queuing inside the tensile barrier? The day had just begun.

Its Saturday morning, the supervisor is hung over from all night clubbing. I turn up and am asked what I want to do today - so I go for the floor. No game plan of what we all should be doing then. A multi functional is missing and won't turn up till midday claiming his drunken flat mates kept him awake till late. No mention of an alarm clock there. Eventually a manager turns up and the annoyed crowd is split into three and directed to their movie auditorium. Thank goodness they are not paying today.

Saturday morning is Juniors Day and parents get in free today as a one-off for its launch. It's normally a pound a film and it's going to be a hit. Children are going to eat a lot of popcorn - not all of it because the auditorium will be a mess with the rest - and drink a lot of coke. So the real money is made on concessions. That's a heck of a lot of children hyper on fizzy drinks.

When customers arrive with their tickets at the drop box there is nothing to work with at first. Then I am given a manila envelope to put receipts in. Then lists of what films are on where and when they come out so they can be cleaned. But the supervisor is freaking out because there is no game plan. Managers and supervisors from other sites take it in turns to impart their knowledge and how things should be done but it's all conflicting. I go off to close screens for cleaning and when four films end at the same time we are harangued by different supervisors and managers to clean different screens as customers attempt to wander in. But it is all our fault.

I get to have a break during the day by asking for one - there is no schedule of when staff can take breaks. One loser is threatening to walk because he can't have a break after only one hour on shift and is deeply unhappy about having to wait two more.

I am happy to stay on the floor - no one working seems to know what to do on the Ben and Jerrys ice cream counter. We've all had the training but there is no substitute for the real thing and the approach here is clearly thus 1) get allocated a role, 2) stand there and panic, 3) do something - anything - when approached and asked by a customer, 4) confirm you

have been trained when questioned by a supervisor/manager, but that was for under an hour about 2-3 weeks ago, and 5) five minutes with a manager and get on with it.

Staff at concessions feels the pain of being thrown in the deep end. At the Drop Box I implore customers to enjoy their film as I rip their tickets but they grumble about being late when concessions is overwhelmed and slow in processing customers. The lack of staff means the managers from other sites actually have to do some work rather than wander round giving confusing advice. It's welcome to see one out on the floor with a dustpan and brush.

Nothing goes to plan but, hey, there is no game plan. A cubicle in the ladies is a mess so I close it. A urinal in the Gents is flooded but it's not overflowing so that's okay. A supervisor asks two of the male multifunctionals to sort out one of the ladies and they bluff her by saying they can't. She reports them. hilariously, male managers end up unblocking a toilet in the ladies.

At some point there needs to be leadership from within the staff of the site, not those from other sites, there needs to be trained supervisors quickly, otherwise, the kids will lose heart and give up bothering out of loss of motivation.

It's raining again

24 March, 2008

Outside the box office but up on the first floor inside the mall the rain drips steadily onto the marble floor. Its a brand new building and its failed the first rain shower test.

Today I start on concessions. Word is out this is the place not to be: long queues, customer aggravation and ice cream to prepare. But this is where the cinema makes its profits. This is where the upsell ("go large for 50p?") and suggestive sell ("chocolates with your popcorn?") must be built in as well as remembering all the food, drink, confectionery, ice cream and coffee. It's daunting. But the approach is you have done the training (for about an hour as a group in a different cinema a fortnight ago) so you know what to do. The external managers and supervisors from other have no guidance from the internal managers and have been left to run the place. It's crucial to gradually bed in staff: watch the manager, support the manager and then the manager watches and supports you. But no. No time. Watch me for five minutes and then your on your own. There is no price sheet. I have no idea how to log in and despite being shown by a manager she still fails to get it right herself and I get the blame at the end of the day.

Two staff are missing today from their shift today. One turns up and the other goes AWOL. So the bar stays shut till more staff arrive for work at lunchtime. The kid on the checkbox tears his hair out as he has few colleagues to clean the screens and managers are missing. The rain means it's a slow day until the afternoon. 10,000 BC is popular. Some films such as The Other Boleyn Girl are quiet except for a few women leaving the end of the film crying. The beheading clearly did it for them.

A customer wants some jalapenos on his nachos. But the can opener is missing. Then it's found but doesn't work. Eventually it's sorted out. But the customer has gone, disgruntled, by then. So why is there only one can opener in this place?

Eventually, we run out of popcorn and I am put on the popcorn kettle. The manager reassures it's okay for another kid to use my float. The kettle may be new but one of the two kettles is still bust. I have never been shown how to boot one up and the poor internal supervisor is as perplexed as me. I figure it out in the end and off we go. It's noisy, boring and repetitive, and not popular with the kids, but hey, it's a break from some of the more boring jobs: making up the nachos trays. Now how boring is that?

It's time to go and a kid has been asked to make popcorn. He calls me over as he and the internal supervisor are struggling - the kettle won't heat up. I explain he has left the oil switch on and its flooded the kettle. If staff had been properly inducted into the job then there would not be problems like with the popcorn kettle.

It's busy and I can't get off my station. I eventually take my float and two external manager decide to escort me down to the cash office - there is no tube available to send it down. I then get told off for not coming down and collecting a tube. I bite my tongue. I have no silver so I get told off again for not having cash changing skills. I want to slap this patronising upstart. I then get told off for letting another kid use my float. I want to let rip but she then praises me on my sales per person.

Tea Break

26 March, 2008

The one not so cool point about working in a new site is that staff turnover is high and management are still figuring out what to do (what comes first is profit, counting it in and out). Even when the rota has been sorted out for the week having it managed so staff can have a short break becomes a challenge. A short break after three hours? Forget it, no staff to replace you. After five hours - once you find the manager - you will get your hour's break so they are not breaking employment law.

After two weeks the staff room has changed in a subtle way. The pile of bottled mineral water has gone not to be replaced but that always appeared to be an anomaly. The milk in the fridge did not get used and was thrown away - not to be replaced. And for a reason - there is no tea or coffee. I have no idea how other sites work but this is a dry room. Even the kettle disappeared for a while (until I found it and put it back). Asking management to organise tea and coffee seems a good reason for them to scoff and growl at the audacity. Expecting shift workers to do it is ridiculous.

It's not so much a tea break as a chip parlour - the kids quite rightly refuse to pay the restaurant prices for the food and drink here and nip across the road for a bag of chips and a can of coke. The frozen tango is a hit though.

Let It Snow

28 March, 2008

It may be Sunday but I am still asked to start my shift at 8.30am. I arrive before then as expected and there's no one around. It's literally freezing out here and snowing. Some kids in the bus station ask me who I work for and assume I am a manager. An obvious view on the world when you take age and ethnicity into account.

A duty manager appears 10 minutes into my shift to let me in. There is one other multifunctional upstairs but she crept through an open fire door (not that it should have been open). We crack on with the concessions preparing it for the day. A new guy has started and asks what to do. He is brand new and has had no formal training apparently, there is no supervisor to either introduce him or guide him, he's just there surviving on that initial motivation. I doubt that will last once he sees how things work around here.

A group of kids arrive and go down to the duty manager in the cash office to ask what to do and get sent to us. The concessions is now crowded with half of us trying to set it up and the other half filling time. Eventually the general manager appears and I have someone to alert what we are low on, in particular popcorn. That concerns him.

We have two members of staff sick on a Sunday. Not good - there is no one on the floor to clean up the screens. I set up my concessions till and immediately get pulled off onto Box Office. I set my till up there and get literally 5 minutes training and a radio for help. The young woman on box office is put on concessions - she has also never worked on box office but would struggle with its complexity of ticket options. I struggle with the ticket options with a steady stream of customers in the morning coming up with many varieties. Consequently the radio is busy with pleas for assistance and I learn by jumping in the deep end. My voids list and refunds list begin to lengthen because the manager rushes through the till screens to fix my problem and then escapes - he has no time to show me what to do.

The fun part of the day is the general voucher from the mall for use in the cinema. It may only be to the value of five pounds but the wording on the back of the voucher is ambiguous and he has managed to get his kids in for free with it. The general relents and I can put through every customer that day for free on this ticket. That's a lot of lost revenue but luckily the offer runs out soon.

It's not only snowing outside but there is gale blowing through the automatic doors as they open all the way up to the box office. With a wall mounted heater blowing out lukewarm air it is freezing. Despite being promised fleeces a month ago there are none and we are freezing our nuts off down here

It's a slow day with the snow outside. Some of the first films of the day are empty. Horten Hears a Who, 10,000 BC and Meet the Spartans attract interest only. The highlight of the afternoon are three teenage travellers causing a commotion in The Other Boleyn Girl, and then frantically asking me for their money back after 25 minutes into the picture because they've had a call saying their mom is in hospital having a baby. They get their money back and are asked not to return. They wander into the Bowling Alley and re-appear 10 minutes later arguing with each other. Three older teenage traveller girls turn up dressed up ready for business and go into see the same film until they are ejected for being caught smoking in the toilets.

Out of about fifty multifunctionals the rumour is 15 have already left. Motivation is clearly low as we grasp what we should be doing now the support of managers from other sites have gone and we are on our own. With one manager on duty during the day he is stretched with no supervisors to organise.

During training the management informed us we could apply for supervisory role after a couple of months learning the job and getting some experience behind us. After only two weeks and not yet gained experience in all areas of the job (floor, concessions, pick and mix, VIP lounge, and bar) we are being asked to apply for the supervisory role. With a new group of multifunctionals starting soon, probably without full formal training, they urgently need some leaders in the pack.

Popcorn is the food of the Devil

3 April, 2008

What is it about popcorn? Today I followed a customer who left a trail of popcorn all the way down the corridor to his screen. Was he bothered? Of course not. Food and drink is not cheap in the cinema yet the wastage is phenomenal. Popcorn is undeniably more-ish but why is it treated so uncaringly. What the heck if so much ends up on the floor? I've got so much to eat! So what if I spent a small fortune on it, I knew I would never finish it all. And it's gets no better with the coke either.

Popcorn is the root of all evil for multifunctionals. They just know where small kids or young teenagers are involved the screen is going to be swimming in the stuff. Have you ever tried sweeping up popcorn off a carpet? Food of the devil.

It's a Saturday afternoon and Step Up 2 and Meet the Spartans is bringing in the kids and young teenagers. The latter group bring in their own food: Pringles and crisps in general are popular - we don't sell crisps.

Three weeks in to the job Multifunctionals are being gently pushed into areas they excel at: there are a couple of level headed women on the box office; a couple of men on the bar; one woman regularly on Concessions. The rest are being moved between concessions and the floor. Box Office requires a little knowledge and experience to overcome the wide range of obscure options - it can be off-putting messing about with coupons and cards. Workign at concessions is not popular because the queues build up suddenly and customers, late for their film, get arsey. And the hot dogs are hated. Pick 'n' Mix is frankly boring - staff have to stand around for hours on end with hardly any customers to break up the monotony. The bar is also a careful choice - some woman cannot pull a pint.

The Floor is a poisoned chalice, cleaning screens is the worst option in the cinema - but is preferred by some to serving food. Being on the Drop Box is a misunderstood role and many get into deep trouble with the bosses. They think it's an easy option ripping tickets until they have strips torn off them for dirty screens and crowded corridors.

Floating or Sinking?

5 April, 2008

It's the end of the shift and it's time to go into the metal plated room otherwise known as the Cash Office. When I take in my float I get that sinking feeling. It's a bit like going through customs where you have that sensation of being potential guilty without reason. So how did I do? Am I short in which case are my pockets stashed with notes? Have I keyed everything in properly or have I filled in my forms properly to show my mistakes? The money side of the business is the serious side. Firstly, because we are not trusted by default. Secondly, because, on concessions, this is where the real money is made. We are expected to upsell and suggestive sell - if our sales per person is low then we get another bollocking.

Because of the computerised nature of it all, myself and others have run up huge amounts of virtual money that has to be tracked back through how sales are recorded. It's so easy to make mistakes on the Box Office where there are many options for ticket sales to consider: students, senior citizens, disabled people, gift tokens, and more. It is not difficult to work out which button to press but the capacity to miss a particular process is very easy. This creates ghost money on the system and keeps managers guessing.

The real concern is when one's float is down. Any margin for error in your psychological profile and you are put "under investigation." That margin can be as little as £3 for one transaction where you made an error of judgement. If you're face does not fit then it may not be a mistake in the company's view as one multifunctional found out. No one's figures add up but when it runs in to tens or even a hundred pounds then the managers need to make a decision about you. And if you've had a run in with the management already then you will get that sinking feeling again.

Respect has to be Earned

17 April, 2008

Three of us arrive on time ready for our shift. It's first thing in the morning. I check the floor, the Control Room, the Cash Office. Where the fuck is the day manager? One of the team recounts the tale of when he turned up on time for his shift but it took ten minutes before he could find the (Scottish) Manager, only to be told off for being ten minutes late. The young man tries to call him on the radio. No reply. No surprise there - I can see the manager cussing the radio now. We are outside the Cash Office as the obvious place to wait. It's my turn and I ask for him on the radio. He replies "How can I help you?" I want to strangle him. I politely explain we are outside the Cash Office awaiting our shift instructions for the day. He is on his way. We never got an explanation.

"The staff simply want to enjoy their work and have a laugh every now and again." She said to me, complaining that she was misunderstood by one of the managers and bollocked for mucking around. There is one dour Scot who I have seen smile only once, and that was when he had his head up the arse of the manager watching the sun shine. He really needs a personality implant if he wants to get on with his own staff. Sitting in the Cash Office playing old music so loud you can't be bothered to say hello is not the way to be civil.

The two day managers who treat as humans not serfs are popular with the staff. It's not difficult to be polite and muck in. Firm but fair always earned respect and these two guys earned it. The Deputy is rapidly becoming some sort of Cruella De Vil with her patronising tone. Such a nice young woman ruins it with her aggressive ego. One multifunctional has already crossed her by telling her he was a having such a great day until he saw her.

Grand Designs

26 April, 2008

A night out at the flicks is an event for some. So first impressions count. You approach the building with a bold entrance. You enter the main hall which should be cathedral-like in its scale and impression. Throughout it should feel "special." After all we are implored to make the customers' day "special." But in a simplistic way what should happen before everything else is recognising you are approaching a cinema.

This new building changes the rules. One could say it compromises the lot for the sake of squeezing it on top of a shopping mall. The priorities are definitely with the major shopping chains. On my first shift a retired gentleman having a look around the site approached me and engaged himself in an animated discussion about the poor visibility of the site. And how right he is. Yes, there are large signs stating very clearly there is a cinema in this building somewhere - but where?

The main entrance is shared with a bowling alley and a well known restaurant chain. Both of which have clearly visible signs above the entrance. So why does the cinema chain have some grayed out sign hidden by glass? One has to look twice to see it and ask the question is this where we go in then? There is simply no single obvious sign to say "yeh, here we are!"

So one goes up the escalator and is presented by the box office. So, no cinema yet then? The experience of purchasing cinema tickets is best described as clinical, and a wee bit cold judging by the lack of heating in this area. Frankly, one is left nonplussed. No sense of anticipation or excitement at all. Then up yet another flight of escalators into the main concessions hall. No one knows it is there and have to ask! Oh, and if you booked by phone the machines are hidden around the corner...

The curious feature of the concessions hall is how one feels as if one is entering by the side door. No grand entrance, no sense of anticipation by being in a large hall full of customers. For a large cinema it does not give off that impression. When I walk in to cinemas through the front door I stop and take in the surroundings - 180 degree absorption of everything on offer. Here the customer is entering at the side so there is some dislocation. On busy days the view will be blocked by the rows of queues for concessions.

One has to walk to the right to get bearings of where all the features are in particular the entrance to the screens. What on earth were they thinking?

The design of the piece de resistance - the largest screen has a few hilarious flaws in it too. The private boxes are too low and have already attracted unwanted attention. The private box to the farthest left (and the seating in front) is, err, too far to the left, and, as a result,

has been pitched at a lower ticket price. The back row of seats starts and then, well, runs out space to continue. So it just stops.

Rules are for Breaking

1 May, 2008

The films on tonight may be desultory (21, Fools Gold, Pathology.....) but it's busy. Very busy. On Box Office the two of us pull in high takings as the queue never dies down. Curiously, with the high traffic the management have stopped showing films after 10pm. This may be because of low attendance (except for staff) and the cost of keeping staff on site through the night.

There are lots of rules in the Box Office and how these are applied is largely down the discretion of firstly the multifunctional on the box, secondly, the manager on duty that night, and thirdly how the rule is recorded. Rules on Box Office are very important to give backbone to the authority of the Multifunctional but needs to be applied with a liberal dose of common sense and consistency from the duty managers. Sadly, the latter is badly missing in this building.

The queues are long and yet customers still turn up after a film has actually started. That's half an hour after the programme time allowing for up to 20 minutes of previews and trailers. Now everyone knows the beginning of film not only sets the scene: the plot, the characters and the mood, notably it gives the viewer basic information for the rest of the film, in particular the characters. So why on earth do people think it is okay turning up late? Company policy is very simple: turn up late and you piss off the rest of the audience so, no, you not going to be let in. After a lengthy wait this older middle class and rather short-tempered gentleman attempts to see a film that has already started and is indignant when refused. After a tour of other films on offer, unfortunately including what has already started, he storms off in a huff.

To my disbelief the dour Scottish Duty Manager then ticks us off on the radio. Yes we can let that horrible man in to a film late as long as we inform him of the times. I expect the overworked manager has backed down for a quiet life.

It seems the world is a student and aged 14 years old. The student rate is for students and if you are a student then you will have proof. Yes there is a grey area for 15-16 year olds at secondary school who are technically students but schools don't provide ID like further education institutions do so the child is technically an adult in our view. But the point is practically every young person tries it on. And I mean almost all of them. It's a badge of honour to the point that the young women with these have-a-goers (and they are typically young men) get very pissed off with them. The rules of the house are very simple: no ID no student rate. No Buts. No ignorant looks. No coy smiles from the girls. Well, maybe.

How Not to Run a Cinema

7 May, 2008

Want to get your cinema shut down. Easy peasy. A few simple rules.

1. Let customers smoke and have sex in your cinema. Don't manage your team so there is no organisation on the floor and customers can break the rules.
2. Allow kids to run between screens. See above.
3. Let your duty managers hide in the cashier's office. Don't manage your duty managers so they sit in the cashier's office listening to music when they should be on the floor.
4. Screw up your film times. Set start films so they finish after the next film is set to start.
5. Demotivate your staff so they have no pride about working there. See above. Take an age to recruit supervisors so the only one you have goes off sick with stress, too many new multifunctionals leave, teams are left on their own without direction, and managers openly criticise the lack of progress - "it's a joke."
6. Don't listen to your customers. Allow them to go to the Council and your Head Office and wait for your neck to go on the line.

Nobody comes here anymore

16 May, 2008

Nobody visits to see films here any more. There are only lunatics left in the asylum.

Security reports a blockage in one of the male cubicles of monumental proportions. The mess is so bad a pair of underpants are removed.

Security staff are called to investigate a man talking to himself in the corridor to the screens. He is stroking a poster advertising a new movie. Thankfully, he is found to have a bluetooth headset for his phone. Still...

I have to ask some late teenage girls to remove themselves from the Gents toilet where they are talking to a boy. "Can I talk to him here?" one of them asks me....."No, you are inside the Gents toilet and blocking the door." "Can I talk to him here then?" "Why can't he come out of the Gents and talk to you?" I ask. 'Thick as shit' I hear security mutter behind me.

One person watches the new movie Speed Racer in the screen on their own....

Kitten and other stories from within the cinema

17 May, 2008

Respect to the “My Soul has been crushed by Cineworld” group on Facebook for this collection of portraits about the experience of working for Cineworld:

The cinema trilogy trailer

http://youtube.com/watch?v=d_sk6Ff2tRU&mode=related&search=

The multifunctional <http://youtube.com/watch?v=0bZzZ9UkgUw&mode=related&search=>

The Projectionist <http://youtube.com/watch?v=tZKFFK4x4Fc&mode=related&search=>

The Manager <http://youtube.com/watch?v=HFvPtWFCtYg&mode=related&search=>

Kitten Trailer http://youtube.com/watch?v=cjRbbhO_axl&mode=related&search=

Kitten <http://youtube.com/watch?v=AilyBJ5szac&mode=related&search=>

All cineworld staff members should remember this

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H7PkwhWi1LY>

The loneliness of the closing shift

26 May, 2008

It's 3am in the morning and I have spent the last five hours closing the concessions on the cinema. The only thing that stopped me waving goodbye altogether to this miserable job is that tomorrow (or today) is a bank holiday. I'm not sure whether this is the second job I imagined, and it's certainly not doing my sleeping pattern any good. I spent the final two hours with one jabberer and his BO, and another miserable egotist who just moaned about the illegality of it all. By 2am, having done all the checks my brain could handle I had still missed the checks the others should have done on Pick 'N Mix and the bar. Spending the evening training new staff whilst serving overly long queues is not healthy. The management knew two multifunctionals were going to be off sick but they left us understaffed without a manager on the floor (he was forced to stay in the cash office rather than assist us).

I briefly stop my blog as some arsehole taxi is honking his horn outside! At this hour!

It is at this hour as I reach for the vodka I contemplate the loneliness of this secondary vocation. Where once my life was fulfilled I now come back to my home in the middle of the night after being on my feet for 9 hours (with a 15 mins break) thinking only of enduring in this mind-numbing job to hold on to my home. It can take an hour to wind down after such adrenalin-inducing heights from churning out so much coca-cola and sweet popcorn at exorbitant prices. What to do in such time than contemplate one's own life.

I don't know how many customers I served tonight but Indiana Jones has definitely saved the cinema's bacon. And the rain helped too. If only there were another tin of jalapenos in the stock cupboard...

Take my shiny new iPod.....No, I insist

1 June, 2008

It's the backward weirdly human rule in life that when we leave our stuff behind in the cinema we only come back to collect the rubbishy sentimental stuff that other lowlifes decide they quite fancy.

I'm standing behind box office in the waiting room for the back office, it's a cold airless, window-less chair-less clinical room that you have to wait in before you go into the cash office, to have your money counted and then get bollocked for not upselling enough and for having no explanation as to where the fifty quid went that your float is down on. But I'd rather be here than waiting at the dentist's. Anyway, it's where the bulk of the lost property goes. The valuable stuff should be in the cash office but no one seems to give a fuck. So there is a steady stream of staff coming through here to stroke the shiny new dark grey iPod Nano 3rd generation some stoopid eedgit has not only left behind in a screen but not bothered to come back to collect. There is a long list of underpaid staff here who are in the valley of temptation because the managers have not bothered to hold it in the cash office.

It beggars belief what customers do not come back for. Bizarrely, though, a lot of customers do come back for missing odd gloves and scarves that have walked, probably with another customer.

I've handled a Mercedes Benz car key and pondered how that rich person managed to get home and avoid their car park fine. I've seen wallets stuffed full of credit cards. Yes credit cards can be cancelled but why not ask the cinema first before going through all that hassle???? And what about all the other personal cards we hold in our wallets and purses? Membership cards, driving license, reward cards.... Businesses are not slow to charge for a replacement card these days.

And then there are mobile phones. Maybe people are thinking leave it at the cinema, report it lost and ask your telco for a nice new one. But what about all the personal information we have on our phones? While we are on the subject of personal information on mobile phones, never leave it lying around if you don't want other people to look inside it. Being a manager in a cinema is not a job if you want to be liked. So if you are married and then start taking time off with another member of staff it's only a matter of time before the rumour mill kicks in. And when you leave your mobile phone unattended with messages on it that are best described as embarrassing.....before you know it everyone else has read them..

The Honeymoon is Over

17 June, 2008

It's a Thursday night so it should be relatively busy. Fools Gold is on the main screen which is not a good sign. The weather is warming up, so crowd pullers are needed to keep the profits coming in. In Bruges is all we have tonight.

I find out that the day has been appalling with even the shift managers joining the multifunctionals for a chat. This is not good. Already they are not showing late night films and Concessions had only one rush all evening. The Sales Per Person is holding up compared to other sites but, as I check the screens, the numbers are poor. One screen has no one in it. It usually takes at least two multifunctionals to clean a screen but I manage on my own even with a rush of change overs. It's a slow night all round.

After three weeks' training and then a stern effort to impose those standards it appears the rule book is being thrown out of the window to hold on to customers at any cost. On the floor I am presented with a customer with a ticket to see the wrong film. The rules are he needs to exchange it for a correct one so the system has an accurate record of attendances for films. Bollocks to that, the manager says just let him in.

I'm on the floor tonight which means cleaning screens between films. The manager's job is to construct the screenings for the night. Oh look, in one screen the film finishes after the next one starts! Luckily (or not for the company) no one is actually watching the earlier screening so projection cuts the film early in time to start the next film. Projection diplomatically point out to me that the times for another screen are completely wrong. It's not clear at all that the duty manager tonight has any idea of this.

A lot of staff have left already and another batch will go when University finishes for the Summer and there will be no one here to train the new crew. So far only one multifunctional has been appointed to supervisor. But will they cull the establishment numbers to keep costs down?

Build it and they will come

18 June, 2008

It's 9am on a Sunday morning and we have been summoned for a staff meeting. Gathering up students at that time is only possible through threats; they work but most turn up half an hour late under protest. I work two days a week at the cinema on top of my five days for a full time job, so an extra two hours on a Sunday morning is not helpful, especially since I did not get home from last night's shift till 2am. What would have helped is all the managers being there, at this first meeting too, as a statement. But they don't have to attend, do they?

The General Manager is prodded about the sales figures and admits it's not going to plan. The cinema is part of a new large shopping mall, built on the belief that firstly standing still is suicide for a town centre and secondly, the town is expanding and local people were not shopping there. But the thinking went too far and the new mall is expected to compete with neighbour towns and larger malls in bigger towns. And it hasn't worked. The hinterland is disturbingly rich but they are not coming into the town centre and mixing with the riff-raff in the new mall.

The cinema relies on the punters shopping in the town and then making an impulse decision to stay an extra couple of hours (paying the extra car parking fee) and watch a film. Like who does that? By the time you've hung around outside numerous women's fashion shops whilst she tries on clothes that either don't fit or don't match her shoes you've had enough and it's time to go back for the football scores.

The scariest clue for the poor "admits" is the almost complete lack of tickets sold for the VIP boxes, complete with their own bar. At the moment it is a complete waste of money. To exacerbate matters at the weekend staff numbers drop (some bother to phone in "sick" some don't), so there are never enough to open the VIP boxes. Those that just don't turn up often never come back. Turnover is so high it must also be a drain on the costs. The recent Council scare has meant whatever staff turn up have been piled in to watching the cinema screens for couples humping on the back row and then sharing a fag in the loo. And piracy (apparently this is a hot spot and we are being bribed by FACT with cash if we catch 'em).

Iron Man could not have come any sooner to bring in desperately needed income for the cinema. It is not a blockbuster but, with so much drivel on the screens (Russell Brand in Forgetting Sarah Marshall – purrleeeze!!), it cannot fail to succeed. But the cinema has no hope of reaching its company's regional average. It is at the whim of the success or failure of the new town centre mall. And it ain't looking good.

What could possibly go wrong?

24 June, 2008

Okay, so it's midweek and nothing is happening in the film world to coax in the crowds. So what could possibly go wrong?

First up, invite your loyal customers in to a screen without a film showing and let them sit there until one of them walks out and asks you what is going on? So your film reel turns up late and it's in a state but, hey, don't forget to tell the Operational Manager will you?

Secondly, promote your leading product, unlimited films, with your computer terminal laughing at your customers. So your equipment sits there and refuses to give the customers their ID number but enjoys the fun of taking their bank and card details.

Don't have enough staff on the shift to keep your costs down and get them to do two jobs at once. So when your popcorn monkeys just don't show up (some may be physically sick, others maybe sick of work) you can't open your underperforming bar or look after your VIP customers.

Promote your latest Sex and The City Film by asking your customers to book ahead and then switch screens without telling them. This is the fun part. A group of high maintenance ladies organise their big night out together, babysitters (apparently), the lot. They turn up and the card machines are not working (again) so they have to get the box office staff to print out their tickets. Now the box office staff know the Sexy City film has been switched to another screen (in favour of The Incredible Hulk would ya believe it) so the customers - who have VIP tickets - should be told they will have to sit with the riff raff now. No chance. So off they go, buying their popcorn, getting escorted up to their VIP Box (hang on a minute, anyone checked their tickets???), sit down to see.....a big green ugly man.

Pay Peanuts – Get Monkeys

29 June, 2008

Okay, so you get promoted to Supervisor ahead of all your mates. Along with the position comes the responsibility...and then the pay increase. Frankly, the derisory pay (barely more than the minimum wage and below that of other large retail employers), for the multifunctionals is what drives a few of us to apply for the role of supervisor. So you pass your interview (if you have one) and get your contract – and then it hits you. Eighty pence. That is how much extra you get paid an hour. So what do they ask you to do for that extra eighty pence? Well, let's make a list...

- Reorganise everyone to cover the large number of staff who don't turn up. After striking off the list those staff who are sick or just don't turn up you have to organise teams on a skeleton staff.
- Stop the staff taking too many breaks for longer than they are allowed. After cramming in everyone's breaks - because once they arrive that is what they look forward to and take every opportunity to remind you about - you may find the time to have one yourself if you're lucky. As staff know they can have an extra discretionary break during the day you have to absorb the moaning when they are denied it and then catch out those that try to take it anyway.
- Do the job of the previous team. Get the team to do the tasks the team from the night before didn't do.
- Herd sheep. It's amazing how staff disappear - especially in the screens - or just take a comfort break that lasts a very long time.
- Act as the UN. Getting certain people to work together requires certain diplomacy some people lack.
- Act like the US. There are times when jobs don't get done or the moaning and whining is unbearable....
- Do other people's jobs. No security officer today?
- Teach monkeys. Some guys just aren't up to the job.
- Count Money. The manager's job.
- Grovel to customers. Air conditioning broken down in a screen and not getting fixed till next week? You take the flack.

And the list goes on. Yo, you're No. 1 on the floor managing a team of at least a dozen disaffected hungover popcorn monkeys with a manager stuck in an airless back-office on the radio. For 80 pence an hour. Enjoy.

Can I have a break now please!

11 July, 2008

Mamma Mia opens tonight and the women flood in. They like to make a night of it with their friends so we are busy meeting their needs. For the record there is one man in the screen but he engineers an emergency work call and steps out of the screen for a while.

Correct me if I am wrong but I am here, in this multiplex, to work. To serve you, the customer. To sell you an overpriced ticket and then overpriced popcorn and coca cola and smile when we do it. But hey, what is it with these numb nuts we employ who nag me every five minutes for a break. Hey dude, I don't care if you've not had a break for the last half hour or five hours we're busy right now! And why do you keep asking me every time you see me? And why do you ask me for a break when the previous supervisor already gave you it? And why do you tell me the previous supervisor said you could have that extra break when I'm now in charge? By the way, don't even think about applying for Supervisor because we rarely have breaks – we are too busy listening to your whining!

Okay, so we turn up for work knowing our shift says we are here till 12 midnite, "close", whenever. So why negotiate it down and piss off everyone else who stays? It beggars belief. So there is no one in a screen means you can go home early? Go and help your colleagues you schmuck! You've been put on yet another "close?" Go talk to the manager who put you on it a week ago like you should have done before you started your shift. My heart bleeds for you especially since I will get 3 ½ hours sleep before I am up for work again.

And remember to smile.

It's a Beautiful Day

13 July, 2008

One of the sad facts of life about having an impossibly irritating job is how much you yearn to be back home away from it. And that is exactly what I felt today: even on a "good" day when I don't fuck up, I am still surrounded by fucked-up situations I can't wash off.

The detailed paper systems in a cinema are both mind-numbingly tedious and unfortunately necessary due to the brain power of the popcorn monkeys employed. A combination of autistic, full of B.O. and lazy losers who are interested in only when their next break is. Opening the cinema involves following operating procedures for the box office, retail, bar and floor. My first job is to see these completed by some of these staff. We've only just started and the fun has begun.

Due to the incompetents on shift the night before the cinema was a mess. Excuses poured in with staff leaving early or just refusing to work. How do these people get a job? So I'm sat with the operations manager listing the state of concessions (dirty surfaces, stock run down) when one of the multifunctionals comes in and releases a stream of bile about the poor state of the bar: "it's fuckin' dirty...I ain't fuckin' cleanin' it....it's a fuckin' joke", and so on until it was suggested that continued swearing was not going to help her or the situation. Erm, you work here so you will clean the bar. Hell, if you are not in the mood for this then the best thing is to work yourself up into a frenzy and make yourself ill so you can go home.

It's unclear how the building of a cinema could be so badly screwed up but this one was. There are over two thousand brand new seats, all of which have to be replaced. How it was possible to install illegal seats in the first place is remarkable. So we have these additional staff whose main responsibility is to stand in the screens to make sure they do not burn down; what they are told is to watch out for piracy. Hey, anyone can see a fire coming, we just need someone there to point it out. But that's too easy so let's tell them to stare at the customers instead, because, ya know, one of them might spark up a ciggie.

Watching a screen has the added benefit of, yeah, being paid to watch a movie, and they get the same pay grade as multifunctionals who work on tills. Now there's a company policy deliberately designed to create conflict between staff. Now these guys have a simple job: check the screen is ok, check the sound is ok, check the customers are not filming the movie, and clean it afterwards. Instead we have numb nuts who just lean on the rails and watch the movie. Hey there is a vertical green line down the screen! Duhh, why doesn't she report it? If this particular worker actually worked at a quicker pace than a snail, she might get to a manager before the film finished.

Then we have a sound problem in a screen, the first screening of the day. Now this is where the fun really begins. Cue revolting customer, shouting so loud the manager can hear him in his office. "fix the sound or move the film into another cinema, NOW!!" "This is bloody ridiculous!!!" Yeah mate, we'll just stop a movie in another screen and piss off all those customers too. Anyway, he's told to lose the attitude or leave the cinema. Now there's complaining and there's asking for a fight. Luckily, this guy took the hint. But we were left with lots of customers leaving the screen - so that's the bottom line screwed.

I walk away and look outside; it's another beautiful day and I wish I was home.

Can I Help You? Can Anyone Possibly Help You?

19 July, 2008

Working on box office presents the staff with the initial needs of the customer. Some may think of them as having special needs. The way of the customer:

- Turn up at the cinema and ask me what you think you should see. Hey buddy I don't know you from Adam but now you are my bezzy and I think you should definitely see Donkey Punch.
- Okay, so you walk away without a word and I figure you may not like teenage horror flicks introducing the latest sex tips after all.
- Computer Says "No" - you turn up late for the film naively arguing its just the previews but you're stupid cos we know the film has already started and genuine film fans don't miss the beginning of films only sad freaks like you. Computer says you're not going in late spoiling for the rest of us.
- We know okay? The flat screens behind us have never worked properly since day one and the clock lost the plot completely with the arrival of British Summertime and the management no longer - so why be the millionth person to point it out?
- Ask me where the screens are. We know the site was designed by a dork but, why not like around the corner of the box office and, oh look, there is a humongous arrow with the word screens next to it.
- You're not as clever as you think you are, you're a dweeb. So you're a spotty teenager dressing to look 18 and then presenting yourself to me trying to buy a child ticket (aged 14 years & under). Get a life.
- Smile it may never happen. There is something about being young that prevents certain people from even looking at us never mind smiling, especially young women with their cool boyfriends. It's your life, baby.

Phew! What a Scorcher!

26 July, 2008

Lying on the sofa drinking as much coffee as I can physically manage to get up and brew, I casually notice through the patio windows that summer has arrived. Dazed from an exceptionally late night on the job, confused what to do with my precious few hours before I am back cranking up my smile for the customers, I casually notice the room is becoming littered with dead but uneaten flies. The cat is getting more out of this summer than I am.

For the casual football fan it is a graveyard time of the year. Bizarrely, there is club rugby league on the radio, interspersed with that preamble to the start of the new football season, the Olympics, a smog ridden affair promoting twenty-first century Mao-ism: whatever you can do, we can make our workers do it better - and quicker (But can we have your best creative heads because we don't encourage free thinking over here). Batman did make a brief appearance in Hong Kong, free running into skyscrapers. But as the Far East churns out ever more HD players, China still doesn't get how many helicopters one needs to capture the caped crusader in mid-air, so we can watch him on those Sony Playstation blu-ray players.

And does he draw in the crowds. Whilst the ladies are singing Money, Money, Money in the aisles of Mamma Mia, the gentlemen are swerving the punches in The Dark Knight. Yes, we are finally sold out. And we don't what to do about it. The beauty of unallocated seats is that most of the time we save a lot of time and effort in letting the customer be in charge of where they want to watch the movie. But tonight, in between catching those naughty members of the travelling community canoodling yet again in the exclusive boxes, we have sold out in two of our screens. Policy is not to sell the last 20 seats as no one wants to sit with their face in the screen. We execute Operation Torch with Mamma Mia; I stand outside the screen at the door with my over large industrial torch explaining to customers they will be allocated a seat, my colleague is inside negotiating with them where it is. It works until the film actually starts and a group of nine ladies all dressed to the nines turn up - that's their night out ruined.

Next up is the Dark Knight and Box Office screw up and sell all the tickets. The film starts and I have two groups kicking off in the screen as its full bar the front row. No one sits there and they get refunded. Over on the main screen Operation Queue works perfectly as we get customers to wait in a line while the screen is cleaned. Once the cleaners are out I let customers in. But the cleaners start up a conversation at the door and I shout at them to get out of the way. At that very moment some bloke with Nachos (ignoring the 100 people in the queue) walks in front of me.

“They are all gonna kick off when they come out and I am going to be cashing up.” Yeh, right. ‘Cos that’s what managers do isn’t it? The fan breaks down in Mamma Mia, so no air conditioning, and it is baking. It’s a full screen and we have a potential female-driven riot on our hands. And the manager is not going to make himself available for any one. He is majorly pissed off at having to make up nachos earlier. So at the moment the screen empties I crack on with recording damages round the back out of sight. As a hundred dripping women file out I only have a couple of complaints to deal with. Apart from a Health and Safety Consultant giving me grief (respect to her 10 year old son who told her to ‘cut me a little slack’) we escaped the worst. Why the manager did not stop the previews and warn customers he only knows. He mumbles something about customers choosing to stay in the screen. Standing at the back of the empty screen afterwards I reckon a lot of women will have cancelled their visit to the sauna the next day.

The Usual Suspects

2 August, 2008

Chatter amongst the supervisors is how the floor staff are in the main subhuman and despair inducing. A mixture of (ever diminishing) veterans from day one in February and the very new. What amazes the supervisors is how from a exceedingly large pile of CVs such reprehensibly incapable people are then appointed. Admittedly, if you can count and communicate you are quickly moved onto Multifunctional work serving customers. But this leaves the floor to the sub-humans and as day follows night problems pop up. Here is a list of some of the characters who mosey round the corridors of the cinema (and in the managers' office).

- The work avoidance addict, otherwise known as the bear with the very little brain. Easily becomes a victim for carrying out crimes he is incapable of planning. Spends more time informing the supervisors of what he has done and for whom than actually doing what he is employed to do. Attention span of a gnat and can be found meandering the corridors looking for someone to talk to.
- The belligerent. Has an opinion on everything and will share it with you even when you are purposely not listening and then instantly accuse you of being a toe-rag for not paying attention. Arrogant and claims to be a manager in his previous life which is why he is now cleaning screens. Has B.O. and is threatening to leave any day now. Has already picked a near fight with another floor person and is now threatening to give the top manager an earful.
- The Psycho. When he looks at you, you're not sure what he's thinking and you don't want to know. It's just disturbing. And he looks that way at customers too. He hangs around the doors of screens as if he's going to grab someone and drag them into a screen. He only talks to you to ask for a break. When he had money stolen from the locker room he pinned the work avoidance addict up against the wall and promised true justice if the notes were not delivered by Friday.
- The young heavy. You just can't figure him out. A little bit fey. Spotty, long-haired and generally polite but underneath there is someone else lurking but trapped in the wrong body. Apparently into heavy metal and obscure fantasy fiction but incapable of, well, most things. Including holding down a simple job. Clever enough to analyse the anal detail of working on Pick N Mix but still manages to screw up his float. Going nowhere very slowly.
- The lovers. A friend of mine wanted to know about twanging stockings amongst the jelly beans. Well of course it goes on and just enough to fuel the rumour mills. Usually involving a freaked out manager on a long shift who just can't look away from the fluttering attention of a student who will settle for the firm hands of a manager in the absence of an ogling tutor. Just like a slavering MP away from home

spending too much time with his research assistant, it helps to release some of the stress of the job. Just don't tell the girlfriend.

- The Alien. More white make-up than an actress in The Rocky Horror Picture Show and plump enough to justify always wearing long black skirts she just could not avoid standing out. Until her visa ran out and she had to leave the country.
- The Idiot. Universally derided by everyone (including the work avoidance addict) for her inability to work at the same pace as everyone else (including the work avoidance addict) and do what the job asks her to do. Part of her job was to be in a screen and check for audio-visual faults, and that the audience is behaving. Standing there watching the film instead she failed to spot a vertical green line running down through it. Last seen leaving the exit for a break at 1am (without gaining permission) and locking herself out of the site by accident.
- The autistic Manic Obsessive. Never speak to him unless it is really necessary because he will not stop talking back to you. And it's all rubbish: why no one else is as good as him and can he have another fag break and can he have another shirt and, oh for fuck's sake someone gas him! You just have to walk away. He is obsessed with the cleanliness of toilets which is a godsend as no one else is. But he lacks social skills in a very dangerous way. Take him on and he will raise the tempo all the way, and when you walk away you will hear him spitting out some pejorative behind your back. It does not help being a woman. Customers somehow get in his way, for instance, when he is cleaning the ladies toilets. Best kept away from people.

Management have now admitted it is time to get picky when appointing. Too late guys, the lunatics are loose in the asylum.

Remind Me What I Do Here?

19 August, 2008

My head hurts. I know it's partly from a lack of sleep. But it's also from doing a job I did not sign up to do. Excuse me, but can somebody, anybody, tell me what my actual job is here?

I was trained to supervise the cockpork monkeys and lick the tight asses of the managers but some days I just don't get the opportunity. Take today, I am starting in the afternoon and already some of the rota'd staff are missing. So my first task is to spread a thin human resource even further. At one point when we usually have four floor staff we are left with one whining snail. Damn, It is so depressing, there are three screens full of popcorn to clean, and she can't manage one. No amount of charm or persuasion seems to get her out of first gear.

My next unwanted task is to ask three teenage members of our travelling community to leave a screen. They have been warned by the multifunctionals to stop making a racket during the film. Their response is to scream, pour popcorn over each other and run off into another screen and then into the toilets. As we have no security guard today the shopping centre security guards are called over and it takes four of them to drag these feral lowlifes out of the complex.

Then I'm off to tackle a another travelling couple busy tongue lashing each other in a private box, and finally a large group of youngsters going ape in a screen, nicking other customer's popcorn and being abusive. Oh, the Summer holidays are just so much fun with nothing to do but annoy others. Again, it takes the centre's security guards to drag these foul mouthed spotty creatures outside.

There is now only one security guard employed here. One was incompetent and the other preferred working with CCTV. If he's not on duty we pick up these problems. So I am a security guard now as well as covering the job of hung over students, work shy wasters and numbnuts who can't remember what shift their on.

Ten Do's and Don'ts when seeing a film

23 August, 2008

1. Do come to the right cinema. Don't argue that we don't have your tickets, you should be at our rival up the road. What does it say about you that you have managed to turn up at the wrong cinema? We are not impressed, nor are your family who will now be late for their film.
2. Don't change your concessions order after we give you your food. We have to write it off as damages and void the order. We won't like you for that. Our managers blame us when you decide to have a hot dog instead of nachos AFTER we give you your nachos.
3. When we ask you if you would like to "go large for 50p" you say "yes." We need to get our average sales per person up or get beaten up by the manager.
4. Don't bring your own food. The smell of a burger in the screen really pisses off the other customers.
5. Do turn up before the actual film starts. If the screen is sold out, your seat is on the front row. No one sits there. And we can hear you moaning in the queue for popcorn but did you allow time for that?
6. Do look at us when you are talking to us. Why do so many customers find it demeaning to look us in the face when we serve them. You get extra ice in your drink for that.
7. Don't complain at the ridiculous prices at Concessions. Yeh we know. You know why we know? Because we earn less than you.
8. Don't pretend you are under 15 years old to get a child ticket. We know we'll see you in the pub afterwards.
9. Don't tell us the screen is the size of your living room because it isn't. We know some of our screens seat only 130 people but, hey, there are 12 screens here and that means more choice. That means some of our screens are smaller; you can't have it both ways.
10. Do respond when we say "Enjoy the Film." We know we have to say it but we are not robots (well, maybe some of the floor staff are), and we get through our day by having pleasant small talk with our customers. We try to make your visit special but it's amazing how many of you grumble at the slightest thing.

Hi 5

August 2008

"I really don't understand why people have a problem with me just because I 'close' so late. Baby, that's the least of your problems. Yes, making people wait - yes wait around doing nothing - or do stuff that can be done in daylight not 1am in the morning, like count popcorn bags - is the most direct way to make oneself not popular. When the operational manager howled with laughter at finding out you were managing my last shift does that not tell you all you need to know? No one likes you.

The Deputy Manager is actually really nice. Attractive, pretty smile, stuff like that. But when she switches on in cinema mode she's someone else. Patronising, belittling. And then some. Combine the two and you have one helluva dominatrix. I'll miss her. Watching her count money with that contented grin did it for me.

No one liked her but she didn't care. She was respected and things happened with her. The job got done and that's what mattered. And she had a lovely smile. You make close friends in work. And a lot of us bonded around our mutual dislike of her methods. So now I am leaving what will I miss and what will I not miss?

Leaving the job ain't easy. The sheer intensity of the work leaves a mark on you. The sense of having done so much, in the operation of the place is quite satisfying. Being part of something, the event: the arrival of the Dark Knight, with its long queues, brings with it a feeling of being there. It became like a drug you were addicted to. But also a rash you wanted to keep itching. The role was always a little too close to serf-like with its scummy uniform and bodged title. Multifunctional at what? Counting popcorn bags?

I will not miss the throb in my legs from chasing around the place, the screwed up body clock and the exhaustion that never completely went away. I will not miss the shirkers, the warped personalities. But I will miss those that put their back into the job and are now burnt out like me. A big Hi-5 to those that deserve better than the treatment they got from the management, the customers, and the wasters on the floor. Was it really worth it to see free films, and eat discounted popcorn?

Yeh. 'Course it was.