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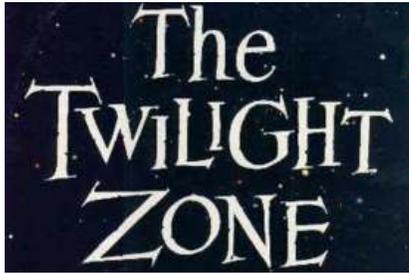
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10 workplace lessons from 'The Twilight Zone'



For as long as I can remember, I have enjoyed the [SciFi Channel's](#) marathons of "[The Twilight Zone](#)"—including the one from last week's long holiday weekend. There are many lessons about life that [Rod Serling](#) taught us through the show, including some that can help you get along in the [workplace](#).

- 1. When you work with the public, sometimes you really need to drink.** Henry Corwin is a drunken department store Santa Claus with a broken spirit. In order to cope with rude customers and their insatiable need to acquire material possessions, Corwin bends his elbow at the local watering hole—an urge that just about anyone in retail can understand. Although Corwin is fired by his [boss](#), Mr. Dundee, and accused of theft, he still manages to get his dream job—equipped with a sleigh, an elfin assistant, and some reindeer. (Episode: "Night of the Meek")
- 2. When you land a new job, people will come out of the woodwork to try to steal it.** Millicent Barnes is waiting for a late-night bus to relocate for a new job, but finds that the trip won't be so easy. Strange things keep happening to her in the station, leading everyone around her to believe that she's mentally ill. But the truth is Barnes has a doppelganger that has been [lying](#) in wait to take over her life—including her new job. Barnes ends up being detained by the police, powerless to do anything about the double that has happily boarded the bus in her place. (Episode: "Mirror Image")
- 3. When you're great at your job, people will never stop trying to outshine you.** Although legendary pool player Fats Brown has been [dead](#) for some [time](#), he's still considered the best at the game. This fact gnaws at Jesse Cardiff, who has sacrificed much of his life to master the table and just wants the chance to prove that Brown is not all that his reputation makes him out to be. He gets his wish to play Fats Brown for the ultimate stakes: If Cardiff loses, he dies. After an intense game with a lot of trash talking, Cardiff wins and gets the coveted title of the best. However, he learns that being the greatest is not all it's cracked up to be when he is regularly summoned from the grave to play other sharks. (Episode: "A Game of Pool")
- 4. Literacy is an annoyance.** Bank teller Henry Bemis is a voracious reader who takes in everything [written](#)—down to the buttons worn by customers to show their support for a political candidate. But his [boss](#) doesn't like these bookworm ways, which leads Bemis to spend his break in the vault to read in peace. It turns out that his nerdiness spares him from being killed by an atomic bomb, but Bemis soon learns that man cannot live on words alone. (Episode: "Time Enough at Last")
- 5. Always tell your coworkers about your vacation plans.** When the Kanamit aliens come to earth to cure us of our ills, this opens the door for intergalactic travel and very exotic vacations. Mr. Chambers, who works as a decoding expert for the United Nations, lands a coveted seat on the Kanamit spaceship and makes sure to tell his assistant about his plans for fun in the alien sun. Unfortunately, the altruistic aliens are not what they seem and although his coworker tries to save him with the infamous statement "[To Serve Man](#)—it's a [cookbook](#)," Chambers cannot escape becoming "an ingredient in someone's soup." (Episode: "To Serve Man")

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- 6. Excellence will kill you.** Lew Bookman is a sidewalk salesman of little ambition until he meets Mr. Death, who makes a courtesy call at his apartment to let him know that he will be passing at midnight. Bookman quickly uses his sales skills to convince Death to allow him to live until he makes a great pitch. Death agrees and Bookman makes it clear that he will never make another pitch again—that is, until the Grim Reaper decides to take a young girl in his place. Bookman makes the pitch of his life to save the child, and is soon led away by Mr. Death to heaven. (Episode: "One for the Angels")

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- 7. Your coworkers are a lot worse than you think they are.** If you think the things your coworkers say are obnoxious, just try [listening](#) to their thoughts for a day. Bank employee Hector B. Poole accidentally develops telepathy and is horrified at the things he learns about the people he works with—his boss is having a torrid affair, a corporate client is borrowing money to play the ponies, and a trusted coworker plans to fill his briefcase with cash and skip town to Bermuda. After finding out things he never wanted to know about his colleagues, Poole is relieved when he loses his mind reading powers. (Episode: "A Penny for Your Thoughts")
- 8. Never lie about your age at work.** Walter Jameson is a hotshot history professor who talks about the Civil War as if he fought on the front lines himself. It turns out that the reason he speaks so convincingly about history is because he has lived through a lot of it, after paying an alchemist two thousand years ago for the gift of immortality. This dark secret, however, does not stop Jameson from his plans to marry a young student—until one of the wives he left behind decades before makes sure that he doesn't live to make any more history. (Episode: "Long Live Walter Jameson")
- 9. Your employees are smarter than you are.** Jerry Etherson may be a ventriloquist, but it's his wooden sidekick that is really pulling the strings. In fact, Etherson's dummy, Willy, has taken over their act by telling his own jokes and making his boss look like a fool. Sick of being the one to sit on a lap, Willy systematically plans an "old switcheroo" that makes his boss into the act's blockhead. (Episode: "The Dummy")
- 10. When you have no talent of your own, steal from those who do.** Julius Moomer is an inept writer who needs help making a deadline and turning a phrase. When he finds a book on black magic at the local bookstore, Moomer accidentally conjures up [William Shakespeare](#) and immediately puts him to work on his projects. However, The Bard quickly becomes disillusioned by what passes for writing in modern times and leaves Moomer to fend for himself. (Episode: "The Bard")

This article originally appeared on my [Workplace Communication Examiner](#) page on July 6, 2009.

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Posted by Kenya McCullum at August 29, 2010

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[September 18, 2010](#) COM101: The Communication Corner wrote:
Photo: Brigham Young University Do your coworkers stand around the water cooler all day discussing their favorite reality shows? Are they also the most difficult workers in the office? According to a study conducted by researchers at Brigham Young University, this may not be a coincidence. Researchers watched popular reality shows for instances of physical, verbal, or relationship aggression and found that the mean behavior in these shows far outweighed the amount that they found in non-reality programming. The worst offenders in the study were "The Apprentice" and ...

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