

= The Incentive =

" The Incentive " is the second episode of the eighth season of the American comedy television series The Office . It was written by showrunner Paul Lieberstein and directed by Charles McDougall . The episode originally aired on NBC in the United States on September 29 , 2011 .

The series ? presented as if it were a real documentary ? depicts the everyday lives of office employees in the Scranton , Pennsylvania , branch of the fictional Dunder Mifflin Paper Company . In the episode , after Robert California (James Spader) challenges the Dunder Mifflin staffers to double their sales , Andy Bernard (Ed Helms) , taking matters into his own hands , creates an incentive program . Eventually , he promises to tattoo himself if the staff earn a certain amounts of points . Meanwhile , Pam Halpert (Jenna Fischer) strikes up an unlikely friendship with Angela Lipton (Angela Kinsey) , both of whom are pregnant .

The episode introduces Sabre 's Pyramid tablet , a device that serves as a parody of several tablet computers , specifically the Apple iPad . The device would be explored later on in the season . " The Incentive " received mixed reviews from critics with many mainly criticizing the episode for recycling stories . According to Nielsen Media Research , the episode was viewed by 6 @. @ 7 million viewers and received a 3 @. @ 5 rating / 9 percent share among adult between the ages of 18 and 49 , marking a drop in the ratings from the season premiere , " The List " .

= = Plot = =

Robert California (James Spader) challenges office manager Andy Bernard (Ed Helms) to double sales after a rousing motivational speech . After Andy tries unsuccessfully to mine ideas from the office employees , he consults a book on management techniques and decides to try an incentives program . He presents a number of items catered to individual employees , which they can purchase with " points " earned by exceptional workplace performance . This idea garners mixed reactions from the employees , but when Jim Halpert (John Krasinski) jokingly asks Andy what prizes he will offer for inordinately large numbers of points , he offers to tattoo whatever his co @-@ workers would like on his butt in exchange for 5 @, @ 000 points , not anticipating that anyone will be able to even come close to this amount .

The entire staff agrees to pool their points towards Andy 's butt tattoo , and the office suddenly becomes a hubbub of activity , with Stanley Hudson (Leslie David Baker) even giving up his nap @-@ time to make sales calls for Sabre 's new Pyramid tablet . To Andy 's great dismay , they earn 5 @, @ 000 points by the end of the day . When Andy and the crew go to the tattoo parlor , Andy backs down and admits to Jim that he isn 't sure why Robert made him manager . Jim reassures Andy that he managed to pick up sales , and that no one in the office expects him to go through with the tattoo idea . Pepped up by Jim 's talk , Andy enthusiastically agrees to getting the tattoo , which Pam Halpert (Jenna Fischer) changes , without telling Andy , to an image of a dog that has " Nard " written on it , a reference to Andy 's nickname " Nard Dog . " Upon seeing his completed tattoo in a mirror , Andy is pleased with the result . Robert then reveals to the cameras that he picked Andy because he is an uncomplicated choice which causes people to rally behind him , because he is an underdog . Meanwhile , Pam and Angela Martin (Angela Kinsey) become walking buddies at Angela 's request , but after Angela says she 's reported Pam to Social Services for drinking herbal tea out of coffee mugs while pregnant , a disgusted Pam tells Angela they should not have anything else to do with each other .

= = Production = =

The episode was written by executive producer and showrunner Paul Lieberstein , who also portrays Toby Flenderson on the series , his 15th writing credit for the series . It was directed by Charles McDougall , the sixth episode he has directed for the series . The episode also featured guest star James Spader as CEO Robert California , his third appearance in the series . He appeared in 15 episodes of the season , before leaving the show . The subplot wherein California

listens to Kevin 's ideas was crafted to make the character " connect with his employees " . Novak later said that " He thinks Kevin is a genius who speaks in metaphors . Everyone 's jealous that Kevin 's become his favorite . "

The Season Eight DVD contains a number of deleted scenes from this episode . Notable cut scenes include Erin trying to comfort Andy by giving him a gift , Andy describing his low key management style , and Andy seeking more advice on which tie combination to wear .

= = Cultural references = =

The episode marks the first appearance of Sabre 's Pyramid tablet . The device serves as a parody of several tablet computers , specifically the Apple iPad . B. J. Novak described the device as " really the worst piece of technology that you 've ever seen . " The device was created by Paul Lieberstein , who originally envisioned that the device only had the rights to the 1993 film Coneheads .

= = Reception = =

= = = Ratings = = =

Upon its original American broadcast , " The Incentive " was viewed by an estimated 6 @. @ 70 million viewers and received a 3 @. @ 5 rating / 9 percent share among adults between the ages of 18 and 49 . This means that it was seen by 3 @. @ 9 percent of all 18- to 49 @- @ year @- @ olds , and 9 percent of all 18- to 49 @- @ year @- @ olds watching television at the time of the broadcast . This marked a 13 @- @ percent drop in the ratings from the previous episode , " The List " . Despite this , it ranked as the highest @- @ rated NBC show on Thursday . The episode ranked third in its timeslot beating Person of Interest which received a 2 @. @ 7 rating / 7 percent share in the 18 ? 49 demographic and The Secret Circle which received a 1 @. @ 0 rating / 2 percent share , but was defeated by Grey 's Anatomy which received a 3 @. @ 6 rating / 9 percent share and The X Factor which received a 3 @. @ 9 rating / 11 percent share .

= = = Reviews = = =

" The Incentive " received average reviews from critics with multiple critics criticizing the episode for recycling storylines . The A.V. Club reviewer Myles McNutt noted that the episode " wasn 't a trainwreck by any means " , but he was disappointed by the fact that the episode recycled storylines from the early seasons of The Office . He also criticized the series for low stakes writing that " While Andy 's character might be reflecting on his management skills , and Pam and Angela might be pregnant , nothing about the eighth season " of the series suggested that the show would try anything other than what it had already established as the status quo . He ultimately gave the episode a " C " .

M. Giant from Television Without Pity awarded the episode a " B ? " . Cindy White from IGN gave the episode a mixed review , writing that it took a " step back " from the promise of the season premiere and resorted to " recycl [ing] familiar plot elements " for the sake of the plot . She did , however , compliment the fact that Andy went through on his promise in the end . Dan Forcella of TV Fanatic awarded the episode three stars out of five and concluded that " allowing [Andy] to be the lead character of The Office is not off to a strong start . " Jonathan Teigland of Starpulse called the episode 's dynamic " interesting " and stated that " The Incentive " ended on " a sweet note " .

The episode 's cold opening received negative reviews from critics . White called it " dumb " , and noted that the joke " became grating very quickly " . Teigland called the subplot " stale " and argued that it " [fell] a little flat " . McNutt was hoping that the cold opening would have attempted to explain Kevin 's lower intelligence , instead of just using it as a crutch for a joke .