

= Stress Relief =

" Stress Relief " is a two @-@ part episode of the American comedy television series The Office . They constituted the fourteenth and fifteenth episode of the fifth season , and the 86th and 87th overall episodes of the series . Both episodes were directed by Jeffrey Blitz and written by Paul Lieberstein , who also plays Toby Flenderson on the show .

In this episode , Dwight stages a fire in the office to test the office 's fire safety skills , but things go from bad to worse when Stanley suffers a heart attack , causing Michael to come up with ways to relieve stress in the office , including a comedic roast of himself . Meanwhile , Andy , Jim , and Pam watch an illegally downloaded movie at work starring Jack Black , Jessica Alba and Cloris Leachman , and Pam deals with her parents ' recent argument that 's caused her father to move in with her and Jim .

Both parts of " Stress Relief " originally aired together immediately following the broadcast of Super Bowl XLIII , and The Office writers and producers sought to attract newcomers to the series with the expected increase in viewership . Guest stars Black , Alba and Leachman do not interact with the regular characters themselves , but rather appear in a film within the episode . The Office creator Greg Daniels said this was done to keep the episode more grounded in reality .

The episode received generally positive reviews , with Time magazine declaring it the best overall television episode of any series in 2009 . Many commentators particularly praised the chaotic cold open scene , in which Dwight panics his co @-@ workers with a simulated fire as part of a twisted safety demonstration . Because of its proximity to the Super Bowl , " Stress Relief " is the most viewed episode of The Office with 22 @. @ 9 million viewers according to Nielsen Media Research during its original broadcast . It won the Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Directing for a Comedy Series , and received another nomination for Outstanding Single @-@ Camera Picture Editing for a Comedy Series .

= = Plot = =

= = = Part one = = =

Annoyed that none of his co @-@ workers paid attention to the fire safety seminar he gave last week , Dwight (Rainn Wilson) tries another approach by sealing the office exits shut , cutting the phone lines and starting a fire in a trash can . Dwight calmly explains the proper safety procedures as the panicked employees try to flee , smashing windows , crawling through air ducts and destroying office equipment . Dwight eventually reveals it was just a drill , but Stanley (Leslie David Baker) suffers a heart attack and collapses in the commotion . Dwight is subsequently censured by Dunder Mifflin CFO David Wallace (Andy Buckley) , and Michael (Steve Carell) strips him of his position as safety officer . After Stanley is released from the hospital , his doctors warn him to keep his stress levels under control to avoid further damaging his health . Michael arranges for a CPR training session for the employees , but they are too easily distracted and the lesson proves fruitless . The session ends badly when Dwight destroys the expensive CPR dummy , earning another rebuke from David Wallace . Dwight is ordered to apologize to his co @-@ workers and get signatures acknowledging that they forgive him , but after he openly declares that his apology is insincere and denies that he is responsible for Stanley 's heart attack , they refuse to sign .

With tensions running high in the office , Michael tries to calm his workers down with yoga and meditation sessions . However , Michael soon realizes he is actually the source of his employees ' stress when Stanley 's stress reader beeps uncontrollably whenever Michael is nearby . Michael hands the stress reader to Oscar (Oscar Nunez) and is horrified when the same result occurs . Meanwhile , Pam 's (Jenna Fischer) parents are going through a rough patch in their marriage , and Pam 's father is staying with her and Jim (John Krasinski) . Jim attempts to cheer Pam up by watching an unlicensed movie with Andy (Ed Helms) (they do not know how to access such films while Andy does , so they have to watch the movie in Andy 's company) . The film stars Jack Black ,

who is engaged to a character played by Jessica Alba , but falls in love with her elderly grandmother , played by Cloris Leachman . During the movie , Jim and Pam discuss the situation with Pam 's parents but , Andy believes their comments are directed at the characters in the film , leading him to conclude they are " movie geniuses " finding hidden depths in the film .

= = = Part two = = =

Michael decides the workers are stressed because they are reluctant to express their feelings , so he organizes a comedic roast of himself in the warehouse . Dwight tricks most of the employees into signing his apology letter by pretending it is a sign @-@ in sheet , but Phyllis (Phyllis Smith) catches on and refuses to sign it . Each of the office and warehouse workers gleefully take jabs at Michael , who initially seems to enjoy the jokes , but grows increasingly uncomfortable and offended . When it comes time for him to roast his employees , Michael ends up storming out of the warehouse , visibly upset . After the roast , Michael takes a personal day (much to the concern of his employees , who start to feel bad about the scathing jokes towards Michael) and spends time at a playground to reflect , feeding pigeons by tossing whole slices of bread on the ground and making bird noises , despite the lack of birds in the winter weather . Dwight tricks Phyllis into signing his apology letter by bribing a mailman to ask her to sign for a fake package . Michael returns to the office , where he roasts each of his co @-@ workers with one @-@ liners . Stanley laughs heartily when Michael roasts him , breaking the tension . Michael tells his employees that they are the reason he got into the paper business , and they applaud him .

Pam asks Jim to talk to her father and convince him to work things out with her mother . But shortly after they talk , Pam learns her father has sought a separation and will be looking for his own apartment . Pam assumes it is because of something Jim said to her father , and blames him for their breakup . Pam later confronts her father about why he left her mother while Jim looks on through the window . Pam returns to the office and tells Jim her father left because Jim told him how much he loves Pam , and he realized that he had never felt that way about her mother even at their best . Pam comes to terms with the separation and tearfully embraces Jim . Later , she expresses confidence that the two are true soul mates . Andy overhears her comments about her real life scenario , still thinks she is talking about the film they watched and concludes that he cannot be a movie critic because he is not as insightful as Jim and Pam .

In the final scene of the episode , the ending of the illegally downloaded movie is revealed : Jack Black visits Cloris Leachman with flowers and a new walker , only to discover her affair with another young man and he walks away heartbroken .

= = Production = =

" Stress Relief " was directed by Jeffrey Blitz and written by Paul Lieberstein , who also plays Toby Flenderson on the show . The episode originally aired on NBC in the United States on February 1 , 2009 , immediately after the broadcast of Super Bowl XLIII . NBC decided to air The Office after the Super Bowl , rather than another show , due to positive feedback the series received from short promo commercials it aired during the 2008 Summer Olympics . Some criticized the decision to place an episode of The Office , an already established NBC series , after the Super Bowl instead of a new show , and suggested it meant the network lacked any exceptional new material .

In writing the episode , Lieberstein said he sought to appeal to newcomers to the series and attract them to the show , without alienating regular The Office watchers : " We wanted to do a stand @-@ alone comedy episode that could bring people in . " Lieberstein said the script drew less attention to long @-@ standing story arcs , which new viewers would not understand . Lieberstein said , " It almost had an air of a pilot in a way , where we had to reintroduce everything . We wanted it to be extremely funny and extremely funny up front . " The Office creator Greg Daniels said he felt the episode had to focus on physical comedy and easily accessible set pieces . Daniels said , " I looked at all the shows that followed the Super Bowl in years past and I feel that a comedy would be a good choice in the current climate . People want to laugh so we 're trying our best to supply some laughs .

" Actor Rainn Wilson said of the episode , " It 's a great opportunity for people to revisit the world of The Office and hopefully get into our style of comedy . "

The two parts of " Stress Relief " ran an hour long (including commercials) , compared to the typical half @-@ hour length of most The Office episodes . Since the end of the second season , the series had begun occasionally showing longer episodes (which they dubbed " super @-@ sized ") on special occasions . Unlike other episodes of The Office , " Stress Relief " included an extended main title sequence that included the names and images of the entire supporting cast of the series , in order to afford them recognition in anticipation of the high post @-@ Super Bowl viewership . The opening scene , in which the characters frantically scramble to escape the Dunder Mifflin office due to what they believe is a fire , took about a day @-@ and @-@ a @-@ half to shoot . It took much longer than the average 45 minutes of shooting time for a scene of that length due to the amount of stunt work involved . Due to the pressure of following the Super Bowl , actress Jenna Fischer said , " I don 't think we 've ever worked so hard on an episode in the history of our show . " The Office actor and writer B.J. Novak , who did not appear in " Stress Relief " , said of the episode , " It 's awesome . After this airs , people are going to refer to the Super Bowl as the Pre @-@ Office Football Spectacular . "

In anticipation of particularly high viewership due to the Super Bowl , NBC officials encouraged The Office producers to feature celebrity guest appearances in the episode . Jack Black , Jessica Alba and Cloris Leachman all made guest appearances in " Stress Relief " as a result . However , they do not interact with the cast and characters of The Office , but rather appear separately in a bootleg film called Mrs. Albert Hannaday , which the characters watch within the episode . Greg Daniels said this was done because it " helps keep the show grounded and less like I Love Lucy " . Lieberstein also said the casting decision made sense because , " If we 're just casting some salesman that comes into the office and it 's Jack Black , it 's hard to believe that . " " Stress Relief " marked Black 's fourth television appearance in five years : he previously appeared in the Fox sitcom Cracking Up in 2004 , the Comedy Central series The Naked Trucker and T @-@ Bones Show in 2004 , and the Fox animated comedy series The Simpsons in 2007 . Steve Carell said of Leachman 's performance , " She is that extra seasoning . That extra spice to the pot that makes for a delicious comedy gumbo . "

= = Cultural references = =

Just before Dwight starts his fire simulation , he said his co @-@ workers previously failed to listen because he made a presentation on the computer program Microsoft PowerPoint , of which he said , " PowerPoint is boring " . Michael refers to Barack Obama , the first African American president of the United States , to Stanley while he is suffering a heart attack by shouting , " Stanley ! Barack is president ! You are black ! Stanley ! " A deleted scene further addresses Obama 's election , with Michael praising the choice and Darryl , with Darryl half @-@ jokingly telling the Caucasian office workers what will change for them (they no longer have to pretend to like jazz , and Morgan Freeman won 't get any more acting work because " he 's more for you guys ") . Michael calls an employee from the Red Cross , an international humanitarian movement , to conduct a lesson about CPR . The instructor suggests they pump the heart to the tune of " Stayin ' Alive " , a disco song by the pop band , the Bee Gees , but Michael mixes the song up with " I Will Survive " by Gloria Gaynor . At the end of the lesson , Dwight cuts the face off the CPR dummy and places it on his face in the manner of Hannibal Lecter , a fictional cannibalistic serial killer who cut the face off a man and wore it as a mask in the 1991 thriller film , The Silence of the Lambs . Watching Mrs. Albert Hannaday , Andy says the Cloris Leachman character was originally supposed to be played by the much younger actress , Nicole Kidman , and the last @-@ minute replacement prompted a minor overhaul in the film 's script . The songs " You Make My Dreams Come True " by Hall and Oates , " All Out of Love " by the soft rock duo Air Supply , " Have a Little Faith in Me " by singer @-@ songwriter John Hiatt , and " Lady " by Little River Band play during scenes in Mrs. Albert Hannaday .

Michael describes the roast as an event in the style of televised comedy specials that air on the cable network , Comedy Central . In describing the upcoming roast , Michael says he plans to call

YouTube , an online video sharing website , to record the event . During the roast , Pam says Michael 's penis is so small , " If it were an iPod , it would be a Shuffle " , a reference to the smallest of the Apple Inc. portable media player brands . Kelly said she would rather kiss Lord Voldemort , the hideous antagonist of the Harry Potter novels and films , than Michael . Andy sings a song about Michael , " What I Hate About You " , to the tune of the rock song by The Romantics , " What I Like About You " . Angela makes a joke , " If you put sunblock on a window , you might be Michael Scott " , which is modeled after the " you might be a redneck " one @-@ liner jokes by comedian Jeff Foxworthy . While roasting his co @-@ workers at the end of the episode , Michael says to Andy , " Cornell called and they think you suck " , a reference to Cornell University , the Ithaca , New York college the Andy character attended .

= = Ratings = =

In its original American broadcast on February 1 , 2009 , " Stress Relief " was viewed by 22 @.@ 9 million viewers in 13 @.@ 34 million homes , according to Nielsen Media Research , making it the most watched episode of The Office and the only episode to reach over 20 million viewers . The episode drew a 10 @.@ 6 rating and 14 @.@ 46 million viewers between the ages 18 and 49 . It more than doubled the show 's previously highest rating in the age group , and constituted the largest 18 @-@ 49 rating for an NBC entertainment telecast in four @-@ and @-@ a @-@ half years , since the tenth season finale of the medical drama series ER on May 13 , 2004 . An estimated 37 @.@ 7 million viewers watched at least six minutes or more of " Stress Relief " . As expected , The Office benefited highly from following the broadcast of Super Bowl XLIII , which was seen by 98 @.@ 7 million average viewers , making it the most watched Super Bowl in history at the time .

= = Critical reception = =

" Stress Relief " received generally positive reviews . Time magazine named it the best overall television episode of any series in 2009 . " Stress Relief " was voted the third highest @-@ rated episode out of 26 from the fifth season , according to an episode poll at the fansite OfficeTally ; the episode was rated 8 @.@ 89 out of 10 . Stanley 's heart attack in response to Dwight 's fake fire drill ranked number 10 in PhillyBurbs.com 's top ten moments from the fifth season of The Office . Many critics particularly praised the opening scene , in which Dwight panics his co @-@ workers by simulating a fire . The sequence included scenes such as Kevin looting a vending machine amid the chaos , Oscar 's legs crashing through the ceiling as he tries to crawl out , Angela tossing her cat through an open ceiling tile only for it to fall through another tile , and Andy 's reaction to a series of popping caps : " The fire is shooting at us ! "

Alan Sepinwall , television columnist for The Star @-@ Ledger called it a " balls to the wall , gut @-@ busting , amazing Office episode " , and called the fire opening scene " not only the best Office pre @-@ credits sequence ever , but an all @-@ time sitcom classic " . Sepinwall said " Stress Relief " was accessible to newcomers and regular viewers , and displayed both the comedic and human sides of the characters . He said the only drawback of the episode was the Mrs. Albert Hannaday subplot , which he felt was an unnecessary gimmick added solely to accommodate the guest stars . TV Guide writer Shahzad Abbas wrote , " This was one of my favorite episodes ever . It had me laughing the whole way through . " Abbas particularly praised the fire opening scene and the final scene in which Michael insults everybody , which he called " a very satisfying ending to the roast saga " . He called the Black / Leachman romance " creepy and hilarious " , but described the Jim and Pam romance subplot as the weak link of the episode .

David Krone of the Los Angeles Daily News said although he had mixed feelings about the fifth season so far , he found " Stress Relief " to be " one of the season 's best efforts " . Krone specifically praised the Jim and Pam subplot and Dwight 's character , adding , " It 's a pretty perfect way to unwind - or , if your team lost , to become reanimated - after the Super Bowl . " Rick Ingebritson of The Palm Beach Post said the episode " was funny from start to finish " , particularly

praising Dwight Schrute 's role and the Michael Scott roast . However , Ingebritson said he was disgusted by the Leachman nude scene from Mrs. Albert Hannaday . Will Leitch of New York magazine , said the episode was funny , but " curiously unfocused [like] two half @-@ hour episodes awkwardly spliced together . He praised the Black / Leachman film , the trouble Dwight kept getting in , and the Jim and Pam subplot , which he called " a rare Pam @-@ Jim plot point that worked " . However , he called the Michael roast " yet another Michael @-@ wanting @-@ to @-@ be @-@ loved @-@ and @-@ still @-@ be @-@ the @-@ Boss subplot that takes over the second half " .

Not all reviews were positive . Entertainment Weekly writer Whitney Pastorek said the episode started strong with the fire scare scene , but " tapered off into a disjointed plot " that she felt would not win new viewers . She said many jokes went too long and lost momentum , but nevertheless wrote " a lot of the episode ' s humor was engaging and smart " . Lorenzo Perez of The News & Observer said the Pam subplot was " overworked " and lacked impact , and the Dwight character was over @-@ the @-@ top , proving The Office writers clearly have no idea how to rein in Dwight Schrute . Perez also expressed doubt the show would attract a new audience because it ran too late into the night following the Super Bowl . However , Perez said he enjoyed the Black / Leachman cameos . Terry Morrow of the Knoxville News Sentinel said , " This particular visit to The Office doesn 't pop like most episodes " . Morrow praised the Black / Leachman film , but said , " To be upstaged by a B @-@ plot , one not involving the show 's main characters at all , is a bit of a misdirection the show doesn 't need in a post @-@ Super Bowl time slot . " USA Today critic Robert Bianco said the plot was extremely thin and the Black and Leachman cameos were humorless and grotesque . Bianco wrote , " Unfortunately , in an hour you get at most a handful of funny moments . So if you want funny from a comedy , look elsewhere . "

= = Awards = =

Jeffrey Blitz won the Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Directing for a Comedy Series for " Stress Relief " . Dean Holland and David Rogers were also nominated for Outstanding Single @-@ Camera Picture Editing for a Comedy Series . " Stress Relief " accounted for two of the ten Primetime Emmy Award nominations The Office received for the show 's fifth season .