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# The Call Centre: Why annoying has never been so moving

Look past the sexist banter and unique management style of boss Nev Wilshire, and what you've got in BBC Three's The Call Centre is a real sense of community. Or so says media expert Dr John Jewell, who looks forward to series two



By **WalesOnline**

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## Nev and co are back on the phone in The Call Centre

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Firstly, interests to declare: Lord, I am from the lovely, lovely town that is Swansea.

Secondly, I worked, albeit over 10 years ago, in a call centre.

This I feel places me in an ideal position to comment upon and assess BBC Three's attempt to hold the working classes up to a distorted mirror.

I want to talk about the return of the docu-soap set in the Save Britain Money call centre, Swansea.

Based around the larger than life uber boss, Nev Wilshire, the Call Centre first aired as a five episode series in the summer of 2013.

The show's energy came principally from the David Brent-like Nev, but also under the visual microscope were the lives and aspirations of his workforce – the majority of whom were under 26 and jaw-droppingly candid.

Series one was coarse, exhilarating, frequently touching and often hilarious.

Indeed, episode four illustrated all of the above points with regularity.



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Yes, somebody had a number two in a bin.

This, only mildly mark you, disconcerted Nev who reasonably enough pointed out that there was no company policy on someone doing such a thing.

As he put it: "It's something we'll have to rectum - fy."

So this is the office environment as evidenced in the Call Centre.

Week after week we saw Nev roam his kingdom dispensing his particular brand of wisdom, cajoling and shouting, matchmaking and arm wrestling, but above all seeking to create an atmosphere where people were relaxed and happy enough to 'cold call' all day.

'Happy people sell' is the mantra he goes by - and, by God, if people aren't happy, he tries to make sure they get happy.

So what to make of Nev?

Completely unreconstructed, his management style appeared to be modelled on Gene Hunt from Life on Mars crossed with Cilla Black circa the Blind Date years.

The evident sexism, border line bullying and general inappropriate behaviour ranging from enforced singing to the abuse of office furniture, would lead one to think that his methods could not possibly succeed and even if they did, he would be loathed by his underlings.

Not a bit of it.

He said it: Nev's best bits of banter

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He was clearly adored by his staff - male and female - and beneath the bluster there were numerous incidents of kindness and compassion.

A clearly intelligent man, Nev acted (and you did sense so much acting going on) as a father figure to a particularly cheeky group of young monkeys.



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Who'd have thought it? The audience, I'll bet anyway, looked on aghast, with self-righteous horror as one unnamed agent said: "I wanted to be small with big boobs....what girl doesn't? It's just something everyone wants I suppose."

Actually, she may have had a point there, as 19 year old Corey, the (male) body builder illustrated whilst in the gym.

He was adamant that his girlfriend, Chloe, 21, had smaller breasts than he did. Of this fact he was clearly very proud.

So there was much to ridicule, much to titillate the superior twitterati as they salivated over their iPhones eager to pounce on the latest, cringe worthy truisms uttered by an inveterate group of people for whom the sexual revolution is a nightclub in Ibiza.

This is, of course, what the programme makers wanted.

We have a curious attitude in this country to...entertainment style programmes.

We expect them to tell us the truth.

We imagine an honesty of purpose and tend to forget that the material is organised in such a way as to lead us to form certain perceptions and attitudes.

From episode four of the Call Centre we could be forgiven for thinking that the entire workforce smoked like beagles whilst preening themselves in front of a giant imaginary mirror.

But subtext is important.

Modern day telesales is an unforgiving environment where every movement of the agent is tracked, where targets must be met, where the often vitriolic abuse meted out by an outraged public can take its toll very quickly indeed.

This working atmosphere is relentless and the need to rack up sale after sale leads many of the workers to end their shifts drenched in sweat with the pressures of it all.

At least the film makers acknowledged the precariousness of the job.



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In the words of the genuinely charming tea lady, Hayley: "I didn't have the chance to say goodbye to them and that is sad. I did lose a few mates.....mates that I looked forward to seeing on a Monday morning."

That for me was the key to the series – there was, amongst the staggering sexism, heavy air of forced banter and a real fear of losing one's job, a sense of community evident.

The collective experience and camaraderie seemed to sustain them.

They really were all in the same boat.

And these were young people working (let's not forget that fact: they were doing just that – working) in a job most of us simply could not do.

Why they said things to the camera that would make a docker weep requires further analysis of course.

But that's for another time.

Maybe after the second series has finished.

**[Dr John Jewell](#) is Director of Undergraduate Studies at the School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies, Cardiff University. The Call Centre returns to BBC Three on Tuesday at 9pm**

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