

TV Review: 'Better Off Ted' Could Be Worse But Far From Best

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on March 18, 2009 - 1:57pm

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Television Rating: **2.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – In a landscape of increasingly lower ratings for quirky TV comedy (talk to the producers of “[Scrubs](#) [17]” if you don’t believe me), I’m kind of amazed that “[Better Off Ted](#) [5]” made it to the air. If “[Arrested Development](#) [18]” and everything [Andy Richter](#) [19] has ever tried couldn’t find an audience, who thought people would be attracted to this left-of-center workplace sitcom? And the fact that it doesn’t live up to the potential of its concept means the show’s thin chance of survival just disappeared.

[Jay Harrington](#) [9] plays the “title character” of one of the most poorly-named shows in the history of television, Ted, a worker in research and development at a massive conglomerate named Veridian. Ted works with the vicious Veronica ([Portia de Rossi](#)), [sweet love interest Linda](#) ([Andrea Anders](#) [13]), and [scientist scene-stealers Phil](#) ([Jonathan Slavin](#) [10]) and [Lem](#) ([Malcolm Barrett](#) [11]). Like [Jason Bateman](#) [20] on “AD,” Harrington’s Ted is the straight man of “Better Off Ted,” the nice guy surrounded by general chaos, quick editing, and tons of narration.



The cast of Better Off Ted.
Photo credit: ABC

What does the company that Ted works for do? Everything. In the first episode, after trying to find a heat-resistant mouse (tune in to see if it’s “computer” or “live”), the team moves to trying to freeze a human being. Poor Phil draws the short straw, suffers some odd side effects, and faces termination.

In the second-and-superior episode, a series of false alarms have forced the company to consider terminating the procedure of putting on hazmat suits every time because of the working hours lost. Of course, they’re not real concerned about workers not having suits on if the false alarm rings true. Ted also brings his precocious daughter to work and she bonds with Linda.

"Better Off Ted" has a decent concept - sort of a "Dilbert" for a new age or an "Office [21]" with a twist - but the execution ranges from so-so to bad. There's far too much narration by Harrington (the first seven minutes of the first episode are nearly nothing but) and too many of the jokes hit the floor. It doesn't help that Harrington and Anders have yet to develop the chemistry to give the workplace romance heat (although Ted does have an easy-going repartee with his daughter, who plays a bigger role in the vastly superior second episode next week), leaving the show without anyone to care about. In "AD" terms, there's no George Michael.



Better Off Ted.
Photo credit: ABC

Barrett and Slavin are fun, Anders is beautiful and charming (she's been wasted in bad comedy before on "Joey" and "The Class") and there are a few clever quips, but "Better Off Ted" suffers from a common problem in satirical comedy - too much winking at the audience. "Ted" thinks its smart, clever, and brilliant and it may be at times, but it's just not consistently funny and too often telegraphs how highly it thinks of itself. De Rossi's heartless gig is already tired after two episodes, the office romance feels inevitable, and the promising concept hasn't been well-executed.

The creator of "Better Off Ted" also made the similar-but-superior "[Andy Richter Controls the Universe](#) [4]," which is finally coming out on DVD next week, but that show had critical raves and couldn't find an audience. It's hard to believe that this inferior version with the low-rated lead-in of the plummeting "Scrubs" will be around long enough for audiences to find it. "Better Off Ted" needed a bit more research and development of its own.

'Better Off Ted,' which airs on ABC, debuts on March 18th, 2009 at 7:30PM CST. It stars Jay Harrington, Portia de Rossi, Andrea Anders, Jonathan Slavin, and Malcolm Barrett. It was created by Victor Fresco.



[22]

By [BRIAN TALLERICO](#) [23]
Content Director
HollywoodChicago.com
brian@hollywoodchicago.com [22]

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