

There's No Such Thing as Too Much Television



Rocco I. Debitetto

Chair | CBA Young Lawyers Section

Rocco is an associate with Hahn Loeser + Parks LLP, where he focuses his practice in the creditors' rights, reorganization and bankruptcy area. He can be reached at (216) 274-2374 or rdebitetto@hahnlaw.com.

I'm the youngest of six, with 16 years between me and the next oldest. Until old enough to appreciate life's unpredictable sense of humor, I was convinced my parents simply decided to save the best for last—the very last.

Suffice it to say that in-house playmates were scarce. There was my pet fish, Harry, but conversation ran dry after about the first six months, and he was only mediocre at fetch. That left the stray cat living behind the garage. We got along okay; however, a lingering fear of rabies makes it difficult to foster a deep relationship with man or beast. Fortunately, around the age of five, I discovered a friend for life.

I discovered television.

Babysat by *Mr. Rogers*, tutored by *The Science Guy*, and entertained by *Sesame Street*, life was good. In fact, when I left home for college and discovered cable's 65-channel bliss,¹ I knew precisely why it was called "higher education."

But what good is an education if you don't share it? My countless hours of tele-studies revealed programs embracing lessons that simply can't be overlooked by new lawyers. Let's take a few for example:

The Greatest American Hero (1981-83): "A teacher is asked to be a superhero using a special alien suit with powers he can barely understand or control."² Does anything more closely analogize a new lawyer's predicament? Many believe lawyers receive superpowers upon exiting stage left at the swearing-in ceremony. While we don't have superpowers, we do have an enhanced ability to alter lives and change society. This power can take a while to understand or control—much like the alien suit. But hang in there. If *The Greatest American Hero* can master it, then so can you.

Oz (1997-2003): "A series chronicling the daily activities of an unusual prison facility and its criminal inhabitants." Love it or hate it, *Oz* makes one point abundantly clear: prison sucks—avoid it at all costs. The law's inroads of opportunity have many forks. A few right turns can land a successful career. One wrong turn can land three-to-five in Leavenworth. Take care in how you exercise your newfound powers.

CHiPs (1977-83): "The adventures of two California Highway Patrol motorcycle officers." Despite seemingly irreconcilable personalities both on and off screen, Officers Frank Poncherello and Jon Baker taught us the true meaning of teamwork. Whether it's a 50-car pile-up on the Santa Monica Freeway or a 50-party case on fast track, never underestimate the value of teamwork among colleagues and staff in getting the job done right. And if you have spit-shined motorcycle boots and mirrored shades, then I recommend wearing them in the process. Because looking good is *never* a crime.

The Incredible Hulk (1978-82): "A fugitive scientist has the curse of becoming a powerful green monster under extreme emotional stress." Imagine if the Hulk was a lawyer? The cost of replacing muscle-torn Armanis alone would break him. Still, there's a little of that green goon inside us all, and the law will do its very best to draw it out at the most inopportune times. When you feel it happening, put down that fifth cup of coffee, take a deep breath, and remember: *Nobody liked the Hulk*.

Quantum Leap (1989-93): "Scientist Sam Beckett finds himself trapped in time —'leaping' into the body of a different person in a different time period each week." As lawyers, our job is to "leap"

¹ Cable's devilish allure did not breach the Debitetto Household until 2001. Now my parents are hooked. The Internet is due for an appearance in 2026.

² All programming information contained herein is from the Internet Movie Database, available at www.imdb.com (last visited September 18, 2007).

into the lives of others. Unlike Sam Beckett, who was trapped in the life of another indefinitely, we have the luxury of checking our jobs at the door when we get home. Easier said than done, I know. Regardless, while it's important to leap into projects head first, it's equally as important to leap out occasionally to remember who you are and what you do when you're not working.

American Gladiators (1989-97): "Two teams (one male, one female) compete in games of physical strength against the 'Gladiators' - very athletic body builders who attempt to halt the contestants from scoring points in any of the competitions." The classic battle of meek vs. might. At some level we all loved seeing the 140-pound accountant from Duluth get blasted by Gladiator Nitro after a wrong turn in the Eliminator Challenge—but we loved it even more when he didn't. The law is riddled with "Nitros," most of which wear suits, not singlets, and all of which want to blast you (metaphorically speaking). Be your own gladiator: Defeat the Nitros of the world with a little extra diligence and planning. They'll never see you coming.

Punk'd (2003-Present): "A [h]idden [c]amera [s]how similar to *Candid Camera* but famous celebrities are [Ashton Kutcher's] victims." Your best friend was in a serious accident. It's entirely your fault. *Just kidding! Ha! You've been punked!* When I watch *Punk'd*, all I can think about is how Kutcher really has a few coming to him. Try to resist all temptations to be the Kutcher of the legal community. That is, try to be accommodating and professional at every turn. Remember, the lawyer who punks others begs to be punked him- or herself.

Wheel of Fortune (1975-Present): No explanation necessary. Other than teaching us that asking to buy a vowel should be the default response to any question posed in open court for which we don't have a better answer, *The Wheel* consistently illustrates one principle: Know when to quit spinning while you're ahead. In that sense, it's time to end this article.

Hopefully I've debunked the myth of "too much television." Don't get me wrong, [comic] books have their place too. But when it comes to a good, old-fashioned sensory overload of life's many lessons, T.V. can't be beat.

So turn on, tune in, and . . . well, you get the point. 📺