



Plaudits and awards don't excuse bad behaviour

TV needs to get its house in order if it is to continue to attract the brightest and best creative talent, says **Lorraine Heggessey**

I have always believed that you get the best out of people when they feel valued and are well treated. I know that the pandemic has caused people in many sectors to reconsider what they want from their working life, but I fear there's something more behind the number of people who are voting with their feet and leaving our industry.

For too long, we have allowed those with power to behave badly, whether star producers or directors, leading actors or popular presenters, people running independent production companies or commissioners with money to spend. We have to find a way to stamp it out, and to allow the victims of bullying to call it out.

No matter how big an audience you attract, how many awards you win, how much pressure you are under, or how talented and indispensable you believe yourself to be, bad behaviour shouldn't be tolerated but seen as an abuse of power and privilege.

Unfortunately, this is not a new problem. When Greg Dyke was director general of the BBC some 20 years ago, he launched a culture change programme called 'Making it Happen'. The aim was to make the BBC a better place to work, to build a positive culture where creativity flourished and ludicrous bureaucratic procedures were eliminated. Greg realised that the people who are most aware of how an organisation needs to change are those who work there, so he launched a wide-ranging consultation process.

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I was at one of these sessions when somebody voiced an opinion that was shared by many. She said she was fed up with what she called the "Bafta Bastards" – these were the people who over-spent their budgets and worked their teams into the ground, often shouting and screaming at them so

that by the end of a production, everyone was a nervous wreck.

But because the 'Bafta Bastards' got critical acclaim and won awards, they were rewarded with yet another plum series to make, where once again they over-spent their budget and made everyone's lives a misery.

There were nods of recognition all around the room. We all knew people like that and we all knew their behaviour was rarely, if ever, tackled. Greg seized on this, decreed that it was completely unacceptable, and said that these people would either have to change their behaviour or leave the BBC.

This immediately empowered the heads of department to tackle this issue, to which many had previously turned a blind eye. It had almost become acceptable for so-called 'creative talent' to behave in this way. And one of the worst things about it was that they became role models, leading those coming up through the ranks to think that this was the way you were expected to behave if you were successful.

For decades, TV was able to attract bright, creative and talented people but we're going to have to get our house in order if we're going to be able to compete with the myriad attractive alternatives out there, not least the fact that you don't need to work for a broadcaster or production company any more. You can now easily make your own content, build an audience and make money by sharing it on a platform like TikTok or YouTube.

Productions are now reporting on the sustainability and diversity of their teams, but is it time to measure confidentially how everybody on the team has been treated so that bad behaviour can be addressed?

With so many people on freelance contracts often working for small companies, it's much harder for one person to issue an edict like Greg did, so it's incumbent on all of us to make it clear that bad behaviour is not acceptable and to find a way of making sure that those who are guilty of it change – or leave our industry.

➤ *Lorraine Heggessey is chair of The Grierson Trust, adviser to the C4 Growth Fund and a former controller of BBC1*