

Film-Tech

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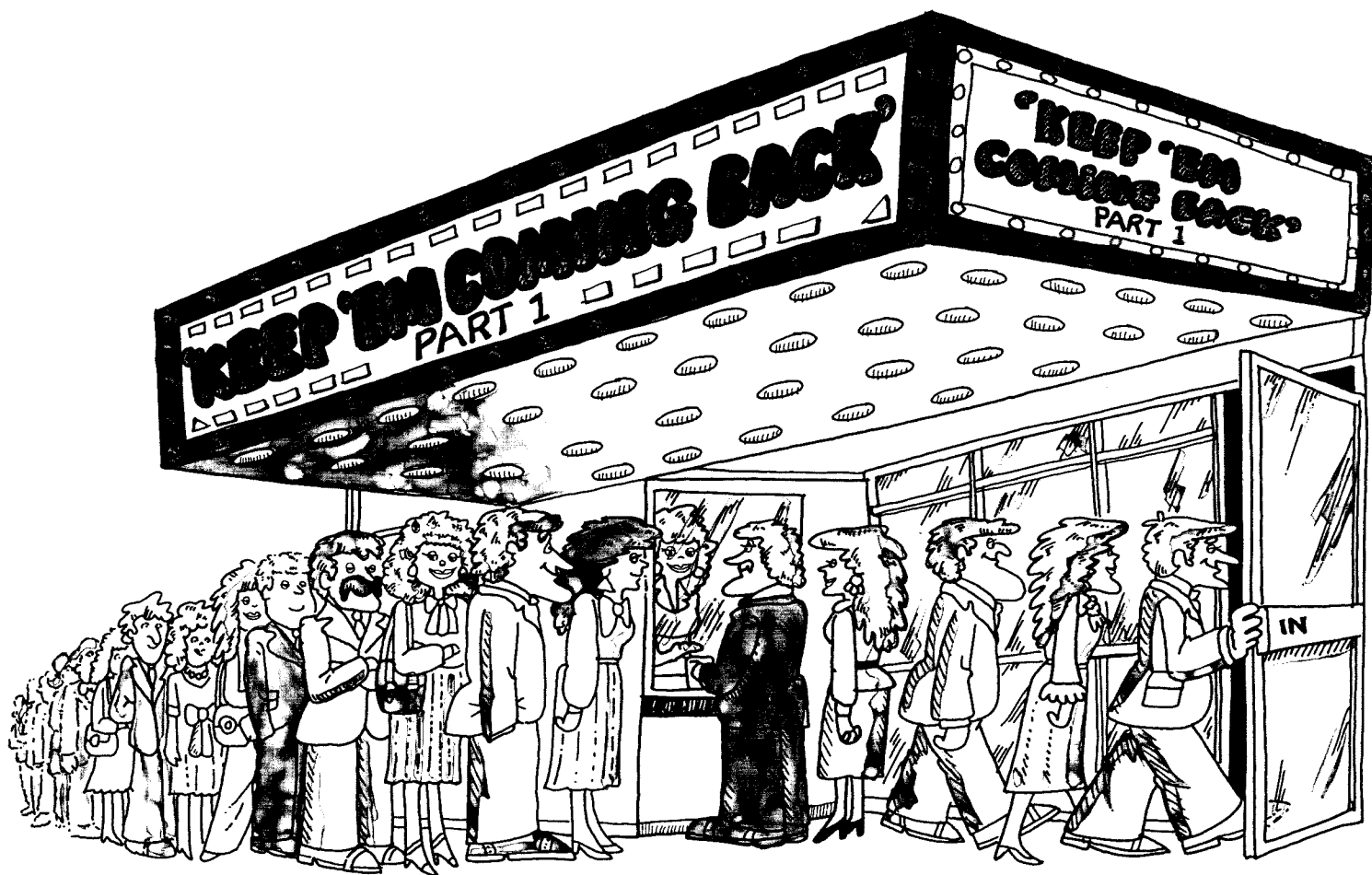
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FILM NOTES FOR THE REEL PEOPLE

H-50-15

A TECHNICAL SERVICE FOR FILMHANDLERS FROM EASTMAN KODAK COMPANY



Introduction

1984 is the year that we at Eastman Kodak have designated to take a more active role to "Keep 'Em Coming Back" to your theatre. In this light, our four quarterly issues of *Film Notes for the REEL PEOPLE* will address various aspects of theatre maintenance, projection practices, employee training and courtesy, and concessions.

There are certain service organizations dedicated to assisting exhibitors and distributors in perpetuating the motion picture experience. Over the years, Eastman Kodak has taken an increasingly active role in each of them. Included in this group are NATO—the National Organization of Theatre Owners; SMPTE—the Society

of Motion Picture and Television Engineers; TEA—the Theatre Equipment Association; MPAA—Motion Picture Association of America; ACVL—Association of Cinema and Video Laboratories; and the InterSociety Committee, founded by former Kodak vice president and general manager, Kenneth Mason, Motion Picture and Audiovisual Markets Division.

In addition to our more active involvement in these support groups, we have embarked on introducing ourselves to you—the theatre owner, manager, and projectionist—on a more individualized basis through our traveling field training seminar, MBO: MANAGEMENT BY OBSERVATION. This presentation is designed to

heighten (theatre) management awareness of projection practices that make "going to the movies" a more pleasurable experience for your patrons. Like our four issues of *Film Notes for the REEL PEOPLE* in 1984, the focus of the seminar is to "Keep 'Em Coming Back." It continues to extend Kodak's commitment to exhibition. For further information about our MBO presentation, please contact your Kodak regional office listed on the back cover. Both Management by Observation and *Film Notes for the REEL PEOPLE* are designed to help theatre professionals help themselves.

We welcome your comments and suggestions for future topics of interest.

SOME LESSONS ABOUT CONCESSIONS

the concession stand. You love it when you total up your weekly profits; you hate it when you have to hire competent people to run it and clean it; you hate it when it's deluged with frenetic and irate patrons; you love it when your patrons buy all your popcorn. And what about those patrons? They love the popcorn, candy, and ice-cold drinks; they hate the high prices, long lines, and often-discourteous service.

Before we delve into the mysteries of this dual love-hate relationship, let's try to put the concession stand in perspective within the overall theatre experience. At the heart of the matter lies your primary reason for being in business: to show film and to provide a pleasureable theatrical experience. NEVER FORGET that your customers are initially attracted to your theatre because you are showing a film they want to see. You might want to argue that point when you see crowds of teenagers clustered around your new game machine or see your small-fry at Saturday matinees clamoring at the

concession stand. But remember, if your theatre and your presentation fails to provide them with the enjoyment they seek, they will cluster and clamor at another theatre next week. Sampling the nachos or setting a new record in "Dig-Dug" may attract them *after* they get there, but first and foremost, you have to get them there! Then, you have to "keep 'em coming back"—again and again.

Since the patrons come to see the movie, then, any enhancements to that experience that you can provide will increase their enjoyment. Munching on fresh, tasty popcorn and sipping a cold drink that is not crammed full of ice pleases a customer. Conversely, if they are served by a harried, disgruntled employee and charged exorbitant prices, the gratification derived from the food and beverage is diminished. And anything that interferes with the pleasure of the movie-going

experience is counterproductive toward keeping them coming back to your theatre.

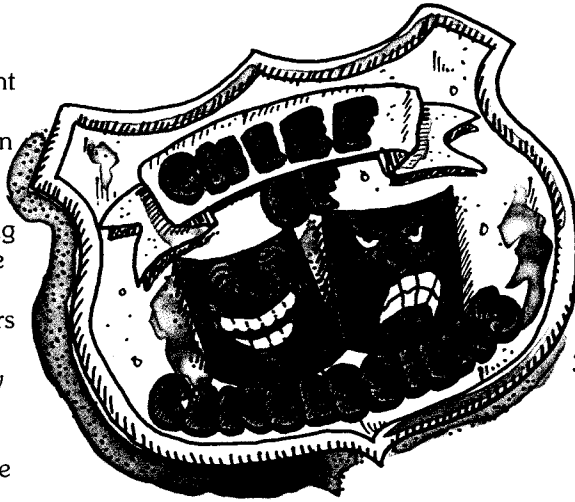
There are three general types of concessions in most theatres: food, merchandise, and game arcades. Perhaps we can take a closer look at each of these to insure that they keep your customers smiling—not swearing!

A sure-fire method to keep the crowd moving smoothly is to minimize the motions of the employees behind the concession stand. The following ideas pertain to concession stands that are circular (with the stock kept in the middle and in cases around the counter) and that have back and front counters.



1. Keep all the items a customer might order within easy reach of each employee so they don't have to run from one end of the stand to the other frantically grabbing candy with one hand and filling a drinking cup with the other. Remember, the more time your servers spend with each customer, the fewer customers they can serve. Having popcorn and candy in or behind the display case, with the drink heads and a cash register atop the counter in each serving area, helps to increase your serving efficiency by reducing the "running and reaching" of your servers. Cups for both popcorn and drinks can be placed in spring-loaded bins near the inside edge of the counter so that another pops up when one is removed. Although duplication of drink heads or cup holders require higher initial cash outlays, you will reap the benefits immediately with satisfied customers, more productive employees, and an increased dollar volume at the stand because you provide service more promptly.

NOTE: If you adopt this concept, ask an usher to assist in channeling the crowd into distinct lines during peak periods and to help keep them moving in an orderly manner toward each server.



2. Schedule one employee to do nothing but stock and clean during peak business periods. If, for example, you normally schedule four concession employees to service customers on a Saturday night, try scheduling a fifth person whose sole responsibilities are stocking ice, candy, and cups, popping corn, and making sure the CO₂ tanks are full. This person might also prepare nachos or drinks so that the servers need only to reach behind them to obtain the item and present it to the customer. What you spend in additional payroll will come back to you in increased sales by providing faster service in an (overall) less hectic atmosphere.

3. Talk with your district or division manager about appointing an employee as "chief of concessions." Aside from giving your concessionists something for which to strive, this person will be charged with the responsibility of staffing the stand properly for peak periods—sometimes taking an usher or two from the floor to work the stand during a rush. One very important function for a chief of concessions is to make sure (before the crowd appears) that the cash registers have sufficient change with which to perform transactions. In short, anything that you as a manager can do to keep the servers busy serving your patrons will keep your cash registers jingling more frequently. Anytime your servers spend stocking, repairing, cooking, or making change takes them away from their primary function of serving customers.



Theatrical Cafeteria

A cafeteria-style concession stand, where the customers move along selecting the items they want, requires that concession employees keep the bins fully stocked and that there are enough cashiers at the end of the line to handle the crowds. Although cafeteria-style stands are designed for efficiency, the best laid plans go awry when the line stops because one cashier just cannot take the money fast enough to keep it moving.

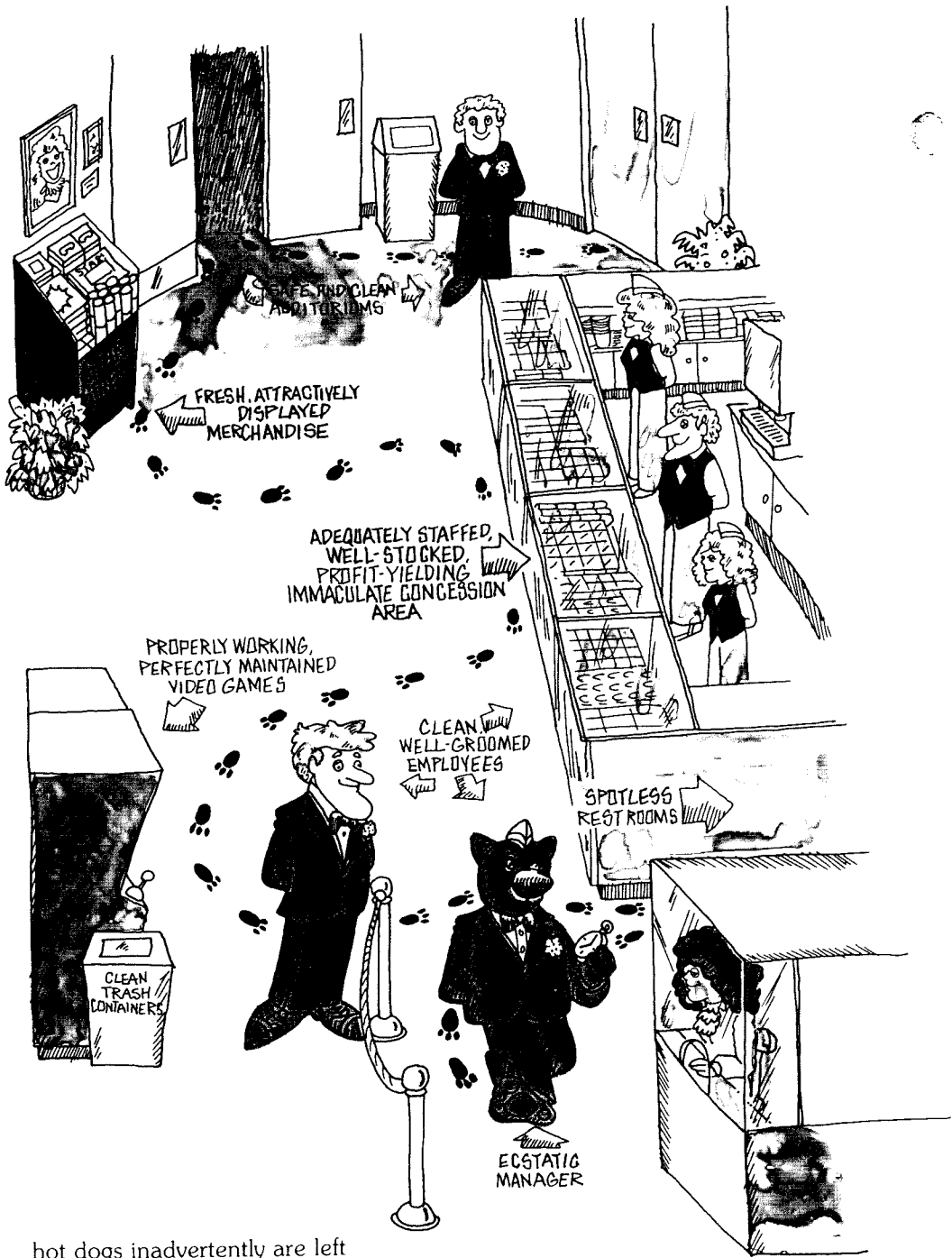
Remember that employee attitudes and actions in any operation reflect the values of management directly. Hold regular staff meetings. Explain your objectives and outline what you expect of your support personnel to help you achieve these goals.

Although loading a cup with ice will use less syrup, it will also annoy your patrons. A more discreet way of accomplishing the same goal is to carefully monitor your drink yields per gallon of syrup and maintain the proper mix of syrup and carbonation. Guidelines on these procedures may vary from one company to another, but usually, your fountain service sales representative will gladly demonstrate the proper method for calibrating drink heads and suggest satisfactory mix of ice, carbonation, and syrup. If you keep tabs (no pun intended) on these levels regularly, overuse of syrup becomes readily apparent.

Monitor Thy Yields

Yield-monitoring and portion-control is applicable in other areas of your concession operation as well; popcorn, oil, butter, nachos, cheese, condiments, and snowcone syrup can all be used excessively. By doing a little math at the end of the week when you inventory your concession stand, you can see if something is being over-used, either because of a mechanical malfunction or human error.

An all-too-frequent customer complaint is that concession items are stale. We've even heard of instances where chocolate was turning white. And, unlike fine wine, chocolate is *not* better with age! Make sure your employees rotate the candy, nacho, popcorn, and hot dog stocks—just like they do in grocery stores—so that there are never any stale items for sale. It is your responsibility to teach your employees the dangers of selling spoiled or tainted food. For example, if



hot dogs inadvertently are left unrefrigerated overnight, they should be discarded rather than risk a food-poisoned patron the next day. Not only would such a customer leave your theatre with a "bad taste" about the theatrical experience, your local health department might take a dim view of your whole concessions operation as well!

No Cheating!

To counteract your patrons feeling cheated by high prices, make sure that the candy you are selling for 95 cents is larger than the one they can buy at the grocery store for 25 cents. Rather than out-right markups, you can increase concession stand profits

significantly by monitoring your yields, as mentioned earlier, and by issuing employee guidelines on butter, cheese, popcorn oil, and drinks. If you do not have company policies regarding these areas, perhaps you, as the manager, should take a closer look at your concession stand. Are four squirts of butter on that medium-size popcorn really necessary...or would two be satisfactory? Is there a large oil residue in your popcorn popper at the end of the night? Maybe your employees could use less. Try to maintain a good balance between the prices you charge and your need to have saleable products at your concession.

MANUAL MISSTRESS...MONEY MISSTRESS...

(ABOUT YOUR CREW)

One for the Money

The ticket cashier is the first person your patrons meet. Their initial impression of your theatre is made at the box office.

Is your box office well-lighted and organized? Are the prices and showtimes posted prominently? Is your box office locked and secure? The money that changes hands at your theatre box office is the "proof of the pudding" for millions of film production dollars. It is this money that keeps the production-distribution-exhibition pipeline filled. Therefore, the cashier's job at your theatre should be performed by only your most conscientious and efficient employees. Cashiering is definitely NOT the spot for new trainees.

Cashiers must have excellent math aptitude for multiplying ticket numbers and prices, be able to make change, work quickly to keep the line moving, AND be courteous and friendly. Keeping a smile on your face is not always easy when your hands and mental computer are traveling 100 mph! But it is vital to your survival that inaccuracies are minimized in ticket selling. A \$1 deficit per day, for instance, multiplied by the number of screens in the United States amounts to a daily loss of more than \$25,000!

And don't forget to lavish praise upon the people responsible for a cashbox that balances to the penny with the box office reports at the end of a busy Saturday. It's really quite an accomplishment.

Maybe your more skilled cashiers could lighten your load a bit by assisting with ticket inventories and weekly box office reports. Their abilities are naturally suited to these areas, and it could provide them with the upward mobility within the theatre that they may desire.

Two for the Show

The usher at the box is charged with tearing the ticket after the patron purchases it. Make sure this person is friendly and always has clean hands. The ticket box post, literally, is in the center of theatre activity; it offers a



good vantage point from which to observe other employees, possible patron jams at the box office or concession stand, or any other action in the lobby, auditorium entrance, or arcade areas. If you (the manager) take advantage of this observation post during peak people periods and send your usher to help with concessions, please make sure he or she is not dripping with butter when returning to ticket box duty—save the butter for the popcorn.

Many theatres have specific policies about the patron retaining the ticket stub. If you want them to do that, or if they will be asked to present it at some future time during their stay, they must be made aware of it. You should post a sign to keep the ticket and also have your usher remind them as the line moves along. If a customer has just spent \$10 at the concession stand and inadvertently dropped his ticket stub while shuffling food and drinks, he certainly will not appreciate being denied admittance to the theatre. If you expect a certain behavior from your patrons, tell them!

Usually, the lobby usher is responsible for directing patrons into lines, maintaining crowd control, and reprimanding rowdy children. Because the job requires a high degree of "people guidance," the usher should be a tactful and nonabrasive sort of individual to attain optimum results.

Three to Get Ready

There are three key phrases to instill into the minds and hearts of your long-suffering concessionists:

1. Please
2. May I help you?
3. Thank you

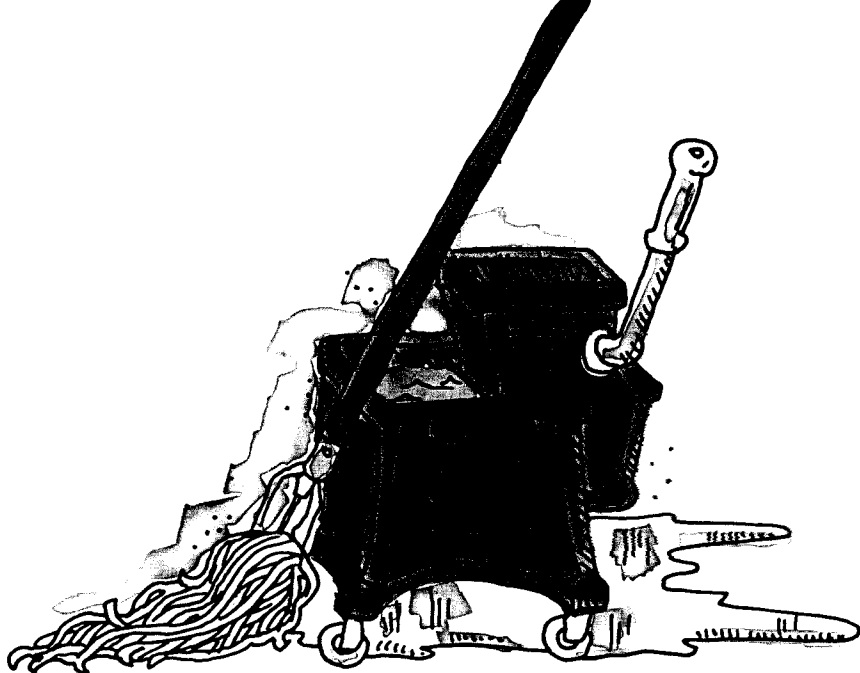
In short, courtesy and helpful attitudes go a long way toward overshadowing the occasional chaos that sometimes befalls even the most organized concession crew.

In all successful food operations, cleanliness goes hand in hand with courtesy. Cleanliness begins with a spotless and well-stocked concession counter. Although maintaining this level of perfection during peak traffic periods is next to impossible, simply having towels on hand with which to wipe up unexpected spills will help. Extend the cleanliness concept throughout the area: Concessionist uniforms and hands, adequate trash receptacles around the stand, employees regularly checking the drinking fountain for dirt and debris, and keeping the floor free of litter and spills.

If you serve hot dogs or similar foods, be aware that the condiment area is a prime target for spills and buildup of napkins and paper. And when it comes to popcorn accidents, the kiddie matinee crowds have no peer. Patrons can be messy too, but in a service facility such as your theatre, the cleanup responsibility is on the staff and, ultimately, the management.

Although it takes time and hands-on experience to be a quick, efficient, and knowledgeable concession employee, it takes only a few minutes to learn the "Two C's": CLEANLINESS and COURTESY. If you hire and train your concession crew with these qualities in mind, you have taken a giant step toward insuring a pleasureable experience for your customers to "Keep 'Em Coming Back."





Clean Counts!

Don't forget to schedule a thorough concession-stand cleaning at least once per week when the theatre is closed. A clean work area (in addition to the obvious health and safety benefits derived from keeping a food-service area immaculate) makes for a happier employee who, in turn, is more likely to smile at the customer instead of snarling or being discourteous.

Take a closer look at your food operation; you can keep profits moving upward without disturbing your customers. Remember, without customers (patrons) your theatre wouldn't be open at all.

Merchandising

Next, let's take a look at selling merchandise inside the theatre. Offering movie posters, records, books, and film-related merchandise certainly can improve your net profit, and can dress up your theatre and provide a real showman's backdrop for the picture you're showing. But providing this type of merchandise for your customers puts you into the area of retailing, not unlike your local discount or department store. Although you are not selling on as grand a scale as these more traditional outlets, remember these few retailing "basics;" any one of them can help make a sale:

1. Make sure merchandise is displayed attractively and is free of dust. Nothing is so tell-tale about slow-moving merchandise as a veil of dust blanketing its surface!
2. Keep the merchandise close

enough so the customer can see it, but not close enough to soil or damage it, or, worse yet, sneak it away without paying for it!

3. If you offer a variety of merchandise, get a display case or section off a small display area in the lobby and have someone staff it during peak hours to maximize your sales. Creative use of available space can help you maintain a good profit profile for each location.
4. Make sure posters and other gallery art are dust-free and have price tags prominently displayed.
5. Hold staff meetings regularly to familiarize your employees with new merchandise, methods of selling, how they should ring up purchases, and the proper way to package items for customers. Since this type of retailing does not take place in all theatres, help your employees understand how they should deal with customers by offering some type of employee sales training program (especially if you are setting up your retailing area for the first time).



Move Over, Penny Arcade!

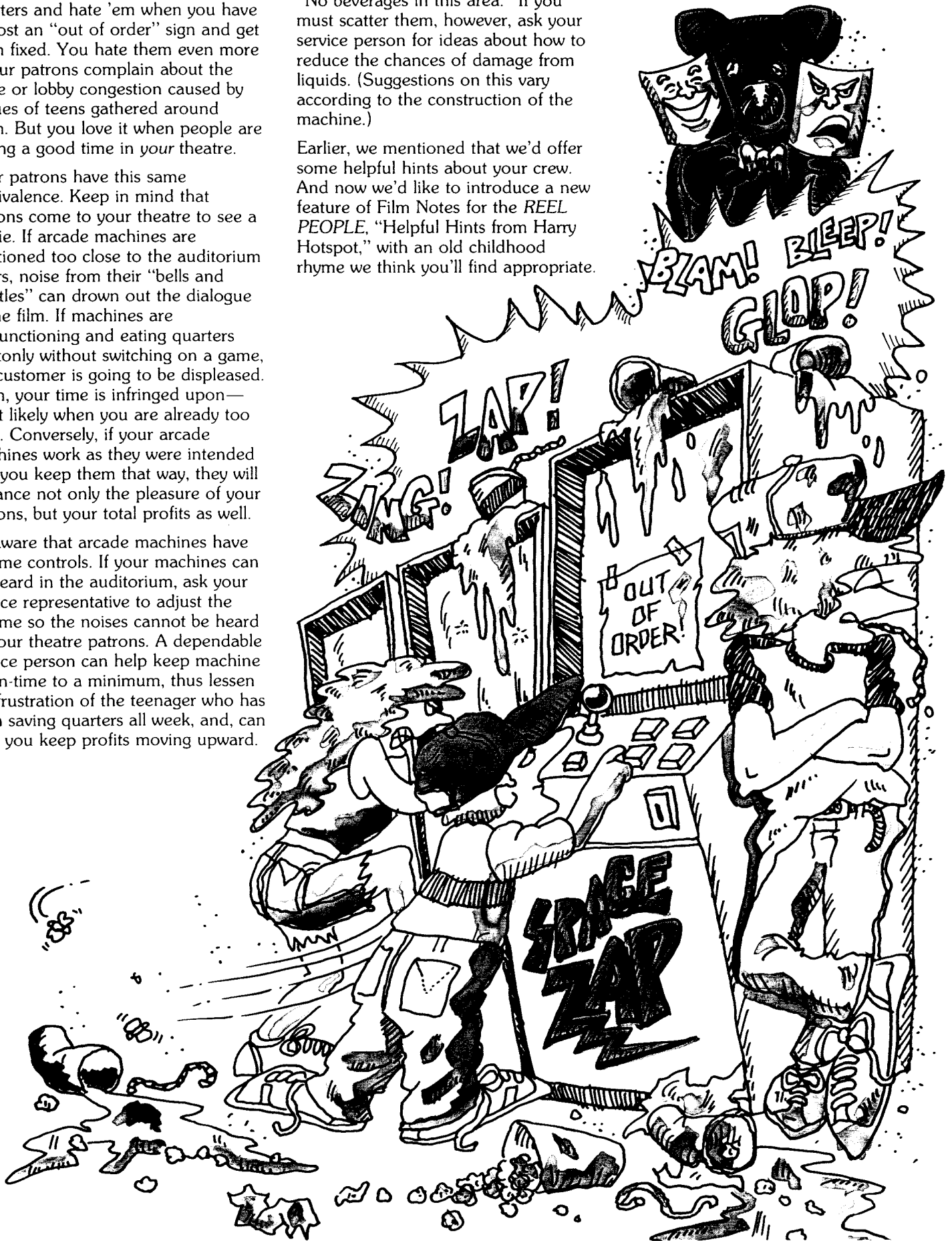
Finally, let's look at the love-hate feelings toward arcade machines. You love 'em when they're filled with quarters and hate 'em when you have to post an "out of order" sign and get them fixed. You hate them even more if your patrons complain about the noise or lobby congestion caused by cliques of teens gathered around them. But you love it when people are having a good time in your theatre.

Your patrons have this same ambivalence. Keep in mind that patrons come to your theatre to see a movie. If arcade machines are positioned too close to the auditorium doors, noise from their "bells and whistles" can drown out the dialogue of the film. If machines are malfunctioning and eating quarters wantonly without switching on a game, the customer is going to be displeased. Then, your time is infringed upon—most likely when you are already too busy. Conversely, if your arcade machines work as they were intended and you keep them that way, they will enhance not only the pleasure of your patrons, but your total profits as well.

Be aware that arcade machines have volume controls. If your machines can be heard in the auditorium, ask your service representative to adjust the volume so the noises cannot be heard by your theatre patrons. A dependable service person can help keep machine down-time to a minimum, thus lessen the frustration of the teenager who has been saving quarters all week, and, can help you keep profits moving upward.

Spilling of soft drinks is a major cause of arcade machine malfunction. If possible, put all your machines in one area and post a large sign that says "No beverages in this area." If you must scatter them, however, ask your service person for ideas about how to reduce the chances of damage from liquids. (Suggestions on this vary according to the construction of the machine.)

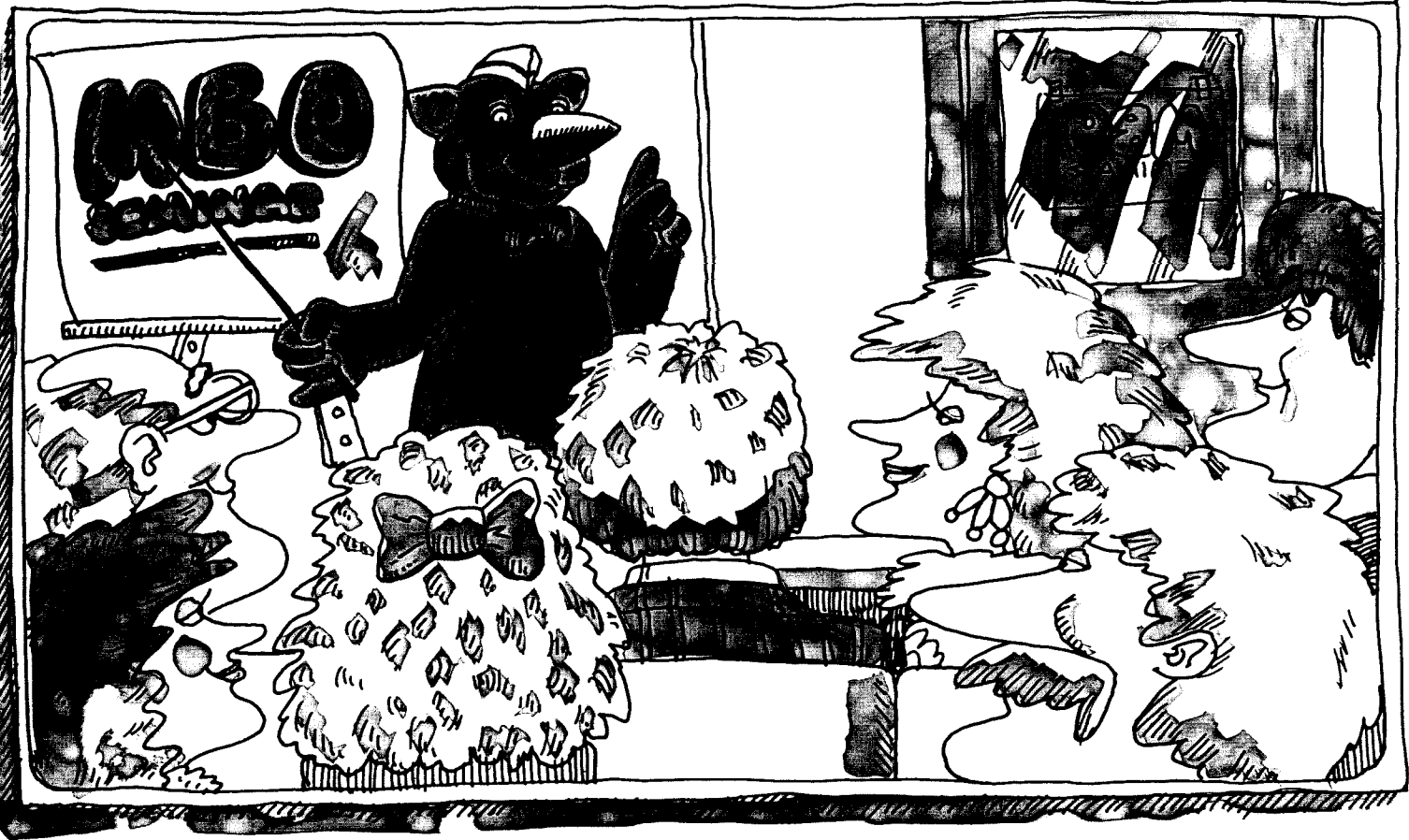
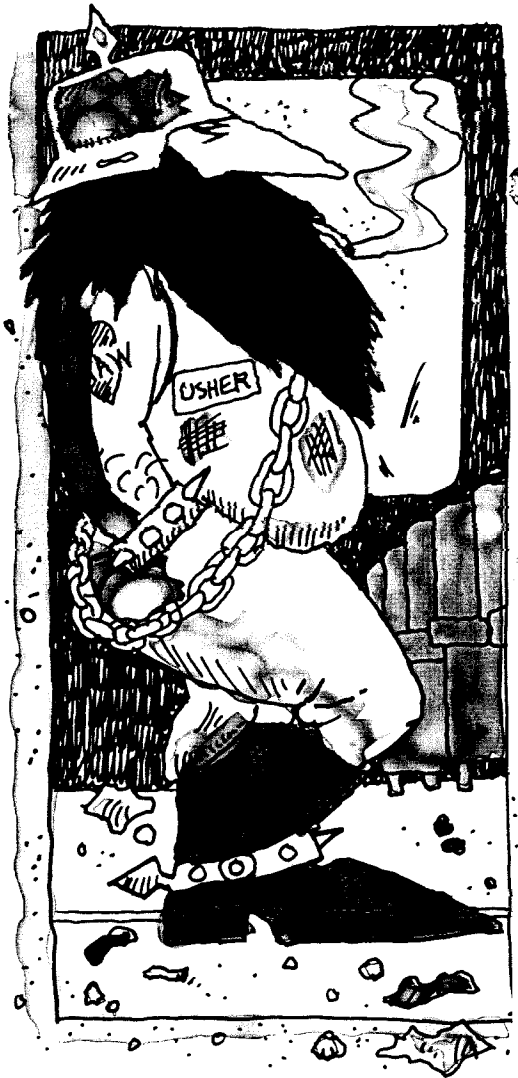
Earlier, we mentioned that we'd offer some helpful hints about your crew. And now we'd like to introduce a new feature of Film Notes for the REEL PEOPLE, "Helpful Hints from Harry Hotspot," with an old childhood rhyme we think you'll find appropriate.



THEATRE USHER

Your patrons have purchased tickets, popcorn, candy, and drinks, and are about to embark upon their final destination; the theatre auditorium. At this point, the theatre usher may greet them to check their tickets, or may be more actively involved by moving patrons toward the center of the rows to make more seating at the aisle ends. Either of these endeavors approach sensitive areas in customer relations because they are being asked to accommodate a request they may not wish to perform. Once again, as with the lobby usher, the attitude of the employee is most important. These ushers must be diplomatic, yet firm in adhering to established policies.

But the theatre usher's job is only beginning when the show starts. The **MOST CRUCIAL TIME** in keeping your customers is at hand; your feature presentation. Kodak addresses this topic in the company's traveling field seminar, Management by Observation, or MBO. It is a refresher course designed to enhance management awareness of sound and visual problems that can detract from the showing of your film. A "crash course" in some of these concepts would be appropriate in assisting your theatre usher perform his job. Instruct him that, at the start of each performance, he is to stay in the auditorium for several minutes to be sure that the film is in focus, that the sound is at the proper level, that exit door lights or noisy fans are not distracting, and that all patrons in the theatre are being quiet. Make your employees aware of any problem that could deter your patrons from returning to your theatre. Establish a regular cleaning procedure to be followed between presentations. Have them check the screen for dirt or debris when they go up to close the exit doors. Have enough ushers available to keep the floors clean and free of sticky candy wrappers and syrup.



Hold a staff meeting on patron safety. A darkened auditorium can be the site of hidden hazards: broken seats, loose carpet, slippery aisles, etc. Your ushers can be your "eyes" between shows to avoid the accidents and liability these unseen problems could create.

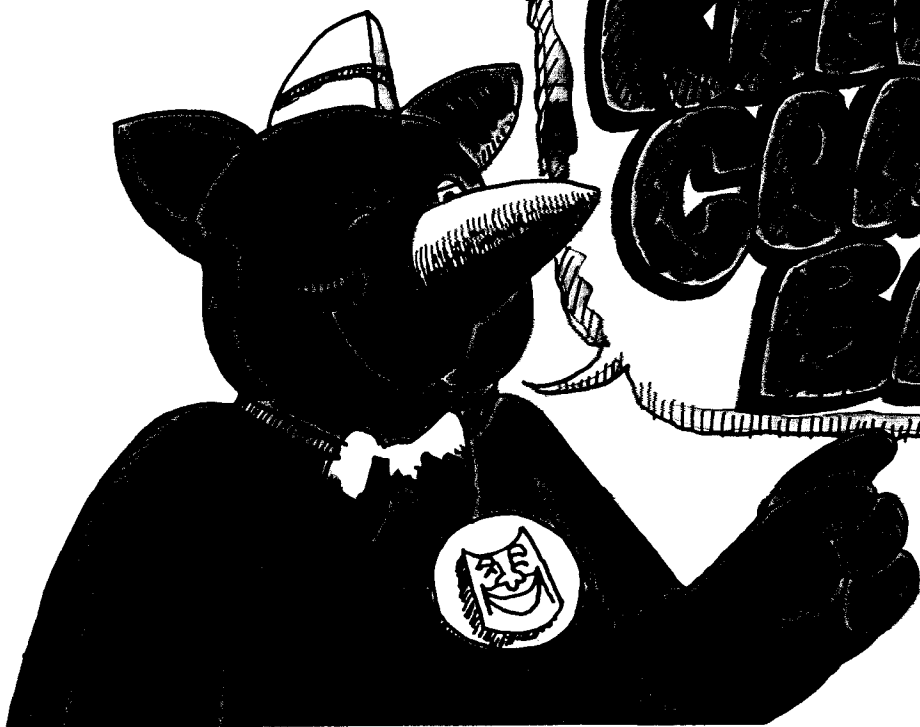
"Helpful Hints from Harry Hotspot" is intended to give you a quick overview of the importance of every cog in your wheel of theatre operations. Remember that your business is only as strong as the weakest cog. If you have tips and techniques, or ideas that you would like to share with your fellow theatre professionals, or if you would like to know more about our MBO seminars, we'd like to hear from you! Write to

Eastman Kodak Company
Film Notes for the *REEL PEOPLE*
Rochester, NY 14650
Attn: "Harry Hotspot"

As a theatre manager, maintaining a certain amount of objectivity on your operation might be difficult at times. Try to step away from it once in awhile by taking a Saturday night off, grabbing the arm of your favorite companion, and heading for the theatre to see a movie. Forget that it's your theatre. Eat the popcorn—play "Kangaroo"—see the movie. Experience the entire scenario as your customer does. Then ask yourself: "Would I want to come back to this theatre? Is there anything that might be improved?" Be your own worst critic.

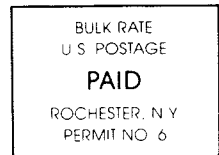


...THEN YOU'RE WELL ON THE WAY TO...



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