

Focus group
by
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INT. A BLAND CORPORATE BOARDROOM. DAY. EARLY MARCH, 1999. 1

Jody Bryant, a 23 year old chubby woman sits in a chair. She stares at an interviewer (Victor Breen, 47) who is behind the camera. He is a bland, balding corporate executive who is slowly selecting candidates for a new focus group. We never see Victor on-camera, except for bits of his arms, his hands, and maybe the back of his head.

VICTOR

I'm going to ask you some questions to see if you fit our profile for our upcoming Consumer Focus group. Okay?

JODY

Is there a trash can in here?

VICTOR

Uh...a waste paper basket, yes...right over in the corner, I believe.

JODY

I had to drop the kids off at my mom's and Kerry had to be changed, and I got a stinky diaper in my purse that I just gotta get rid of, you know?

VICTOR

Yes.

Jody takes out a dirty, rolled up diaper and drops it in the waste paper basket in the corner.

JODY

My whole purse stinks now. Even my cigarettes stink. Like smoking poo.

VICTOR

Are you ready now?

JODY

Ask away.

VICTOR

Can you give me three uses for a phone book, other than the obvious?

JODY

To look up phone numbers.

VICTOR

Other than the obvious.

(CONTINUED)

1 CONTINUED:

JODY
To look up addresses.

VICTOR
Give me three other uses.

JODY
To sit on?

VICTOR
Okay.

JODY
As a step-ladder.

VICTOR
Yes.

JODY
A rain hat.

VICTOR
Very good.

CUT TO:

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Two hours later. Victor is still behind the camera. Bob Dallas, a 30 year old CITY Bank executive sits in the chair.

BOB
Are we almost done here? Because the Colts game starts at four.

VICTOR
I just have a few questions left before the screening process is complete. If you could invite any dead person to your home for dinner, who would it be, and why?

BOB
They wouldn't be able to eat dinner if they were dead.

VICTOR
That's your answer?

BOB
Yes.

(CONTINUED)

VICTOR

Well then, let's suppose this dead person could eat dinner. Who would you invite?

BOB

Then they'd be a zombie.

VICTOR

Fine. They're a zombie. Which zombie would you invite?

BOB

Robert Guillaume from "Benson". No, wait. Is he dead? I think he's still alive.....ummm...The guy who played Captain Stuebing on The Love Boat.

VICTOR

Why?

BOB

He's a captain.

CUT TO:

INT. A BLAND CORPORATE BOARDROOM. DAY.

An hour later. Victor is still behind the camera. Being interviewed is Anne Boudry, 58, a housewife from Indianapolis.

VICTOR

I want you to tell me the first thing that comes into your mind after I say something.

ANNE

Standing in line at the drugstore.

VICTOR

I didn't say anything yet.

ANNE

Yes you did.

VICTOR

No I didn't.

ANNE

Yes you did.

(CONTINUED)

3 CONTINUED:

No, I... VICTOR

You did. ANNE

I..... VICTOR

You did. ANNE

..... VICTOR

Yes you did. ANNE

CUT TO:

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Thirty minutes later. Victor is interviewing Walter Pincon, 22, a gas station attendant.

What is your favorite music? VICTOR

The radio. WALTER

What music on the radio is your favorite? VICTOR

Songs. WALTER

Can you be more specific? VICTOR

Radio songs. WALTER

CUT TO:

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Thirty minutes later. Victor is interviewing Mario Ginelli, a 35 year old landscaper, who lives with his mother.

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VICTOR

You're on a journey along a forest path.
You come upon a bear. Describe it, and
how you'd get around the bear.

MARIO

Can it be a cartoon bear?

VICTOR

It's your journey.

MARIO

Okay, it's a cartoon bear.

VICTOR

How do you get around it?

MARIO

I turn the cartoon off and go eat dinner.

CUT TO:

INT. A BLAND CORPORATE BOARDROOM. DAY.

Thirty minutes later. Victor is behind the camera
interviewing Rain Digby, a 28 year old female yoga
instructor.

VICTOR

If you were to come back to Earth in
another life, what would you come back
as, and why?

RAIN

A dandelion.

VICTOR

Why?

RAIN

I want to be blown and spread all over.

VICTOR

I have to stop this interview now.

CUT TO:

INT. A BLAND CORPORATE BOARDROOM. DAY.

Two days later. There are 7 large chairs seated around
the table. Seated in the chairs are Jody, Bob, Anne,
Walter, Rain, and Mario. Victor sits at the end of the
table.

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There are information kits on the table in front of each chair. A jug of water and 7 glasses are in the middle of the table. A clock on the wall ticks loudly.

VICTOR

Okay. I think it's time to begin. Does everyone have their name tags on?

The group responds "yes", some saying it, some nodding their heads.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

Good. As you can tell by my name tag, my name is Victor. Let me start by welcoming you all here to the Consumer Focus group. We will be looking at a variety of products and other things, and my job is to facilitate discussion and move the process forward. I am called the facilitator. You of course, are called the focus group.

WALTER

What do we do?

VICTOR

That's a good question Walter. Your job is to tell me what you like or don't like about what I show you.

WALTER

Which is it?

VICTOR

What?

WALTER

Do we tell you what we like? Or do we tell you what we don't like?

VICTOR

Both.

WALTER

That's kinda confusing, isn't it?

VICTOR

Why don't we get right to it, and it'll sort of explain itself as we go along.

JODY

Do we get a bathroom break?

(CONTINUED)

VICTOR

You need to go to the bathroom?

JODY

No. I might later though.

VICTOR

We'll see how fast we can get through this, okay? Which reminds me, all the information presented to you today is strictly confidential. You can't tell anyone about what you see.

ANNE

Can we talk to each other?

VICTOR

Yes. I meant anyone outside the room.

BOB

Just tell them to go away and stop bothering us.

VICTOR

Who?

BOB

Those jerks outside the room. I'll tell them myself, if you like.

VICTOR

No, there's nobody outside the room.

MARIO

How do you know? You haven't left the room.

VICTOR

Believe me, I know.

RAIN

I think before we start, we should all hold hands, close our eyes for a moment, and feel each other's breath.

Pause.

BOB

(to Victor)

Do we have to?

VICTOR

Why not? Let's just do it quickly and move on. We have a lot to cover today folks.

They all hold hands around the table, and close their eyes for a moment, and breathe. Bob is the only person who keeps his eyes open. After a moment of silence, Victor speaks to the group.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

Now, let's begin our focus group with looking at a new business product: the staple-less stapler. Please pass it along so everyone can examine it carefully. What are your reactions to this product?

BOB

How do we know it works?

VICTOR

Go ahead and try it.

BOB

Yeah right.

VICTOR

In front of everyone is an information kit regarding all the things we'll be looking at today. Grab two pieces of paper from the kit and try the product out.

WALTER

That's nuts.

VICTOR

Really folks, we encourage you to test the items you'll be seeing today. That's what you're supposed to do.

BOB

What the hell.

Bob staples two pieces of paper together. He passes the stapler along to Anne.

ANNE

I feel uncomfortable just looking at it.

Anne passes it over to Jody, who staples something and passes it around the table. The rest of the group tries out the product as Victor asks questions.

(CONTINUED)

VICTOR

Let's go around the table and hear what everyone else has to say about it. Anne? Let's begin with you.

ANNE

Well, I'm offended by it. A staple-less stapler. What's next? A news-less newspaper? Wine-less wine? The world is going to hell in a handbag.

VICTOR

Bob?

BOB

I like it, but I don't understand it.

VICTOR

Jody?

JODY

I like real staples. Like, I used to do a lot of postering, to make some extra cash, and how are you going to put up posters on a telephone poll without real staples? It's stupid.

VICTOR

Rain?

RAIN

I think it's good for the environment because it's not producing little metal things made from iron ore, and if you cut down on mining iron ore, that saves the environment and stops global warming. So, I like it.

MARIO

But you need two pieces of paper to make it work, and that means more trees being cut down.

RAIN

I don't like it then.

VICTOR

Mario?

MARIO

I like it because it's different. And I think we should celebrate differences.

CONTINUED: (5)

VICTOR

Walter.

WALTER

It's like a magic trick, isn't it? I don't know...magic scares me.

VICTOR

The majority of the group has had a negative reaction to this product. Let's move on.

Victor holds up a cell phone.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

This is a cell phone with a digital camera built into it. You can talk and take pictures at the same time.

Victor passes it around the table.

CUT TO:

INT. A BLAND CORPORATE BOARDROOM. DAY.

Ten minutes later. All the members of the focus group have examined the product and are now making their assessments.

C.U. OF MARIO.

MARIO

I think it's kind of kinky, kind of sexy. You know, you could be talking to your boyfriend, if you had a boyfriend, and you're just coming out of the shower, and you can send him a picture, and my god, he'll be over to your apartment in a New York minute.

C.U. OF JODY

JODY

A lot of times I'm in Safeway, and I'll call my mom and say, "The liver doesn't look too good.", and she'll say, "What does it look like?" And I'll try and describe it, but I can't, and I'll bring it home and my mom will have to throw it out because it's a grey color. Now I can send her a picture and she can tell if it's grey right away.

9

C.U. OF BOB

9

BOB

I like it. I can send pictures of my ass to my old dorm buddies, and talk to them at the same time.

C.U. OF ANNE

ANNE

I think it's entrapment. It's another way for the police to trick unsuspecting innocent people. They claim my husband Don is a regular caller to a phone sex hotline, and this would be another tool they could use to hurt him and embarrass my family.

C.U. OF WALTER

WALTER

I could talk to my hunting buddy Tom Black, when we're out lookin' for deer, 'cause we're always fifty yards apart when we're in the bush, and I could shoot the deer, talk to Tom, and take it's picture, all at the same time. It's cool.

C.U. OF RAIN

RAIN

When I channel past lives, I get visions a lot, and this is exactly like that, only for 19 dollars a month, and with better reception.

VICTOR

A resounding yes. Moving on. A Unicorn-Making Kit.

CUT TO:

10

INT. A BLAND CORPORATE BOARDROOM. DAY.

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Ten minutes later. All the members of the focus group have examined the kit. It contains diagrams, instructions, and a video tape. Victor addresses the group.

(CONTINUED)

VICTOR

As you've seen from the instructional video, this kit shows how to make a unicorn by clamping together the two front horns of a six week old goat. Then you train the goat to act as a guard animal for your home.

C.U. OF ANNE

ANNE

I have been married to my husband Don for thirty years. We've been through a lot. His affair with Cindy, his dental technician. All the prostitutes. The internet chatrooms. The porn. And last year we had a home invasion. They took our stereo and Don's little black book of "special business contacts". A guard unicorn wouldn't have saved our lives and it certainly wouldn't have gotten Don's book back. It probably would have eaten it. I think it's a terrible idea.

C.U. OF MARIO

MARIO

I think that taking one animal, physically altering it to look like another animal, and training it to act like another animal is cruel and maybe... illegal? I'd rather get a cat.

C.U. OF WALTER

WALTER

My boss says that unicorns are mythical creatures. I sure as hell don't want a mythical creature guarding my home. Like how would they let you know if someone's in the house? And anyone can grow a horn. My cousin Andy did a few years ago. I just don't like it.

C.U. OF JODY

JODY

I think it's a great thing. Why the hell not? Just as long as it doesn't poo in the house. And at Easter, we could use it as a pony ride for the kids in the back yard. Sign me up.

C.U. OF RAIN

RAIN

I picture myself riding on this beautiful mythical beast, naked, in the moonlight.

MARIO

It's a goat. Its hair is matted and full of fleas, and it stinks.

Pause.

RAIN

Then no.

C.U. OF BOB

BOB

I don't have a problem with the cruelty part, and robbing it of it's purpose in life, but a guard animal? Come on. You'd be better off with an M-16. That's what I have, and I've never been broken into.

VICTOR

Very well. The group has spoken. The Unicorn-Making Kit is rejected. Next. Selection of the President of the United States, for the term 2008-2012.

The Focus Group starts to discuss various presidential candidates. The camera pulls back behind a mirror on the wall to reveal it is a two-way mirror, and the entire proceedings have been observed by two men in shadows. The men watch the focus group members as they debate their choices. The two men smile with evil. The camera slowly fades to black.

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