

The West Wing Weekly  
1.18: Six Meetings Before Lunch  
Guest: Ann Kline

[Intro Music]

HRISHI: You're listening to The West Wing Weekly. I'm Hrishikesh Hirway.

JOSH: And I'm Joshua Malina.

HRISHI: Today we're talking about Season 1, Episode 18 "*Six Meetings Before Lunch*."

JOSH: It aired originally on April 5th, 2000. It was written by Aaron Sorkin and directed by Clark Johnson.

HRISHI: All right, let me give a little synopsis here...

JOSH: I'm excited. This is new Hrishi synopsis?

HRISHI: [affirmative noise]

JOSH: Now be honest, you pre-wrote this, or you're--

HRISHI: No--

JOSH: --freestyling it.

HRISHI: I'm freestyling right now.

JOSH: Wow! Brave.

HRISHI: In this episode, Zoey goes to a frat party and her friend is arrested for drug use. They think he's a drug dealer, and C.J. has to deal with trying to keep it out of the press. The confirmation of Judge Mendoza--now Justice Mendoza--finally comes through, and Josh has to talk to a civil rights lawyer about statements he made about reparations. Sam has his flirty debate with Mallory about school vouchers, and Mandy tries to get Toby to help her get some pandas for the National Zoo.

JOSH: That was a remarkable live performance. I applaud you.

HRISHI: Thank you.

JOSH: Well done!

HRISHI: So, it's called "Six Meetings Before Lunch"-

JOSH: What are the six meetings?

HRISHI: What are the six meetings?

JOSH: [laughs] Yeah, I don't have the diligence that you have, because you probably tried to count through... somewhere in there my eyes glazed over and I thought, 'I can only think of two meetings that are happening.' [laughs] I know Sam and Mallory meet. And they meet cute, and they have their little official work time flirtation/argument/conversation.

HRISHI: "Six Meet-Cutes Before Lunch" sounds like a Katherine Heigl movie.

JOSH: Yes it does!

HRISHI: I mean, this is the thing, what are you going to count as a meeting? Is it when someone makes an appointment and then they have to go see that person? There's either fewer than six or way more than six. Because C.J. alone meets with Zoey, Danny, Gina Toscano, Sam, and the President. That's just C.J.'s day.

JOSH: That's five, if you can come up with just one more we can maintain that the title is about C.J.

HRISHI: Yeah. That's it, that's all I got.

JOSH: I think she had one more off screen meeting.

HRISHI: [laughs] Right...

JOSH: Hence the six meetings before lunch.

HRISHI: Yeah, but then you've got Mallory and Sam; Josh and Jeff Breckenridge, the lawyer; and Mandy and Toby... I don't know. Doesn't add up. I was wondering where that "Six Meetings Before Lunch" title comes from. If somebody has an accurate count...

JOSH: I was going to say, that's the kind of thing--why think through it ourselves? Throw it to the viewers, there'll be nineteen responses within five minutes of the podcast going out.

HRISHI: All with different math.

JOSH: Yeah. I was mainly--forget about the number of meetings, I just wanted to see lunch!

HRISHI: [laughs]

JOSH: I wanted to know what they were serving.

HRISHI: So we start this episode with the confirmation--or what might be the confirmation--of Mendoza.

JOSH: Well it seems to be what everyone in the White House, everyone on the White House staff, takes it to be the slam dunk roll call to confirm Mendoza and we find a dour Toby insisting that no champagne be popped, no drinks be poured, before the fifty-first 'yea' is called out on the floor. A little superstitious is Toby Ziegler.

[West Wing Episode 1.18 excerpt]

*TOBY: Fifty-one yea votes is what we see on these screens before a drop of wine is swallowed! Because there's a little thing called what, Bonnie?*

*BONNIE: ... Tempting fate?*

*TOBY: Tempting fate is what it's called.*

[End excerpt]

HRISHI: And I applaud his superstition.

JOSH: You don't like popping champagne early.

HRISHI: No, I hate being superstitious but I also can't help it.

JOSH: Yeah, I've got all sorts of that stuff, too. I do a lot of 'poo-poo.' Do you know what 'poo-poo' is?

HRISHI: I'm... sure. It's one of our sponsors? [laughs]

JOSH: It's [laughs] Oh that's a good point!

[both laugh]

JOSH: That is almost too on the nose! There's a Jewish thing where if you mention anything good. Like, were you to say, "Judge Mendoza is going to be confirmed as an associate justice of the Supreme Court today." Somebody would immediately say "poo-poo." You either say that or you actually spit. And my understanding is you ward off the evil eye. Anytime you mention something good that's happening or appears to be happening, you then have to just create something bad that happens. You just spit, or you say "poo-poo" and it's like "OK, that bad thing happens and now the good thing isn't not going to happen."

HRISHI: It's like knocking on wood.

JOSH: It is, right. I think knocking on wood refers back to knocking on a cross. So the Jews had to come up with their version and for some reason they said, "We'll just spit. We'll just spit or say 'poo-poo.'"

HRISHI: There's a thing that my mom does and other Indian aunties. All Indian women who are your mom's age or so, you know, give or take twenty years, they're all aunties. So when they're

trying to ward off the evil eye, they do a thing. It's specifically if someone's going to like, cast an evil eye on someone to protect them, they do this thing where they put their hands against your face and then--it's actually really gentle and quite affectionate--they crack their knuckles on the side of your head.

JOSH: Ooh... I've never heard of that one, I like it.

HRISHI: It's really, uh... I used to love it so much, I would ask my mom to do it.

JOSH: And any idea? What the thinking behind that is?

HRISHI: Uh... [chuckles] I don't--I'm not sure what the thinking was, but you know, when I was seven I thought it was fantastic.

JOSH: Is there any vestige? Cause I will, now as a middle-aged Jew myself say, I say "poo-poo" all the time... "Oh, call me, you know, when your plane lands safely, 'poo-poo,' gimme a call."

HRISHI: Ok! [laughing] You say that?

JOSH: Yeah, I'm sure my kids love that.

HRISHI: Well... My mom still does it to me every now and then.

JOSH: Oh, well there you go.

HRISHI: So there's that.

JOSH: Do you have any superstitious stuff?

HRISHI: I have so many! I am plagued by superstition.

JOSH: So gimme... toss something out.

HRISHI: Oh, they aren't... they aren't like, codified *real* superstitions. They are things where I'm like, "Oh... I did well on this math test by sitting in this chair, therefore I must sit in that chair again." That kinda dumb stuff.

JOSH: Yeah... no, well we got a little bit of that from Dulé, you know. "The first audition went well, I better wear the same clothes."

HRISHI: Right. But there's at least some reasoning in that, right? They liked you in those clothes, so...

JOSH: I guess you're right, there's at least a modicum of sense to that.

HRISHI: Yeah. There are all kinds of weird Indian ones that my parents have foisted on me and now I'm... I take it back, there are some prescribed ones like: if you sneeze just before you

leave the house, you're not supposed to go? You're not supposed to leave right away? You're supposed to like... sort of recollect or something like that... so many of these, I don't even know what the real deal is, I'm just, I just... do them.

JOSH: Interesting...

HRISHI: And I'm universal. You wanna throw a superstition at me, I'll be like, "Yeah, there's probably something to it," and I'll do that.

JOSH: Well I'll know- [HRISHI laughing]

JOSH: I'll *know* that I finally had an effect on you when I hear you say "I had a good meeting today, poo-poo."

HRISHI: All right.

JOSH: [laughing] That will absolutely make my day if that should ever occur, but it has to be natural, it has to be organic.

[laughing]

HRISHI: Josh, I think your colonoscopy's going to go great, poo-poo.

[laughing]

JOSH: Wow. Again, too on the nose.

[laughing]

JOSH: All right, in any event! Toby's a little superstitious, but, as soon as the fifty-first 'yea' is heard, he uh... the champagne flows.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: And they have a little party.

HRISHI: Before they even pop the champagne, Bonnie and Ginger do such a great job of both humoring him and also [laughing] looking like they're suffering under him.

JOSH: Yeah, that's true.

HRISHI: And I love when Josh finally enters. First of all, his, "To-BAY!" as he walks in..

[West Wing Episode 1.18 excerpt]

*JOSH: To-BAYYY!*

*TOBY: Joshua.*

*JOSH: I brought some champagne.*

*EVERYONE: [moans] No...*

*JOSH: ...the hell?*

*TOBY: Ginger?*

*GINGER: 'Tempting fate.'*

*JOSH: ...OK.*

[End excerpt]

HRISHI: We also get a telladonna here, between Leo and Margaret.

JOSH: As to what? Refresh my memory.

HRISHI: Margaret doesn't know what reparations are.

JOSH: Oh... I don't remember that moment.

[West Wing Episode 1.18 excerpt]

*MARGARET: What was that?*

*LEO: An appointment to a justice post favors reparations to African Americans.*

*MARGARET: What for?*

*LEO: Capturing their ancestors and keeping them as slaves.*

*MARGARET: What kind of reparations?*

*LEO: Money.*

[End excerpt]

JOSH: Oh yeah, that... that...

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: That was rough.

HRISHI: So Margaret...

JOSH: ...not a U.S. History major.

HRISHI: [laughs] I guess not! This is one where I didn't know what the difference is between 2000 and 2016. I mean, in 2016 we are living in an age past Ta-Nehisi Coates and "The Case for Reparations," which I felt like was a pretty big deal and ended up winning him a lot of awards and got a lot of attention.

JOSH: This is the article in *The Atlantic* ?

HRISHI: That's right, his article in *The Atlantic* .

JOSH: I was thinking that this episode doesn't dig too deep into anything too political, but it gets closest on reparations and the conversation between Breckenridge and Josh Lyman. And so we might at least link to that article, which is an incredibly well-written and I think pretty persuasive argument for reparations.

HRISHI: In the episode there's a book coming out. It's called "The Unpaid Debt" by Otis Hastings.

JOSH: That Breckenridge has "blurbed."

HRISHI: But as that is not a real book, we'd recommend that you guys go to *The Atlantic* and we'll have a link to read, "The Case for Reparations," by Ta-Nehisi Coates. Even before that, I certainly knew what reparations were. I think my first introduction to it might've come from Spike Lee, because his production company is called Forty Acres and a Mule.

JOSH: Yes.

HRISHI: Which they explain the forty acres and a mule in this episode.

JOSH: They do reference... yeah...

HRISHI: But so even whenever 'Do the Right Thing' came out, sometime in the early 90's, I was like, "Oh, ok.." and that was kind of where I...

JOSH: Yeah. Well, I also, as a young Jewish boy, I was also aware of the concept...

HRISHI: Of course.

JOSH: Of *massive* societal wrongs being redressed in some way financially and, you know, reparations from Germany for Holocaust victims is a real thing, and Israel has received payments from the German government and was I think probably a significant part of German society also is starting to come to terms in a very real way with what had happened. And there are also ongoing attempts to get people's looted houses and money and bank accounts and property and art...

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: ...restored to them even today. So, I've always been sensitive to, and, you know, aware of the argument for reparations.

HRISHI: Yeah. So this telladonna to me felt too expository.

JOSH: Well, you know what, it's interesting, I'm glad that you brought it up because it speaks to me. There's a recurring issue I have with moments in *The West Wing*, where I can both appreciate their inclusion in this show, and yet, I feel talked down to at times. There are often moments--and sometimes it's a greater issue--but there are times when I think to myself, "There are probably people who needed to hear that," but for me as a viewer I feel a little bit condescended to because I feel like someone's saying, "Hey, you probably don't know what this is, but it's this!"

HRISHI: I totally get what you're saying.

JOSH: It gets *my* back up a little bit, but at the same time I'm thinking, "Well maybe this is good. Because there's probably also a fourteen-year-old kid watching this who's maybe going to say, 'Oh, yeah... oh that's what that is.'" And maybe they're going to Google it and they're going to learn more, so the ongoing civics lesson that is *The West Wing* also has great value, but sometimes it does work as a little bit of a hiccup in the flow or dramatic movement of an episode.

HRISHI: No, that's true, and it's completely subjective, because, there are obviously things that other people might find blatantly obvious that for me I was informed or educated or my mind was changed because of something that happened on this show and someone else would be like, "you didn't already know about that?" So, this just happens to be... you can pick and choose those moments.

JOSH: Yeah, that's true.

HRISHI: I have no problem with the moments where *The West Wing* goes broad in order to get as many people to watch and be involved as possible because that's only about ten percent of the time, and the other ninety percent it feels like it's just for me. And if that ten percent is what it takes in order to keep the show going and get all the money it needs? Let's... let's do it.

JOSH: Yeah. Well said, fair enough.

HRISHI: I think that the Josh and Breckenridge debate is so fantastic. Despite what I said about this introduction between Leo and Margaret, the way they handled that is everything that I want from *The West Wing*. I feel like with both that meeting and with the Sam and Mallory meeting, even though in that case the stakes are much lower, there's great debate. I loved it. And actually, another thing, speaking of stuff that they do that's for everybody, you know, we talked



about the music sometimes playing up the emotional aspects... now I'm jumping way ahead to the last scene of the episode...

JOSH: Jump away!

HRISHI: The music in general in this episode, I thought, was particularly good. When Jeff Breckenridge says to Josh to take the dollar out of his pocket and look at it.

JOSH: Mmhmm.

[West Wing Episode 1.18 excerpt]

*BRECKENRIDGE: You got a dollar?*

*JOSH: Yeah...*

*[music begins]*

*BRECKENRIDGE: Take it out. Look at the back. [music continues] The seal, the pyramid, it's unfinished. With the eye of God looking over it and the words: 'annuit coeptis.' 'He (God) favors our undertaking.' The seal is meant to be unfinished because this country's meant to be unfinished. We're meant to keep doing better. We're meant to keep discussing and debating, and we're meant to read books by great historical scholars and then talk about them, which is why I lent my name to a dust cover.'*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: That whole speech, it really moved me. And I don't know, this time it really, um... it affected me a lot. I think maybe because of all the tumult and discord and horrible things that are happening around the world, but especially around the conventions. I don't know, I've been feeling kind of distraught about America in general, and that speech about "We're meant to keep discussing" and "we're meant to keep debating," it really affected me.

JOSH: Yeah, no, it spoke to me as well and then, just within the framework of the show itself, it was encouraging to me that an encounter like this ended, I don't wanna say for the first time, but certainly it's been rare in the first season thus far, where an appointee or somebody that the White House senior staff has some sort of leverage over, gets to walk away having convinced them, you know, "Let me be me."

HRISHI: Right!

JOSH: That we've had so many opportunities and so many situations where they've really sort of tamped down their appointees or, you know, O'Leary is made to apologize to Wooden, and...

HRISHI: Mendoza's told he can't ride out the, you know, whatever demonstration he wants to make...

JOSH: Right. Political expediency is just again and again causing “our guys” to kind of tamp down the people that they’ve chosen, presumably because they trust their instincts and the way they want to conduct themselves and—at least this time--Breckenridge really makes the case and they go and they have lunch and we finally see, like, one of these guys who could’ve been kind of maybe pressured into, “Hey, you want this job? This is how you’re gonna do it.”

HRISHI: Right. You have to disavow this thing that you’ve said.

JOSH: Right, but instead he gets the go ahead, go be you.

HRISHI: Yeah, I love that Josh lost his cool during this debate, too. Jeff Breckenridge is so even-keeled throughout it--he doesn’t get mad. He’s talking about it intelligently and he doesn’t get steamed up the way that Josh does, and it’s interesting how well that those layers start to get built up, of Josh’s frustration over the conversation.

[West Wing Episode 1.18 excerpt]

*JOSH: While we’re on the subject of the Civil War, let’s remember the six hundred thousand white men who died over the issue of slavery.*

BRECKENRIDGE: Is that why they died?

*JOSH: It’s why a lot of them died, Jeff, and there’s no other place and time in recorded history where an event like that has occurred, so... let’s... leave it at that and move on, ok?*

...

*JOSH: Jeff, I would love to give you the money, I really would, but I’m a little short on cash right now, you see the SS officer forgot to give my grandfather his wallet back when he let him out of Birkenau!*

*BRECKENRIDGE: Well your beef is with the Germans!*

*JOSH: You’re damn right it is!*

[End excerpt]

JOSH: Yeah, yeah, it’s handled well, it’s acted well, by both of them: Brad and Carl Lumbly as Breckenridge. He’s also one of those guys who’s done I think really just hundreds of episodes of TV and who’s always good.

HRISHI: He was really--he’s so great in this.

JOSH: I certainly know him from many, many, many episodes of *Alias* ...

HRISHI: You know what made me laugh? When Sam is talking to Mallory, when she first confronts him about the position paper, she says:

[West Wing Episode 1.18 excerpt]

*MALLORY: Don't play dumb with me.*

*SAM: No, honestly I am dumb, most of the time I'm playing smart.*

[End excerpt]

HRISHI: I wrote down: 'Hey, it's us!'

JOSH: That's funny! I have similar thoughts all the time [both laugh] so, it's very well put. That did make me laugh out loud. They get more of very charismatic, funny, lovable Sam Seaborn.

HRISHI: They've really made the character evolve into somebody who I love.

JOSH: Yeah, and on the voucher side of things too... You could certainly question the fact that he could have allayed her fear with--before she even fully expressed her concern having read his position paper, he could've said, "This is just opposition prep." I mean, he really plays it out, but it does allow Aaron to write kind of both sides of an argument articulately, even though he puts them in the same actor's mouth, which is actually interesting. But I like when he--even when it's sort of clear where Sam and where the writer who's writing for him ultimately comes down on the issue, he wrote both sides convincingly and well.

HRISHI: I watched it twice before we talked, and the second time I was specifically looking for how he deals with not coming clean about what his actual position is, and there are at least a couple moments where it seems like he is about to tell her that, "This is just a thing that I had to do for my job," and both times--or, each time--she cuts him off and says something especially inflammatory? And then he feels like he has to just defend himself and it gets sidetracked and he never gets to have that moment where he says, "Oh this is something I had to do for-- [chuckling] I *had* to take the opposite side!"

[West Wing Episode 1.18 excerpt]

*Mallory: I thought we had something going on, Sam.*

*Sam: We do...*

*Mallory: And yet you haven't told me that you favor school vouchers?*

*Sam: I- first of all, hang on! We haven't been on a date yet!*

[End excerpt]

JOSH: Yeah. I like it... it's also I think edifying in a sense, as to his character, and really to all of them, that they like intellectual repartee and battle and you know, arguing for sport is something that's part of their daily job and they relish it.

HRISHI: Yeah, as much as they make out that Leo's trying to separate the two of them or drive a wedge between them, Leo does say:

[West Wing Episode 1.18 excerpt]

*LEO: When we're gearing up for a debate, we have the smart guys take the other side.*

[End excerpt]

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: So it's in a very, you know, unceremonious way--which in some ways make it have even more impact--that Sam's a smart guy.

JOSH: So is it time to talk about [chuckles] "The Jackal"?

HRISHI: No! No wait, wait, not yet, not yet! [laughter] because I need--

JOSH: [laughing] We need to build up to it?

HRISHI: Yeah, because I still have one more thing about this, which is, in terms of Leo driving a wedge between them: how many subplots can you have about characters dating their boss's daughter? In such a small cast?

JOSH: Several. [laughter]

HRISHI: Apparently more than one! You'd think that one would be all you could really get away with. And I would argue that that's true! [laughter] That that is all you can get away with.

JOSH: Ah! So which one do you accept? Charlie/Zoey?

HRISHI: Yeah, the Charlie/Zoey one, as we've noted before, that relationship is a lot more mature and clearly the stakes are much higher there. There are realities of race, and racism in America, while also getting all the like, fun, lovable moments of two characters with a lot of charisma interacting with each other.

JOSH: Right. Well, leave it to those two kids, they've managed to get a lot farther in their relationship than [laughs] Mallory and Sam have, who I think by the end of this episode still haven't, that we're particularly aware of, gone on their first date. I think--

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: I guess they've, we see them leave for lunch, but that's about it. Whereas Charlie and Zoey are already snogging in the hallway.

HRISHI: [laughs] Yeah, a really weird kiss.

JOSH: [laughs] What say we take a quick break and come back later. [break]

HRISHI: Ok, "The Jackal."

JOSH: Here we go. Did you have to watch horror movie like through a hand across your face? Or was that just me?

HRISHI: Yeah, I mean. There's no suspense because I've seen it so many times I know where all the scary parts are so I don't have to cover my eyes.

JOSH: [laughs] I want to say this, just overall, for me it's the whitest scene ever filmed since the signing of the Declaration in the film *1776*.

HRISHI: [laughs] I don't understand, there's so much I don't understand about what's going on.

JOSH: It's a uh--it's certainly the gift of GIF.

HRISHI: Yes.

JOSH: I mean, I know we can get some Rob Lowe up there, I think we can get Brad Whitford and his white man's overbite, hat's off to Allison herself. I enjoy her Jackal rendition, the surrounding white men ...

HRISHI: [laughs]

JOSH: ... and their attempt to sort of groove along – kinda hard to watch.

HRISHI: Really, it's Sam and Josh.

JOSH: [cross talk] Yeah.

HRISHI: They're the worst offenders I think.

JOSH: Certainly.

HRISHI: But I was always so confused just about the fact of it, it's built up so much before we actually even see it. "Oh she's going to do 'The Jackal,' she's gonna do 'The Jackal.'" And I didn't know what 'The Jackal' was, this is not a song that I'd ever heard in my life.

JOSH: Nor I. Nor since.

HRISHI: Right, nor in any other context. I actually talked to Ann Kline, the music supervisor for *The West Wing* about getting that song on the show.

[West Wing Episode 1.18 excerpt]

C.J.: [sung to a recording of "The Jackal"] Had a Ph.D in street stride. They called him 'The Jackal.'

[chuckles]

[End excerpt]

ANN: I'm Ann Kline, the music supervisor from *The West Wing* .

HRISHI: And what does a music supervisor do?

ANN: So basically the music supervisor deals with all the music issues in the production. So whether it's having to find a composer, doing deals, finding music that plays in the background of scenes, hiring artists to perform on camera – just any issue that involves music falls under our domain. So *The West Wing* was probably 50-50. There was so much that Aaron knew he wanted and would write into scripts, or he would see something that would inspire him, or he'd write to a song. So a lot of it was just helping him get what he wanted, and then there would definitely be times as well where we'd all work together to collaborate to figure out what made sense for a scene, or storyline, or whatever it was.

HRISHI: We're about to talk about episode 18, which is in some people's minds, most notable for "The Jackal."

ANN: [laughs] Yes.

HRISHI: What was your experience of working on that episode and with that music cue specifically?

ANN: I knew I'd heard about – that Allison Janney had done this in her trailer and then they said that they were going to put it in an episode and asked me to clear it. And I'd never heard the song and never seen her do it, and back then it wasn't so easy always to find the rights to songs or figure out, you know, what the song was or who owned the rights. But luckily, there's not a ton of songs named "The Jackal." But I know we didn't have a lot of time, and it was kind of like, "This is going to happen, and it's the whole scene so it has to work out, basically." And I remember being super nervous about it, but it was a pretty quick clearance and then it was awesome to go down to set and watch her perform it. But that just came from her knowing this song and everyone loved it.

HRISHI: It's kind of a random song, right?

ANN: Yes! I mean, had you heard of it before?

HRISHI: No, I never had. And I – but the way it was presented on the show, I felt like I *ought* to have.

ANN: Right, me too. And I feel like when things like that happen, and I don't know who came and told me about it, it might have been Tommy, like, "This thing she does is amazing, 'The Jackal!'" And you're almost embarrassed to be like, I don't know what "The Jackal" is, but I'm about to find out.

HRISHI: [laughs] Right, and it's like music is my job.

ANN: Right, I should definitely know this, but--never heard of it!

HRISHI: Well that makes me feel better about not knowing it myself, so – thank you so much.

ANN: Thanks, it was really nice meeting you, and I love your podcast.

HRISHI: Thanks a lot.

ANN: Ok, take care.

[musical excerpt of "The Jackal"]

HRISHI: So if Ann Kline doesn't know about what the song is and she's a music supervisor, I don't feel so bad.

JOSH: No, so at your behest actually, I reached out to Aaron Sorkin.

HRISHI: Oh yeah, because I saw this note that said that this was something that Allison really did. But when it came time to actually film the scene, she was too good at it and Aaron asked her to make it more awkward.

JOSH: Right, so you gave me that quote – I'm not sure where you found it – do you remember?

HRISHI: It was on Wikipedia.

JOSH: Oh, on Wikipedia it says, "Janney's performance of 'The Jackal' was deemed too good by Sorkin during initial production and she was advised to make it more awkward to fit the character for the final screen version." So I sent this to Aaron and said, can you confirm, deny, any further comment? And he said, 'it wasn't Allison, it was the director. I can't remember who directed the episode' – it's in fact Clark Johnson, apologies to Clark – 'but he originally staged 'The Jackal' as if he were doing a musical number on the show that had been rehearsed. When I came to watch the first set up, I saw that it looked like a Vegas act and explained that it was just meant to be someone lip synching late at night while the staff stood around and watched. It didn't have anything to do with the character being awkward; it had everything to do with our show not being a musical.'

HRISHI: [laughs]

JOSH: 'As you know, *The West Wing* frequently shot late on Friday nights and well into Saturday mornings' – Fraturday, we called them – 'and on Friday nights, Allison's trailer which

had been dubbed Café Flamingo, after C.J.'s secret service code name, became a hang out where cast and crew could get a cocktail during lighting set ups. On one such Friday night, I was in my office trying to start writing the next script. I was stuck and took a walk over to Café Flamingo. I walked in and Allison was doing 'The Jackal' while Richard tugged on a cigar in the corner. I waited until she was done and then went back to my office and wrote the teaser for "Six Meetings Before Lunch."

HRISHI: HA.

JOSH: Interesting right? Great response.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: One, to me the big revelation is apparently they would drink and then film.

HRISHI: [laughs] Right.

JOSH: Which strikes me as shockingly unprofessional. I've done it myself but only when I'm supposed to be drunk on screen. But apparently that was ok back in the 90s and the early aughts.

HRISHI: You didn't do that on Saturdays when you were on *The West Wing* ?

JOSH: No, not that I recall – I don't think so. I mean, I certainly, I've been to Café Flamingo.

HRISHI: Oh, you have, you knew that term.

JOSH: Yeah, but I wanna say, maybe I'm just protecting my own ass here, I don't think I ever drank before I was done shooting--possibly after. So, let me also first say, not to cast anything negative on Clark Johnson, these things sometimes happen. Usually in pre-production there will be what are called tone meetings, and I've never attended one myself because I've never directed an episode of TV. But each scene and beat of scene will get discussed in terms of what the writer, you know, in TV the writer is the ultimate creative person, and so you want to get what he or she wants on screen. So there would be what's called tone meetings, what's the tone of this. And sometimes things don't get discussed at as great length as they ought to and maybe there was a miscommunication of sorts where it seemed like this was more supposed to be like a number from *Glee* than from *The West Wing* . I have to say, Aaron's email leaves me wanting to see the first take of this scene.

HRISHI: [laughs] Right.

JOSH: I want to see what it meant with the more polished, rehearsed Vegas-y version of this scene.

HRISHI: Yeah. One thing I was thinking about when you were talking about Sam and how much these characters love intellectual debate and just are great at what they do. They give that same



kind of characteristic to the Secret Service. I feel like Gina says to C.J., “I’m looking at teenaged Nazis.” And she’s like, “Why?” And she’s like, “I’m on a break.” Even when she’s not working, she just loves what she does so much. It was nice that that passion extends outside of just the senior staff.

JOSH: Yeah, you’re right. That’s a very good point, that’s an Aaron Sorkin workplace. Whether it’s a sports show or a newsroom or a sketch comedy show or here at the White House, people come to work to do their best generally for the right reasons, they’re super dedicated, they’re good at what they do, they don’t loaf, they don’t drink during lighting set ups – oh I mean, the cast playing them does, but not the characters.

HRISHI: [laughs] I really liked the C.J. and Gina scene.

JOSH: I did, too.

HRISHI: It’s a short scene and a lot of the information that we get is stuff that had already been covered in that scene with Gina and the President on Air Force One where they talk about how she can’t disclose information about her protectee, but there’s something about their dynamic that’s so interesting.

[West Wing Episode 1.18 excerpt]

*C.J.: Gina, I’m the press secretary. There’s a story that Zoey’s involved with, and I need you to tell me what you know about last night.*

*GINA: I’m sorry C.J., I can’t protect her if she feels like she’s got to do things behind my back. I’m not permitted to discuss the behavior of the protectee.*

*C.J.: Ok. Thanks.*

*GINA: C.J., the thing with the reporter this morning. It was fast, it was physical, she’s nineteen years old, and she thought her father was in trouble.*

*C.J.: Ok. Thanks, I appreciate it. Sorry about--*

*GINA: No problem.*

[End excerpt]

HRISHI: I loved it.

JOSH: I thought the same thing too, it definitely caught my eye and my takeaway – I hope this won’t come out the wrong way – it struck me as a classically female interaction.

HRISHI: Hmmph.

JOSH: I don't want to paint with too broad a brush, but let's say that any other two male characters from this show had had that interaction, it probably would have left with hurt feelings and, you know, the press secretary would have been pissed off because this Secret Service agent wouldn't give him what he wanted. There's something to me, there's sort of like a, oh this is a better approach to things, where they are kind of circling each other, they're kind of staking out their territory, and they're making clear where the line is drawn. But they're also finding a little way to compromise and then the scene ends and they haven't alienated each other, they have a greater understanding of each other. And it even ends with them saying, hey, do you want to hang out with me during my break?

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: It's just like, there's something--

HRISHI: It's the most minor of power struggles.

JOSH: Right, where not every little thing doesn't have to get blown up into a very destructive moment.

HRISHI: Right, it's kind of the opposite of what happens with Josh and Jeff Breckenridge, where they are talking about something and Josh is like oh, let's talk about it in the abstract. And Jeff Breckenridge just says, no this is a real thing. But even as Josh talks about it in whatever abstract terms he frames it – he still gets so heated about it as if he's being personally attacked. He gets so defensive about the idea of reparations, even academically.

JOSH: Yeah, and Toby Ziegler screams all the time [laughs] at the slightest...

HRISHI: His arc in this episode is fantastic, the shortest good mood ever.

JOSH: Yes, I do like that opening sequence though where he's actually calling people by name. He's smiling, he actually chuckles, and it mainly gets bemused or nonplussed looks from the rest of the staff. This is not the Toby they're used to.

[West Wing Episode 1.18 excerpt]

*MANDY: You got two seconds?*

*TOBY: Madeline, you are charming and you are brilliant, and, for you, I have all the time in the world.*

*MANDY: What's with him?*

*GINGER: It's the day after his day of jubilee.*

*BONNIE: He never sustains a mood this long.*

*TOBY: Bonnie, you are dedicated and you are beautiful. And Ginger, you are other nice things.*

[End excerpt]

HRISHI: You know, he tells Mandy that he needs to snap out of his good mood, and she starts to tell him about the need for the pandas and the whole time while she's doing that, he's sitting there twiddling his thumbs.

JOSH: Oh, is he literally?

HRISHI: He's literally twiddling his thumbs, and I love that as he goes from his strange happy mood to his mood being completely deflated and he lets her know – well, that did the trick. He doesn't stop, like his body language doesn't actually change, his posture is the same, his little absent-minded twiddling of the thumbs is exactly the same. You only find out that things have changed by his voice and what he says.

JOSH: I felt bad for Mandy/Moira in this episode.

HRISHI: You know, one thing we didn't talk about actually, Josh, is that this is episode 18 and in episode 16 and 17, there was no Mandy. She didn't appear in two episodes.

JOSH: Yeah, you said we should discuss that, and you shot me an email saying hey we should have mentioned that. When I read your email, I hadn't noticed that she wasn't there in those two episodes.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: Judging from the amount of email and comments I've seen from people, it's one of the great enigmas of the show as to what actually happened – you know, we've got some theories. Donna and Josh, really their chemistry was sizzling in a way that Mandy and Josh's wasn't. And that she was a little bit of the outsider in that she's so focused on optics. But again in the end, I do find myself puzzled as to – I want to know the what really happened of it all. I don't know we'll get to the bottom of it when we finally drag Aaron in here, I don't know if he'll want to address it on mic but I am interested.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: There's a story there that I don't think anybody has shared publicly.

HRISHI: I've even, you know, on a couple of episodes, really tried to look for the best in Mandy and what the character is bringing. Trying to find the goodness or something in that character, even though she is so universally disliked and pointed out, oh, she's doing the right thing here, she's actually the voice of reason here. But yeah, it's really telling that we went two episodes without her and we didn't even notice it.

JOSH: And didn't see fit to comment on it.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: Well this episode she's really given not much to work with. We've got a discussion about reparations happening, a discussion about school vouchers, there are issues of white supremacy and death threats, there's a question of how properly to deal with an overly aggressive press, and then there's Mandy talking about getting another panda from China.

HRISHI: Right, and I would normally have no problem with that, even if there's part of the plot that's lighter--I'll tell you there's one exact moment where I was like, this is where I found Mandy to be really awful in a way that I hadn't really felt since the first couple of episodes. She's talking about the pandas and she says:

[West Wing Episode 1.18 excerpt]

*TOBY: That may have been Ping.*

*MANDY: Well whatever, Ping or Ling dies. Sing Sing mourns, panda bears, [chuckles] it turns out, mourn. And for Sing Sing, it seemed like the time was unendurable.*

[End excerpt]

HRISHI: And she chuckles while delivering that line. "Panda bears [chuckle] turns out mourn." And I was like, where is the humor in that?

JOSH: Damn. Oh you're tough, you really will not give her a break.

HRISHI: No.

JOSH: Man oh man, she thinks grief stricken bears are funny.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: [laughs]

HRISHI: It's like look at that, they mate for life and then they get said. [chuckles]

JOSH: Maybe she's nervous because nobody likes her. There are two pandas in Gail's fishbowl.

HRISHI: *Very* nice.

JOSH: I didn't even have to look it up at that great site that lists everything that's in Gail's fishbowl. I caught it myself.

HRISHI: I love both Toby and Josh's utter lack of knowledge and disdain for panda bears that Josh says:

[West Wing Episode 1.18 excerpt]

*JOSH: Little Australian thing eats the bark off the koala tree?*

[End excerpt]

HRISHI: And Toby says, get us two regular bears.

JOSH: A bucket of black paint and a bucket of white paint?

HRISHI: [laughs] Yeah, it's quite bear-ist of him.

JOSH: [laughs] That's true, you're not wrong.

HRISHI: To say that there are such a thing as regular bears and non-regular bears. But yeah, I wrote down, 'why chuckle about panda bears mourning? Arrgh.'

JOSH: Yeah I guess so, I didn't even pick up on it.

HRISHI: It was, for me, reminiscent of – like that was the exact moment when I was like I'm done with Mandy. Sort of like in the Simpsons when Ralph gives the valentine to Lisa and then later on when she rejects him, Bart is going through the tape and says:

[ *The Simpsons* Episode excerpt]

*BART: Watch this, Lis, you can actually pinpoint the second when his heart rips in half.*

[Ends excerpt]

JOSH: So Mandy is dead to you now.

HRISHI: I'm done with her. I like this George Washington book that the President is reading.

JOSH: I didn't like though that it started with a big close up of the perfectly legible title of the book, and then Charlie comes in and asks, whatcha reading?

HRISHI: [laughs]

JOSH: I know, like we don't have to hear the title, we know, but I guess Charlie is not watching the show, so I withdraw the comment.

HRISHI: Okay. [laughs] I really like the, I don't know that it's like a ha-ha moment, but I find it incredibly funny cerebrally this exchange when C.J. comes in and President Bartlet reads to her the little passage from the thing. He says:

[West Wing Episode 1.18 excerpt]

*BARTLET: C.J.!*

*C.J.: Mr. President.*

*BARTLET: When in company, put not your hands to any part of the body not usually covered.*

*C.J.: Well, I do what it takes to keep the press corps happy, Mr. President.*

*BARTLET: Yeah, you're right.*

[End excerpt]

HRISHI: It's really not on the nose. Like, you have to think about it for a second.

JOSH: Yeah, what was she thinking? No, it's very funny.

HRISHI: It's so good.

JOSH: You're right, he's a good writer – that Sorkin.

HRISHI: I love that. Yeah, you're right. But this is another great scene where C.J., having been bucked up by Sam who tells her to stay in the President's face, she actually goes and she does it. He's all riled up and he's ready to call the press into the briefing room, and C.J. actually raises her voice, she yells at him.

[West Wing Episode 1.18 excerpt]

*C.J.: [yelling] You can't talk to the press.*

*BARTLET: Watch me.*

*C.J.: I'm telling you now, Mr. President, this isn't about your daughter, it's about the First Daughter, and that's my job and you're not going down there. You, me, Charlie, and Zoey are the only four people who know she was lying and there's no reason it doesn't need to stay that way. It's a non-story! You go down there and it's a big story.*

[End excerpt]

HRISHI: And there again, is like a power struggle that she's thrust in the middle of and it goes beautifully. Again, it gets resolved in this really nice way, she does what she's supposed to do--

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: --she gets in his face, she talks him down.

JOSH: Turns out Sam's advice to her was actually fairly sage advice. It is what she needed to do, and she acquits herself very well in that scene.

HRISHI: Yeah and you get the full validation of it too, I think, when – the way that the President says thank you to her at the end. When she finishes yelling at him and then he says, “Thank you, C.J.”

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: All in all, I really liked this episode. Again, it’s one of the small stakes ones, but I love these - the little moments, the daily life.

JOSH: These are the ones that I tend to like more too. And that’s it for this episode. I hope you’ll join us next time, in the meantime you can leave a comment, a question, or just your own particular take on why you don’t like me at [thewestwingweekly.com](http://thewestwingweekly.com) or on our Facebook page.

HRISHI: [facebook.com/thewestwingweekly](https://www.facebook.com/thewestwingweekly)

JOSH: As always, you can reach us on Twitter – Hrishi is @hrishihirway, I’m @joshmalina.

HRISHI: Ann Klein is @theannkline.

JOSH: And the show itself is @westwingweekly.

HRISHI: And if you want to get your own West Wing Weekly pin, you can go to [thewestwingweekly.com/pin](http://thewestwingweekly.com/pin) and check them out. They’re really pretty.

JOSH: Oh Hrishi, oh Hrishi. I’m having a revelation. Two people run into each other and notice that they’re each wearing a lapel pin, there should be something you do.

HRISHI: Oh yeah.

JOSH: I don’t know what it is, we have to think about it. Maybe we’ll come up with it for next time.

HRISHI: Turn around three times, spit, and say, “poo-poo,” yell flentl, and then run away.

JOSH: Wow, that is a lot more elaborate than I was thinking but sure, ok. We’ll see if we get any reports of that.

HRISHI: [laughs] But please, if you run into somebody with a West Wing Weekly lapel pin while you are wearing yours, take a picture, send it to us. That’d be great.

JOSH: There you go.

HRISHI: Ok.

JOSH: Ok.

HRISHI: What’s next?