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Taking Care Of Business Movie

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Rediscovering the 90s Classic: A Deep Dive into Taking Care of Business Movie

Released in 1990, **Taking Care of Business**is a comedy film that perfectly encapsulates the energetic, aspirational spirit of its era while delivering a timeless message about identity, ambition, and the value of human connection over material wealth. Directed by Arthur Hiller and starring a young James Belushi and Charles Grodin, the film presents a hilarious and heartwarming tale of swapped identities and unexpected friendships. As we revisit this underrated gem, it becomes clear that its charm lies not just in its comedic set pieces, but in its surprisingly sharp commentary on class, work-life balance, and what it truly means to "take care of business."

Plot Overview: A Tale of Two Suits

The film wastes no time establishing its central premise. Spencer Barnes, played by Charles Grodin, is a high-powered advertising executive on the verge of landing the biggest account of his career. He is organized, meticulous, and utterly consumed by his work. On the other side of the social spectrum is Jimmy Dworski, portrayed with manic energy by James Belushi. Jimmy is a convict serving time in a minimum-security prison, but he has a singular obsession: he must get out to watch the final game of the World Series featuring his beloved Chicago Cubs.

When Jimmy discovers a forgotten business card in a phone booth, he decides to impersonate Spencer Barnes. He walks into Spencer's life, checks into his luxury hotel suite, and begins to take over his appointments and responsibilities. The comedy of errors that unfolds is a masterclass in situational humor. Jimmy, the free-spirited felon, must navigate the cutthroat world of high-stakes corporate negotiations, while Spencer, trapped in the prison Jimmy left behind, is forced to confront a life without his phone, his agenda, or his identity.

The parallel narratives drive the film forward. Jimmy uses his street-smarts and unconventional charm to win over clients and colleagues, revitalizing Spencer's career in ways Spencer never could. Meanwhile, Spencer, stripped of his status, learns to rely on his wits and discovers a more grounded, human side to himself. The film cleverly uses the physical exchange of a Filofax planner—a symbol of 80s corporate culture—as the catalyst for this profound, albeit comedic, transformation.

The Stellar Cast and Their Dynamic Performances

The success of **Taking Care of Business** rests squarely on the shoulders of its two leads. James Belushi, fresh off his success on *Saturday Night Live* and in films like *About Last Night...*, delivers a performance full of improvisational energy and physical comedy. His Jimmy Dworski is a lovable rogue; he is manipulative for his own ends, but he possesses a genuine warmth and a desire to help those he meets. Belushi makes the character's transformation from a selfish convict to a reluctant corporate savior feel authentic and earned.

In stark contrast, Charles Grodin brings his signature deadpan, exasperated style to the role of Spencer Barnes. Grodin is a master of playing the straight man, and his growing frustration and gradual humbling in the prison environment provide the film's emotional anchor. Watching him attempt to explain his predicament to skeptical prison guards or bond with inmates over their shared love of baseball is genuinely touching. The chemistry between Belushi and Grodin is palpable, even though they share very little screen time until the film's climax. Their final confrontation and eventual mutual respect form the heart of the movie.

Supporting performances from Veronica Hamel as Spencer's wife, Elizabeth, and a young **Gates McFadden** (of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* fame) as a business associate add depth to the world. The film also features a memorable cameo from late-night television host Merv Griffin, a nod to the era's celebrity culture.

Themes and Cultural Significance

Beneath its comedic surface, **Taking Care of Business** explores several themes that remain remarkably relevant today. The most prominent is the critique of corporate obsession. Spencer Barnes is a man who has everything materially but has lost his connection to his family and his own happiness. He spends his days managing "the big picture" but cannot manage his own life. The film asks a simple but powerful question: if you are a success at work but a failure at life, are you truly taking care of business?

This theme resonates strongly in the modern context of hustle culture and the burnout epidemic. The movie advocates for a more balanced approach, suggesting that true success involves personal fulfillment, time with loved ones, and the ability to enjoy life's simple pleasures, like a baseball game. Jimmy Dworski, despite his criminal record, is in many ways the wiser character. He knows what he wants and understands the value of joy and freedom.

Another significant theme is the fluidity of identity. Both protagonists discover that they are not defined by their circumstances or their jobs. Jimmy proves he can be responsible and strategic when he chooses to be, while Spencer discovers he can be spontaneous and compassionate when forced to step outside his comfort zone. The film suggests that our identities are more flexible than we often believe, and that a change in perspective can unlock hidden potential.

Script and Direction: Balancing Comedy and Heart

The screenplay, written by **Jill Mazursky Coen** and **Jeffrey Abrams** (who would later become the blockbuster director known as J.J. Abrams), is tightly constructed. It sets up its comedic situations with precision and pays them off effectively. The humor is derived from character and situation rather than relying on cheap gags. The fish-out-of-water scenarios for both leads are mined for maximum effect, from Jimmy trying to close a business deal while suffering from a hangover to Spencer learning to make a bed in prison.

Director Arthur Hiller, a veteran of classic comedies like *Love Story* and *The Hospital*, brings a professional, unobtrusive style to the film. He trusts his actors and allows the story to unfold naturally. The pacing is brisk, with a runtime of just over 100 minutes, ensuring that the narrative never drags. Hiller also manages to balance the film's comedic and heartfelt moments, ensuring that the emotional beats land without becoming saccharine.

The film's title itself is a clever play on words. The phrase "taking care of business" initially seems to refer to Spencer's corporate ambitions. However, as the story progresses, its meaning shifts. By the end, it is clear that the real business is taking care of oneself, one's relationships, and one's personal happiness. This thematic evolution gives the film a depth that many similar comedies of the era lack.

Production Anecdotes and Creative Choices

Taking Care of Business is very much a film of its time, and its production reflects the sensibilities of the late 80s and early 90s. The film's aesthetic is defined by the power suits, big mobile phones, and the ubiquitous Filofax planner. The use of the Filofax as a symbol of corporate status is a perfect period detail. In 1990, this was the ultimate status symbol for a busy professional; losing it was akin to losing your entire life, a concept the

film exploits brilliantly.

The film was shot on location in and around Los Angeles, adding a sense of realism to the corporate and prison environments. The scenes at the fictional advertising agency are filled with the vibrant, slightly garish colors and large-scale artwork that defined the decade's design sensibility. The prison scenes, while played for laughs, have a gritty edge that prevents them from feeling entirely cartoonish.

Interestingly, the film's original title was *Filofax*, but it was changed to *Taking Care of Business*for its North American release to make it more accessible to a wider audience. In some international markets, it was still released under the original title, which shows how central the planner was to the film's original concept.

Reception and Box Office Performance

Upon its release in August 1990, **Taking Care of Business**received mixed to positive reviews. Critics praised the performances of Belushi and Grodin but sometimes found the premise to be too formulaic. Roger Ebert noted that the film "works because of the chemistry between its two leads and its willingness to be a simple, good-natured comedy." It holds a moderate approval rating on review aggregation sites, with many contemporary viewers appreciating its nostalgic charm and comedic pacing.

At the box office, the film performed respectably, grossing over $20 million domestically against a production budget of approximately $15 million. While it was not a blockbuster, it was considered a solid commercial success, particularly on home video. The film found a second life on VHS and cable television, where its breezy tone and quotable dialogue made it a popular choice for weekend viewing. For a generation, it became a staple of afternoon cable programming.

The film's legacy is that of a beloved cult classic. It is frequently rediscovered by new audiences who appreciate its simple, effective premise and the charisma of its leads. It stands as a time capsule of a specific moment in American culture, just before the economic boom of the 90s gave way to the more cynical, irony-laden comedies of the late 90s.

Similar Films and its Place in Comedy History

Taking Care of Business belongs to a long tradition of identity-swap comedies. It shares DNA with films like *Trading Places* (1983), *The Prince and the Pauper* adaptations, and later films like *The Family Man* and *Freaky Friday*. However, it distinguishes itself by having both protagonists actively participate in the swap. Unlike *Trading Places*, where the characters are manipulated by outside forces, Jimmy actively chooses to steal Spencer's identity, while Spencer is forced to adapt to his new circumstances. This gives the characters more agency and makes their growth feel more earned.

The film also anticipates the themes of *Groundhog Day*(1993) in its focus on a man learning to appreciate life's small pleasures after being forced to live a different way. While it lacks the metaphysical elements of that classic, it shares a similar humanistic core. It is a feel-good movie that earns its sentimentality through genuine character development.

For fans of 90s comedies, **Taking Care of Business**is an essential watch. It captures the optimistic, slightly naive energy of the pre-internet era, a time when a misplaced planner could change your life and a baseball game was a worthy cause for escape. It is a reminder that comedy can be both lighthearted and meaningful, and that sometimes the best way to take care of business is to forget about it for a while.

Final Verdict: Why You Should Watch It Today

In an age of high-concept, often cynical comedies, **Taking Care of Business**offers a refreshing dose of pure, unpretentious fun. It is a film that believes in the fundamental goodness of people and the possibility of change. James Belushi and Charles Grodin deliver career-defining performances that elevate a simple premise into

something genuinely charming and memorable. The film's message about prioritizing relationships over work is more poignant than ever in today's always-connected world.

Whether you are a fan of 90s nostalgia, a lover of classic comedies, or simply looking for a movie that will leave you with a smile, this film is well worth your time. It is a gentle, funny, and surprisingly insightful look at two men who help each other become their best selves. They both learn, in their own way, that the most important business to take care of is life itself.

In conclusion, **Taking Care of Business**may not be the most famous comedy of its era, but it is certainly one of the most endearing. It successfully blends slapstick humor with genuine heart, creating a film that is as enjoyable today as it was in 1990. If you have not seen it, take a trip back to a simpler time and let Jimmy Dworski and Spencer Barnes teach you a lesson about what really matters. It is a movie that, like a good vintage, only gets better with age.

Frequently Asked Questions About the Film

- Who directed Taking Care of Business? The film was directed by the legendary Arthur Hiller.
- Who wrote the screenplay? The script was written by Jill Mazursky Coen and a young Jeffrey Abrams (J.J. Abrams).
- What is the movie's original title? It was originally titled Filofax before being renamed for its theatrical release.

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