WANT TO HELP? EMPLOY THE AUTISTIC

By JOANNE LARA

Want to Help? Employ the Autistic

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The biggest company in the San Fernando Valley — in fact, in the entire Los Angeles area — is the Walt Disney Co. So it’s increasingly disheartening to see the company continue to fumble with ESPN, which is the biggest chunk of Disney’s biggest division. A few years ago, I might have been inclined to chalk up Disney’s missteps with ESPN to executive misjudgment. The more chronically disheartening pattern for me is the deeper, long-term disappointing portion of Disney’s generally disappointing earnings report last week. Subscribers have been leaving from ESPN since its peak in 2011, and lately that leak has widened. It’s not quite a screen-wipe effect, but it’s getting there. Worse: Disney doesn’t appear to know what to do with ESPN. If you cup your ear to hear Disney’s campaign to alienate half the audience apparently will continue. And any move to join the cord cutters and stream more sports is a decision to get into a low-margin business that will hurt the high-margin cable franchise. It reminds you of that old television commercial in which an older woman growls, “I’ve fallen and I can’t get up!” — ESPN — the biggest piece of the Valley area’s biggest company — has fallen. And Disney appears flummoxed about how to get it back up.

On the other hand, Disney just pulled off a coup for its television network.

ABC announced early this month that Ryan Seacrest would be the permanent co-host with Kelly Ripa on the “Live! With Kelly” morning show. That was immediately intriguing because it brought up the possibility that Seacrest could move his reality show powerhouse, “American Idol,” to ABC. As you may recall, “Idol” ended its long run last year on the Fox network. Last week, it was reported that yes, “Idol” is moving to ABC.

What will “Idol” do for ABC? Well, as others have pointed out, the show’s lowest-rated season ever its 15-year run on Fox would make it ABC’s second-worst-rated show today. What’s more, “Idol” will be a nice complement to ABC’s “Dancing With The Stars” and “The Bachelor/Bachelorette.” In Seacrest, ABC got much more than just a partner for Ripa.

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