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Lesson From Reality TV In 'The Apprentice'

By SARAH E. NEEDLEMAN

NBC's new reality show, "The Apprentice," is far from a realistic portrayal of what it's like to compete for a job. But M.B.A. students and university career counselors who watched the first episode say it can offer viewers some valuable interviewing tips.

The weekly show has 16 20-something professionals competing for the chance to earn a six-figure salary as president of one of billionaire Donald Trump's companies. Of course, in the real world, interviews don't last for so long (13 episodes equal to about 13 days); competitors aren't expected to share living quarters; and they aren't under the microscope of a TV camera. Like on other reality television shows, one player is singled out for elimination from the game at the end of each program. "Everything is magnified to unbelievable proportions," says Heather Johnson Huntley, assistant director of the Raisbeck Career Center at Iowa State University's College of Business in Ames, Iowa.

The Reality of the Reality Show

That aside, the contestants experience interview blunders and successes akin to those of other job hunters. Here are four lessons that can be learned from the first episode:

1. Be professional at all times.

Occasionally job interviews extend beyond the office to places such as restaurants. In these settings, some candidates erroneously shed their professional demeanor, says Huntley. "Even in a social situation, you're still being observed," she says. In the show, when some candidates visited Trump's luxury Manhattan penthouse, and one repeatedly exclaimed, "This is so rich!" Huntley says that while the candidate wasn't speaking directly to Trump, there was a chance he'd learn of her behavior because she was speaking to the camera, so her words were inappropriate.

2. Remember who's in charge.

In one scene, a contestant interrupted Trump to argue a point and the real-estate magnate upbraided him for the disruption. Bob Greenberg, director of career services at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville, who is a fan of the show, says this rebuke wasn't just Trump's ego talking. "Always recognize what seat you're in. Never interrupt the person who's in the power

position," he says.

3. Exude confidence:

"No matter how desperate you are, you don't want to show it [in a job interview]," says Victor Madrigal, a second-year M.B.A. at the University of San Francisco's Masagong Graduate School. "Employers look for confidence in a candidate." One contestant learned this lesson the hard way. When the candidates competed in teams to sell lemonade on Manhattan sidewalks, he jumped in front of a passing bicyclist clutching a "for sale" sign. Later, he told Trump that sales wasn't his "forte." The candidate was the one who was "fired" at the end of the program. Theresa Burke, a first-year M.B.A. at the University of Chicago Graduate School of Business, offers a better way to make the point: "While sales isn't my forte, here's what I can bring to the table..."

4. Think creatively.

One contestant tried charging \$1,000 for a glass of lemonade in exchange for a chance to be on TV. Greenberg says the gambit, though unsuccessful, was worthwhile. "It showed that this guy has self-confidence and initiative and that he was really thinking outside the box," he says.

-- *Sarah E. Needleman is associate editor at CollegeJournal.com.*

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