



## The Apprentice' gets an 'A' from an expert

Reality TV show is educational, a career coach says

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By CHERYL HALL / The Dallas Morning News



Karyl Innis thinks Donald Trump's *The Apprentice* is outstanding educational TV.

And no, the career coach and chief executive of The Innis Co. in Dallas isn't sleep-deprived delusional.

"You have to think of *The Apprentice* as a training video and an extremely interesting one from a number of perspectives," says Ms. Innis. "Both executives and peer groups can learn from the antics and tactics of these young executive wannabes."

For the uninitiated, Mr. Trump calls his show a "13-week job interview" in which 16 original applicants (now down to 11) vie for the "dream job of a lifetime" as his protégé. The winner gets \$250,000 for a one-year gig.

Millions – although not as many millions as NBC had hoped for – watch on Thursday nights to see young overachievers perform strange assignments and to find out which unfortunate The Donald will ax next.

I found the concept about as real life as eating slugs on a deserted island. So I asked Ms. Innis, who mentors executives on career strategies and handles outplacement for such clients as J.P. Morgan Chase and Blockbuster Inc., to give her impressions.

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Just what can we glean from watching people sell lemonade in Manhattan or run a themed restaurant for a night?

Ethics, teamwork, leadership and the lack thereof, she says.

Before last night's episode, it was men vs. women. But the male team lost all four previous tests and were down to a lopsided four against eight, so the guys and gals got shuffled together.

### **Ethics questions**

So were the women better at teamwork?

Hardly, says Ms. Innis. There's been plenty of equal opportunity backstabbing and cliques being formed. The women were more on target with their overall game plan, but in each test they used their looks and gender to an unfair advantage.

For example, to boost profits at a Planet Hollywood, the women focused on increasing bar revenue, which has the highest margins. They bounced sales by 31 percent compared to a paltry 7 percent by the guys.

"An outstanding victory," she allows, then adds, "The ethical problem is how the women achieved that. They wore their tightest T-shirts, started drinking with their customers and had their customers buy them drinks. It's one thing to encourage your clients to spend more on beverages and food and quite another to increase tabs by buying for you."

The guys weren't exactly ethical either. One posed as a sports personality giving autographs – although he never actually claimed to be a star.

"That's another important point: You can be unethical and still lose," Ms. Innis says.

"This snippet could lead to a wonderful training conversation of how far you should go to lead people to appearances that are different from the truth. That happens in business all the time."

### **'You're fired'**

Ms. Innis says Mr. Trump should have fleshed out the goals. "A leader needs to build a fence around the values he or she wants used."

Generally, though, she gives the real estate tycoon high marks for leadership. "He explicitly states the goal before the task, evaluates the performance, seeks input about who did not help reach that goal and then does the dirty work himself."

But, she said, his trademark "You're fired" line might be great TV but is too blunt for the real world – and could easily get you sued.

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As for lessons for managers: "Most executives will be shocked at how little it takes to have a team stray so close to the ethical edge," she says. "They need to know bright employees need clear direction, too."

Ms. Innis knew within minutes that David, the M.D. and MBA, would never make it through the first night's show.

"He's living proof of my 'Smart But Theory,' " which is a phrase she's trademarked.

"David was fired because he didn't connect with his peers, didn't understand the mission, and his intellectual capital was worthless to his team," she says. "He tells the camera while he's leaving in the taxi that he takes 'solace' in the fact that he was the smartest. And I'm thinking, 'Yeah you're the smartest, but you're the first to go because you're the most expendable.'

"That's an incredible lesson for young people in the workplace."

### **More to know**

Some other lessons:

- Being popular only goes so far. Performance counts. Arlington resident Bowie Hogg, who was offed in the fourth round, was amiable but did nothing to distinguish himself.
- Leaders should be picked based on their "followship" abilities, not just what they know. Someone who knows marketing doesn't necessarily make the best chief of an advertising campaign.
- Everyone in an organization is responsible for sales.

"These teams are learning that you have to know what your client wants," Ms. Innis says. "What a surprise!"

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