



# So, you wanna be a STAR?

FANCY YOURSELF AS A MASTERCHEF? WHAT ABOUT THE NEXT IDOL? WELL, NOW THERE'S A SCHOOL FOR ASPIRING REALITY TV CONTESTANTS. SHANNON O'MEARA SIGNS UP

**W**HOS popping? What's popping? Whatever it is, you've got to pop somehow!" Robert Galinsky, the founder of The New York Reality TV School (NYRTVS), explains over-enthusiastically in my first lesson towards reality television fame.

Yes, I'm at a school that trains people to become reality TV "stars" – and it's being inundated with students. In the US there are two channels devoted entirely to reality programs and more than 100 such shows in existence. *American Idol*, *The Amazing Race*, *America's Next Top Model*, *Dancing With The Stars*, *The Apprentice*, *Big Brother*, *Project Runway* and *The Hills* are just a few with huge followings and highly competitive casting processes.

And so, for \$225 for a group session of two hours, or \$500 per hour for a one-on-one tutorial, you can learn the six commandments of Reality TV School – which include Speak In The I, Have No Barriers and (not surprisingly) Say Yes As Often As Possible. You're also provided with reality mentors and an array of "life skills" to assist in a successful audition.

"Confidence, authenticity and knowing your story are the keys to making it," says Galinsky, a stand-up comedian and acting coach who radiates far too much energy. "You have 30 seconds with a casting director. It is a microcosm of a show. If you can give them really specific, honest and outrageous reality, they know they can expand that over a period of seven to 10 weeks."

Doesn't the school take the "realness" out of reality television?



Screen test: you could make it with the help of reality TV school

"I'm not telling them to say anything that isn't already real," Galinsky, who has watched far too much of the genre, reassures me. "Unscripted television, it's coerced and it's manipulated."

When I tag along to a private NYRTVS tutorial in Brooklyn, I quickly discover just how much of a serious business it is...for some. Leo Fernekas, 45, an inventor, is taking the class in preparation for an audition on the Discovery Channel. "I want to be

a more focused presenter and reach my audience," Fernekas explains. Although he recognises the toxic nature of reality programs – "putting yourself in a meat grinder" is how he describes it – he is extremely self aware. "I like being recognised as an intelligent, creative person – I seek that," he says.

Fellow student Anne Johnson, 21, is a reality TV wannabe who took the skills she picked up in class, applied them during her auditions and is now

waiting to hear back from third round castings for *The Real World*. "It wasn't about being taught how to be real, it's about knowing what's interesting about you," she insists.

Galinsky has coached doctors, street sweepers, boxers, firemen, models and farmers, and now has a corporate reality arm to the school. The breakdown of his classes tends to be 50 per cent actors (who see it as a new way to break in to the industry and

expand skills), 30 per cent "delusional and desperate – they seek fame", and 10 to 20 per cent come in with a talent or skill they're hoping to maximise.

The school prides itself on preparing students for all the gritty elements of reality TV. "Personal issues have got to be on the surface," Galinsky reiterates. "If you're not comfortable airing the dirty laundry it means you're probably not right for reality TV."

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