

As the promos start to run... (sorry you have to see those pics of me as a kid :), I've been doing some interviews and posting on some message boards. I thought I would share some of what I said and wrote here on the blog...

In picking the contestants for The Benefactor, I wanted a wide range of experiences, backgrounds, education and personalities. There were 8 guys and 8 girls, ranging in age from 22 to 42. The common trait that I was looking for was competitiveness and the willingness to stand out, rather than fit in.

In every other reality show, everyone does the same thing. That's not real world. I wanted The Benefactor challenges to represent more of what we all face...

In the real world we either challenge ourselves to figure out how to reach our dreams and goals, or we find ourselves doing the same thing day to day wondering what it will take to find the lives we want. I wanted people who would challenge themselves to go after the million dollar prize knowing it could enable them to change their lives in however they saw fit.

In the real world, when you walk into a job interview, there isn't a scoreboard above the interviewer's head saying where you stand. You have to be prepared to compete as yourself, on your own, using your brains and experiences to get the job. But in the end, it's one person's subjective opinion of you that determines your fate, and you go crazy knowing how and why you were or were not picked.

In real world, if you start a business, it's your business. The brains, creativity and effort you put in to it determine if you survive or go out of business. Until you know, you are at the whim of your prospects and customers, hoping your vision met their needs.

In the real world, everyone thinks there is something special about themselves.

If they only had the chance to show it, and somehow enable it, they could stand out from the pack. Some do. Most don't. This show is about giving a shot to 16 people to show how they can stand out from the pack. It's my job to pick the right person. It's a job I took very seriously.

The Benefactor is about my creating open ended challenges that push each of the 16 contestants to challenge themselves to stand above and apart from their competitors, knowing that 1mm is at stake.

There are challenges that I think reflect what we all face every day trying to make our dreams, whatever they are, come true. Unlike the real world, I had cameras on them all the time to see not only how they responded to the challenges, but how they responded to and competed with each other. Let's just say some contestants came to the early realization that they weren't going to win on talent alone and having the cameras certainly helped me out quite a bit.

To give you an idea of the challenges...

In one challenge I gave each contestant 1k dollars and 24 hours to prepare a 15 minute presentation to me that showed what was special about them. An individual task where they had complete creative control. I told them I wanted to see them step out of their comfort zones and do something that showed how they could shine.

It's not an easy challenge if you think about it. They had no idea what the other contestants would do. Some were so freaked out about this challenge they tried to find out.

How and what do you present about you, or from you, to show me that there is not only something unique about you, but something that makes you stand out more from the competition?

It was really hard on the contestants, but it turned out to be one of the easiest challenges from which to make cuts. It was obvious who opened up and pushed themselves, and who took the completely safe route and did nothing to differentiate themselves. The only risk to me was if someone completely fooled me about who they were. If they completely lied.

Another challenge was based on the premise of time being more valuable than money. I put them in teams of 4 and gave each team 3 hours of my time. My instructions were simple. You have 3 hours, don't waste my time.

Two teams just blew me away. You know how there are always things you say you are going to do, but never find the time to do because of kids, work, whatever? They understood the concept completely. They had me doing things that I never thought I would find the time to do...I was surprised and I had a blast.

These were just two of the many challenges. I also had character tests to weed out the kiss-ups early.

Honestly, going into the show, I really didn't know what to expect. I did the show because I wanted the experience for myself. I got far more than I expected. I really had a blast with it. It wasn't easy by a long shot, but it was fun.

I participated far more than a host or judge would. I really got to know and like most of the contestants. Some I thought I would like, and didn't, but I couldn't cut them because they were so talented and surprising. Others, I thought I knew, and found out I was completely wrong about. Each cut was painful not just for the contestants but for me as well.

Fortunately I decided to go visit the contestants and spend a full 24 hour day with them. I got to meet their families, their friends, see where they grew up, and find out what their friends and family thought of them. It was eye-opening.

Thank goodness I did it too because it's where I found out someone had been lying about themselves. In another case, this person's family warned me that they thought the contestant's significant other was a pure gold digger, and if this person won, it could hurt more than help. Then we got the significant other on tape acting the part. On top of that, in one of their interviews, the contestant talked about his/her biggest fear being not wanting to go down in history as the one reality show winner who blew the million dollars in 6 months or less, and had to go back and beg for the job they had before the show. Talk about putting me in a damned if I do, damned if I don't situation. Do I cut them because of this, or give the contestant the benefit of the doubt and let them deal with it if they won? I really, really liked this person and I lost a lot of sleep and made up and changed my mind dozens of times before I finally made my decision.

One of the hard parts for me was that I really wasn't allowed to talk to anyone to get advice. I could ask questions about what a contestant did or said, or ask to see what they did on tape, but there was always someone from ABC right there to make sure the decision was 100 pct mine. As the numbers got smaller the decisions got more and more painful for me to make.

The other thing that was really cool about the show was that I found myself truly impressed with many of the responses to the challenges, and more than a couple times I realized that if I were in their shoes, there is no way I could have come up with the answers and responses that they did.

In the end, I think I made the right choice, and I'm proud of the person I picked. I had fun doing the show, and would do it again in a heartbeat.