

## **For Immediate Release**

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### Life After Reality: Business Lessons Learned from Former Reality TV Contestants

It was 2005 when Alicia Campise stood in front of Paula Abdul, Randy Jackson, and the infamous Simon Cowell to belt her heart out. Of the 9,000 people that originally turned out for the Greensboro, NC *American Idol* auditions, she had made it to the final 90. After four days of extensive screening by producers, it was the first time she had ever sung before them. “I had no idea how complicated the process would really be,” Campise explains. “Producers cut the final footage to make it appear that all of the auditions occur in one day, when in actuality it is a lengthy five-day process. We were asked to wear the same clothes, makeup, and hairstyle every day in order to promote the appearance of continuity.”

As one of the few invited to fly to Hollywood for the next round of auditions, Campise now has mixed feelings about the show. “I would definitely say that my involvement with the show has changed my perception of it. *Idol* is very ‘political’ – the producers like people who have interesting stories to tell. I was flat out told that I was ‘too boring’. I’m just a regular girl from Michigan and that isn’t the story the judges want to see.”

“The feeling of dissatisfaction that a contestant feels when voted off a reality show is not unlike the malcontent sometimes experienced by an exiting employee,” explains HR Solutions, Inc. CEO and Employee Engagement expert Kevin Sheridan. “I would give both the same advice: use your experience as a catalyst for positive development.”

*Biggest Loser* finalist Amy Hildreth-Wolff did just that. After being voted off halfway through the competition, Wolff decided to capitalize on her experience by taking steps to become an ACE certified personal fitness trainer. Shortly afterwards, Wolff and her husband, fellow *Biggest Loser* contestant Marty Wolff, co-founded Reality Wellness, a fitness program that offers motivational speaking, corporate ‘lunch-n-learns’, workout classes, boot camps, nutritional advice, and life management coaching.

Sheridan lauds Wolff for her proactive post-show follow-up. “Amy displayed exactly the kind of ‘can-do’ attitude that is key to discovering professional success. This is exactly the kind of mindset that employees should have when exiting a job. Regardless of whether they have been fired, laid off, or have simply chosen to leave of their own free will, dwelling on frustrations of the past will never bring a positive return.” Sheridan urges these individuals to harness the energy that could be wasted fretting about their previous job and use it to create an action plan for the future.

Exiting employees should ask themselves: what did I not like about my previous job? Or, alternatively, why did the job not work out the way I had hoped? “If the answer lies within the realm of personal development,” Sheridan explains, “create a list of items that you would like to work on and address each with at least six potential action plans for improvement. Set a target completion date and end goal for each so that you have a clear idea of your expectations from the start.”

Campise also followed her reality show experience with positive personal development. She attended Oakland University in Auburn Hills, Michigan and later found her niche in the field of cosmetology. She continues to watch *American Idol* and holds particular regard for Season Eight winner Kris Allen. “He has a sound that is very similar to Jason Mraz, and I respect his ability to play the piano and guitar.” Despite her mixed feelings about the show, Campise describes her time on *Idol* as “a once-in-a-lifetime experience. It’s something that I’ll always be proud to say that I did.”

Wolff echoes this regard: “On *The Biggest Loser*, there really aren’t any ‘losers’ in the true sense of the word. I wasn’t in it to win, I just wanted to be healthy. The positive surprise for me was in learning that there were so many others who also needed help, so the transition into my new role at Reality Fitness was an easy one.” Wolff urges those who are unsure with their career path to ask themselves, “I am doing what I want to do *for the rest of my life*? Would I do it even if I wasn’t getting paid?”

As a final note of advice, Sheridan urges employers to consider the wealth of information that can be gained by appealing to exiting employees for their feedback through an exit survey or exit interview. According to our national exit survey data,” Sheridan explains, “a massive 78 percent report that there was no effort made by their department to stop them from leaving. An exit interview not only provides insight into the efforts made by management to retain their employees, it also reveals the reasons why exiting staff members choose to leave. Imagine the potential for positive organizational change that could result from harnessing this information.”

Leaving an organization can sometimes be as difficult for exiting employees as it is for contestants that are voted off a reality show. Both are faced with the looming question: “*what do I do next?*” While it is not always easy, they should use their prior experiences as a springboard for future success. This surely will be no problem for Adam Lambert, American Idol’s most recent runner-up. There is little doubt that America will see Adam’s own album hit the shelves, and likely the charts as well, within the next year. With an established fanbase already in place, Adam may have lost, but he is certainly far from a ‘loser’.

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