

Unemployment Isn't A 'Reality Show' Premise

By Holly Culhane, Contributing Columnist



Reality TV doesn't always imitate life. The soon-to-air reality TV show, "Someone's Gotta Go," appears to miss the "reality" mark by a mile, and adds a cruel, twisted accent to today's already brutal economy and job market.

Fox television network has the reality show in production, with viewing likely later this summer or fall. It will chronicle several small businesses that employ 15 to 20 folks as they are forced to lay off employees. Describing the show as a cross between "The Office" and "Survivor," a Fox official explained that employees will decide who gets laid off. Viewing will likely be later this summer or fall. No doubt there will be an audience. After all, who among us doesn't turn to look when we drive past a gruesome traffic accident? And producers believe the show's many sponsors will likely include manufacturers of anti-depressant medications.

So, there you have it. The ingredients of a television success: audience appeal and big bucks. But what does it say for us; for our compassion for those suffering in these times of layoffs and economic suffering? Not much, if you ask me.

This "reality" TV show seems to ignore the real suffering felt by more than a million people who have recently lost their jobs in the U.S., and by their co-workers left behind to grieve and pick up the added workload.

Employees will be given the company's internal information – budgets, personnel files, salaries, etc. – to decide who will get pushed off the workplace "island." Each episode will involve a real company. Employees will decide who deserves to be paid more, or less, and fired. A production company executive told entertainment newspaper *Variety* the show will be a public service to America's struggling business and an "extension of that real-life experience."

In real life, tough layoff decisions are made by company owners and executives after considering many factors, including immediate needs and strategic plans. These decisions are not the result of "popularity contests." Managers and "surviving" workers are left to pick up the pieces in the aftermath, while the downsized company must maintain its productivity with fewer people.

Many local companies have downsized. Others may soon be laying off workers. They must strive to retain as many productive employees as possible, while meeting cost-cutting requirements. They also must focus on maintaining productivity and morale of those left behind.

My human resources consulting firm and others offer training to help supervisors manage through this painful change and to help "surviving" employees find the "up" in the upheaval they are experiencing.

Change is awkward and uncomfortable. Company managers must communicate to workers the reasons for downsizing and where the company is headed. If company officials have a track record of being honest, workers will better understand the need for layoffs. And trust is critical to success.

Workers left behind generally go through adjustment phases – denial; active resistance; exploration, as they become interested in their new assignments; and commitment, as they accept the realities of a layoff.

The economic downturn and resulting job losses are real and painful. A “reality” show that suggests layoff decisions can be frivolously handed over to employees and people voted out of their jobs denies this reality.

This article written by Holly Culhane first appeared in The Bakersfield Californian on May 09, 2009. Holly Culhane is president of P.A.S. Associates, a Bakersfield human resources consulting firm. She can be contacted through her webpage at www.PASassociates.com or by phone at 631-2165.

P•A•S Associates has expertise in human resources and other areas involving employment issues. P•A•S Associates, in providing this website, does not represent that it is acting as an attorney or that it is giving any form of legal advice or legal opinion. P•A•S Associates recommends that before making any decision pertaining to human resource issues or employment issues, including the utilization of information contained on this website, the advice of legal counsel to determine the legal ramifications of the use of any such information be obtained.