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How to land a role on a reality show

In all reality ... Whatever your motivation for getting on a reality show, treat your audition like any other job interview and be prepared

By Emily Hughey Quinn, Tribune Media Services

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For recent college graduates, a challenging job search might spawn an unconventional one. In the era of reality television, living your life on screen is one way to pass the time — and potentially make some money — before landing a more traditional career.

"In today's job market it's a very good idea to be ready for anything and open to anything," says April Masini, career and relationship expert. In addition to doling advice at AskApril.com, she's an entertainment-industry producer and activist. So, in the event you win over a casting director, saddle up.

"Expect that your life is going to change somehow," says Lyle Dohl, casting director at Good People Casting, a company that specializes in real-people talent for commercials and occasional features, including the movie, "Drive." He's also casted shows such as "Top Chef" and "Project Runway," and he's currently the talent scout on Nigel Lythgoe's "Opening Act" on the E! network.

"I tell my casts, 'you don't know exactly how it'll change right now, so take advantage of the opportunity, but don't expect things to happen for the better or the worse,'" he says. "Just do what you can to enjoy the experience and create more opportunity for yourself if you can."

Whatever your motivation for getting on a reality show, Dohl says to treat your audition like any other job interview and be prepared. Come ready to talk about yourself and, most importantly, be authentic.

"You have to really truly know who you are, good and bad. You have to know what you bring to the table, and you have to know how to condense that into real quick bites. This is TV; we don't have time to go on and on and on. We don't have to like you but we have to find you interesting," Dohl says.

He suggests reviewing the questions on the application beforehand and creating a mission statement for

yourself around which all of your answers revolve.

"You just have to take a risk and have opinions. You can't hold anything back. You have to be yourself when you go in there, but be the best version of yourself," Dohl coaches. "Have those answers prepared. Just be ready to tell it like you really think it is. Don't sit back and wait to be asked certain questions. It depends on the show, but I just want to see someone who is themselves, gets my attention and I want to learn more about."

As for what gets Dohl's attention in a casting call, he says he likes to see story potential, a character with layers that can be peeled back.

"Often what we talk about are conflict, sex and humor. They have to deliver on one or more of those," Dohl explains. "And sometimes you have to include skill in that as well. When it comes to 'Big Brother' or 'Survivor,' it's 'can you play the game.' When it comes to other shows, like 'Top Chef,' it's, 'can you cook.'"

But, for most shows, he admits, it comes down to how conflictive, sexy and/or funny you are.

Masini, the entertainment-industry executive and advice columnist, offers cautionary counsel.

"The biggest reason people go into reality television—on screen—is also the biggest liability: exposure," Masini explains. "The most common complaint from reality TV folks is the loss of control over editing; the misunderstandings conveyed, or manipulated, for ratings; and the personal and emotional impact that anonymous millions who watch will shower on stars and their families."