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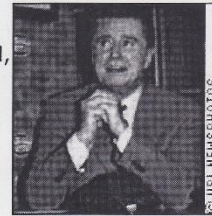
career interview

Who Wants to Be a Game Show Contestant?

Interview With Personal Consultant Mark Anthony DiBello

05.03.00

He's been a producer, writer, actor, comedian, model, and Chippendale's dancer, but what he really wants to do is host—a game show, that is. Hoping one day to follow in Regis' footsteps, Mark Anthony DiBello is no stranger to the *Millionaire* craze. He's been a contestant himself, winning two cars and over \$65,000 in cash and prizes on *The Wheel of Fortune* and *The Price Is Right*!



"I wonder if Mark can score me some cash."

Eager to get in on the new generation of game shows—but temporarily ineligible because he did so well the first time around—DiBello has, in the meantime, become a personal consultant to other contestants, coaching them on game show strategies and helping them to win big. Curious as to whether we had any chance of sitting across from Reege one day and winning the million-dollar question, we sat down with Mark for a personal consultation.

How did the idea of being a "personal trainer" to prospective game show contestants come about?

The idea came about because even before *Millionaire* came on, I had the feeling—knowing TV as I do—that game shows were going to be popular again. While *Millionaire* was being developed, I was starting to develop a game show of my own, and I said, "You know what, this is the right time [for] a game show offering a million dollars in prime time."

It didn't matter what the format was. Any million-dollar game in prime time would really score with viewers, and since I had done some research already on a couple of shows, I said, "You know what? When this breaks, there must be something I can do to get in, whether it's to host (which is one of my aspirations), or I can go on myself, or help other people." And sure enough, after *Millionaire* took off, it didn't take long for me to get the Web site up and running and my name back out there. They still run me a lot on the promotions on *Wheel of Fortune* because my shows were kind of wild. Same thing on *Price Is Right*.

Great. So you had a lot of business?

Yeah, I've had some pretty good business. As a matter of fact, my most recent client just won \$40,000 on *Greed*. And I'm still working with a lot of people that I know are going to do well when they get their opportunity.

When you teach your courses, do you focus on specific shows, or do you just teach general strategies?

What I'm focusing on right now is the personal consultation. I'm not doing [the seminars] as much anymore. If they're going to be televised, I'll do them, [because it's] added publicity. But the Web site really is not about folks ordering one of the downloadable programs. It's really about the personal consultation, because you really need to work with people one-on-one.

What personality traits would you say make for an "ideal contestant"?

Well, you have to be open to being coached. Everyone wants to be on a game show. The difference is, what are you willing to do to be a winning contestant? It's like, if I had the first graphite tennis racket. You can play with the old racket, but if you really want to be one step ahead of the game—and if the graphite racket was just invented—you'd really want to have that in your possession. Mine is the only course of its kind. I've found a new way to pan gold. So many people who don't use me, it's like they're breaking into Fort Knox, but they forgot to bring a suitcase.

What are some of the strategies that you teach?

There's four different aspects to all the shows. I call them the "Four S's". One is Spirituality, which means: Good things happen to good people. You really have to be a nice person, because you're dealing with a lot of nice people. Show them respect. It's like being nice to your neighbor, and on *Greed*, not being greedy. Be working *with* the other people rather than against them. Be a graceful winner and a good loser, because that reflects upon your future appearances or even the way people will work against you there. I've seen it happen a thousand times. The guys who are the cutthroat, mean, prideful, think-they're-all-that smart guys, they don't do all that well. It's the people who are gentle, nice, working with their own capabilities [who win].

Number two would be Show Business. You're being cast as a "Game Show Contestant." You're not just the person off the street. They may tell you they want the person off the street, or quote-unquote "real people." But they really want people to act like a "Game Show Contestant."

So what is a "Game Show Contestant"?

A lot of people (you'll be amazed) don't actually watch the shows they want to go on. They don't study what kind of people are on there, their professions, the way they act. Whether they're energetic, intellectual, brainiac types. The other part is being energetic and working like a professional. They don't want prima donnas in there; they don't want people trying to get the host's job. They want people to act like a

professional. Go in like it's a job.

The third part would be Strategy. And that's the part I'm most effective at. That involves probability and odds and outcome. Certain tricks, if you will, of going against other people. More like poker strategies and knowing the competition. There are certain mathematical principles. For instance, in *Twenty-One*, if you've got 14 points and you want to score 21, you don't go for an 8 or 9 or 10 or a more difficult question. All you need is 21, so get the 7-point question and get out of there. Almost 99 percent of [the game] is strategy.

Would you say some shows have better odds of winning than others?

Absolutely. It's not only performing well on the right show, but picking the right show for yourself. That's part of what I do as a producer. There are a lot of shows out there, and not every person is made for every show. But there is a game show for everybody. So you really have to pick the right show for your talent, for what you know about the strategy.

And the final part would be your Smarts. And there's not much I can do to improve that. I can tell you certain things to study, even how [the writers] write their questions, how they research their materials. But really, what you know is what you know. For most people, that's their biggest detriment. They're out there to prove how smart they are, and that pride sucks them in. So you really have to go in there humbly, open-minded, and realize that your intelligence is about 5 percent of the package. Who cares if you're smart? If they don't like you, they're not going to put you on the show. So that's where the Show Business comes in. Also, if you don't do the right Strategy, if you don't know how many points to go for, or how to outwit your opponent, then you're bound to fail as well.

So those would be the Four S's: Spirituality, Show Business, Strategy, and Smarts.

What would you say is a common mistake that contestants make?

Well, I'll go through all of them. On *Greed*, don't be greedy. Be a nice guy. Play within the context of the team. And don't terminate people. I [tell people], "Just everyone go in for the \$200 level, take your money and run. It's the easiest \$40,000 you'll ever make." It's just hard to convince the other players to do that. They just end up getting greedy, and they all end up losing. Nine out of ten groups end up losing, they win no money. So the moral of the story is, play along as a team, and take the money the show wants to give you. So that's one mistake.

The other mistake is not being a nice person. They're mean, they're cutthroat, they're not polite. They just do things that will eventually cost them. Now that goes into the Show Business part. They're not acting like they're in show business. They're acting like it's their 15 minutes of fame, and they're gonna go out and do something crazy and stupid, and the producers will never let them on the air. As for Strategy, nobody studies strategy, nobody knows as much as I've been fortunate to learn and to study over the years.

How did you do your research, by the way?

One is by watching. Two is obviously taking a lot of notes. Three is just applying all the games to all the principles that I know of math: geometric principles, algebraic principles, odds, and probabilities. Knowing about the odds and probabilities is the biggest part of it. I used to be a professional gambler, so there's a real professional gambling mentality to it. But people don't have the time to do that. That's really what I can certainly help them with.

You've worked with a lot of contestants. What are their motives? Is it to win the money? Or is it just a way to gain free publicity or get into show business?

There are usually five motives. Part of my testing is to have [my clients] write down their five motives: One would be money; two would be fun; three would be show business (to be seen on TV); four would be to advance your career (whether you're an actor looking to launch his career or whatnot); and five would be for whatever reason you may have. Some people are like, "The angels told me to go." Other people are like, "Yeah, my father is dying in the hospital, and this was his final wish."

When you list those five reasons, I'll keep you to those five reasons. Because what happens is, as the process goes along, people adjust and they change and they move their reasons. They lose sight of why they're there. For most people, money would be number one. And then surprisingly, they'll put fun there as number two. And the problem is they'll eventually put fun first. And when they lose, they realize that they didn't have as much fun.

What's your success rate?

100 percent.

Would you say some game shows are better for beginners?

Yeah, absolutely. The first game I would suggest everybody do is *The Price Is Right*. It's been around the longest. It has just about a little of everything. *Greed's* also a real good show.

Is it possible to make a living as a game show contestant?

Oh sure. There's different ways you can do it. One way is to go on as many [shows as you can]. I know some guys who've been on six or seven shows.

Isn't there a cap on the number of times you can go on a particular show?

Different shows, yes, have different rules. But there's two ways to do it: One is if you feel you can go on that many shows, you have to [have] a plan. It's either one show a year or two shows every five years, but you have to pick your stuff. If you can only go on two shows in five years, you don't wanna go on and win \$5,000 and a toaster oven, you know what I mean? You gotta win 100 and 100 or something. Or, there's the other way. Don't go on for the longest time, and if you win a million dollars, that's it. You're done. All you have to do is make a million once, and you're done. You don't have to work.

Are you planning to try some of the new game shows?

I'm making a move. But I cannot discuss that at this time. [laughs] I can help other people just as well. I like helping people.

Well, my last question is...

This is all you got; you've got one more question. I'm teasing. [laughs]


OK, well, my last question is: Which game show is your personal favorite?


My personal favorite is everyone but *Millionaire*, because I think I'd make a better host than all the other guys. I like *Millionaire*, because I think Regis Philbin is a genius, I think he's awesome. But Chuck Woolery drives me nuts. And the other guy is just as bad as Chuck Woolery-Maury Povich. He's terrible. So those are my favorites cause I like to watch and see what kind of host I would be one day if anybody ever asked me to be a host.

Well thank you Mark, that's all the questions I have for you.

April, that's all the answers I have for you.

-- interviewed by april kao

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