



'The Apprentice': Ex-DiversityInc Employee Gives Us the Inside Scoop

By Yoji Cole

If you're a fan of NBC's Donald Trump-led "Apprentice," Surya Yalamanchili, the most recently fired candidate and the former marketing director of DiversityInc, wants to tell you the show is less about dealing with office politics than it is about dealing with being a game contestant.

"It wasn't what I expected," said Yalamanchili, who was depicted as intense and focused on the show in contrast to other contestants who were more playful. "I expected a six-week job interview and got a game show, but the game show was the experience of a lifetime."

Yalamanchili, 25, who is currently a brand manager for emerging media strategy at Procter & Gamble, one of DiversityInc's [25 Noteworthy Companies](#) in 2006, is an achiever. His potential was evident early on. Prior to P&G, he worked at DiversityInc as an intern and was promoted to director of marketing while he attended college full time. In addition to his salary, DiversityInc paid his tuition at Rutgers University.

"Surya is one of the most intelligent people I've ever met," says DiversityInc Partner and Cofounder Luke Visconti. "He was an exceptionally capable intern, easily No. 1 out of hundreds we've employed over the years. He has a keen strategic mind."

"At DiversityInc I learned about how diversity should work at an organization to make it stronger," says Yalamanchili. "At Procter, I saw those principles at work. The people here have the utmost integrity. I can't think of a time I've been lied to. People always look out for you."



However, working with coworkers to accomplish a common goal is something Yalamanchili experienced little of on "The Apprentice."

Being that it's a game show, "everyone is out for themselves," says Yalamanchili. He adds that being on the show was the chance of a lifetime. Not only did he meet and work with Donald Trump but a couple of the rewards for winning the show's contests included rapping with Snoop Dogg and hanging with Hugh Hefner.

Yalamanchili's family is from India. He was born in Pennsylvania and lived most of his life in New Jersey. He was one of two contestants of full Asian descent—the other being James Sun, who was born in Seoul, Korea, and immigrated to the United States with his parents when he was 4 years old.

Being one of the show's few people of color and its only Asian Indian was pressure Yalamanchili welcomed. It provided him the opportunity to represent his community and family as an Asian Indian on TV—to be the face he never saw on TV growing up.

"I wanted to represent my community well because when I grew up, no one looked like me on TV or in magazines, so I thought, 'This is my chance,'" says Yalamanchili.

A common comment on Yalamanchili was that he was always very serious on the show, which he attributes both to editing and the pressure he felt to represent his family (and his company) well.

"I felt pressure to represent my family well and Procter & Gamble well ... and it showed in the editing because I was serious all the time," says Yalamanchili. "When you're a minority, you think, 'I'm not only doing this for me but for those like me who might not get this chance' ... but people in the Asian-American community said they could see through the editing."

"What makes good business is people cooperating and treating each other with respect to achieve one goal," says Yalamanchili. "On 'Apprentice' a lot of it is about competition—how do I win and make another person look bad?"

Even though Yalamanchili had a winning record when he was eventually fired, he describes Trump as "very fair."

"The Donald is thoughtful of who he fires and why," says Yalamanchili, who was fired after the losing team—on which he was placed to help them win—turned on him.

"He takes into account your teammates' [problems with you], but he still struggles with it," says Yalamanchili. "My boardroom seemed to last about three hours. My teammates ganged up on me and he saw that and asked me to respond ... I feel he tried in his own way to minimize the game ... but there's only so much he can do."

Now Yalamanchili is back at P&G. He has college speaking engagements scheduled and is writing a book he plans to self-publish titled, *Forsaken: The Betrayal of America's Future for the Expediency of Power Today*. It's about the legacy irresponsible power-hungry leaders are leaving behind.

He has no plans to pursue reality TV again but he says he'll always look fondly at his time on "The Apprentice" as "the experience of a lifetime."