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HUFFPOST

Truly Original Steven Weinstock Co-CEO, Executive Producer; Looking Back On Ten Years of “The Real Housewives of Atlanta”

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After chatting with more “Real Housewives” than you could throw a champagne glass at, it was beyond interesting to sit down with Steven Weinstock, the co-CEO of Truly Original, the production company behind “The Real Housewives of Atlanta”. Along with his amazing team at Truly Original, Steven crafted together an amazing original cast of Georgia peaches and have worked tirelessly behind the scenes keeping the show going for ten fantastic seasons. I sat down with Steven as Season Ten was just starting up to talk about the origin of the Atlanta cast, full time vs. “Friend of” and how long we could possibly see the ladies of the ATL continue to entertain us.

Steven, you have been part of the “Real Housewives of Atlanta” ride from the beginning, and what a crazy and ultimately successful ride it has been. Right off the bat, how did you assemble the original five ladies? At the time, Bravo had come to me and were already airing the “New York” and Orange County” franchises. They had expressed to me their desire to expand the franchise and asked if I had any thoughts. What immediately came into my mind was the possibility of a diverse cast, which immediately led me to the city of Atlanta. At the time, no one in reality television had really explored the city of Atlanta and we found this amazing group of ladies down there that ultimately became “The Real Housewives of Atlanta”.

With the tenth season here, and you being on board for all ten seasons, you now have three original cast members on the cast this year (Nene Leakes, Kim Zolciak Biermann and Sheree Whitfield) and Kandi Burruss who has been on board since Season Two. That is a result of scheduling without a doubt. Both Nene and Kim have big careers that have really blossomed and we were able to work with their schedules. I

think the fact that it has also been ten years, and ten years of something that they both had been very integral to, starting it and being “original Housewives” so we were able to talk them into coming back.



It is probably great to have some of the ladies come back, but when you have to drop a lady from the cast like Phaedra Parks or drop a cast member to a “friend of” role like had happened with Porsha Williams it must never be fun. What are those conversations and the decision making process like? Well here’s the thing, it’s not really done arbitrarily. There are sets of circumstances that lead us to that decision. These women are very smart and intelligent and know the demands of the show. I think in each instance that you mentioned it was pretty self evident and none of them were taken by surprise. I think that there is a natural evolution of women moving through the show. The show really only has one requirement; you allow us into your lives in as authentically a way as possible. As long as that happens, we are committed to the women staying on the show.

Conversely, women sometimes are cast like Claudia Jordan and Kim Fields, who start as women that could be potentially breakthrough housewives, and then don’t translate on screen or with the viewers. Is it frustrating when a housewife does not work out the way you thought they may have? Yeah, sure. I think in those particular cases, being cast on the show is one thing and going through the whole season and knowing how real the process is another. It’s truly three hundred and sixty degree, three dimensional process. As much as I talk to them and try to be as up front and as straightforward as I can with what this involves in terms of commitment, not just in time, but with the intimacy and honesty required, I think it can be a bit shocking. I think they go through the process really well and some just don’t.

Women like Nene and Kim truly shine and have broken through with their own spin-offs airing on other nights on Bravo. What is it like to take a certain Housewife and spin them off to what could ultimately become their own brand within the brand, so to speak? Well with Kim, for example, she is just naturally funny. Almost in a Lucille Ball type of way, she does not even realize that she is this funny. She met Kroy (Biermann) on camera and we did the wedding special. There became the construct of a really intriguing and funny, for lack of a better term, a reality situation comedy show. She began having more kids and it kept developing and the audience was just intrigued with it. Kroy has really come into his own, so it makes him a great counter balance to this comedic almost Lucille Ball type character. I think the audience really likes Kroy also, he's this grounding force and this voice of reason who really meshes nicely with her larger than life and funny personality.



The franchises have started bringing back some of the women back from earlier seasons, both as an homage to the show's history and as a treat for the audience. Ever give any thought to bringing back DeShawn Snow from Season 1 or Lisa Wu from Seasons One and Two? We're always thinking of how to keep the show evolving. We are always involved in helping find new cast members to add to the mix. It's always a combination of looking for new cast members, along with the cast we have now. Kim has her own show and Nene has so many other things going on, and it's not clear if either of them will be involved after this season. It's really up to them if they want to make the commitment to it or not. The two of them have been on the show for many years and it made a lot of sense to bring them back right now.

Looking long term, what do you think the future is with "The Real Housewives of Atlanta"? I mean, could Riley Burruss and Brielle Biermann be fighting it out on Season Thirty Five? (laughs) who knows! Listen, obviously, there has to be the audience. We have been incredibly blessed that the audience has been devoted to this show and it just grows. I think some of that is a function of the stories that we are telling. They see their lives evolving, they see marriages, divorces, broken hearts, children, love affairs, they see grandchildren even. I think they are very attached to these characters. I think as long as we continue to tell these stories and every so often bring a new character in to the story, I think these shows have a real possibility of being on for

quite some time. I think also because they are limited run in terms of being almost like a telenovela with an arc of a season, it gives people the ability to engage, really get their dose of it, and then look forward to a year later and another season of it. It really works in that way.

I have always felt that the “Real Housewives” franchise and all of the cities it encompasses are the new nighttime soaps. How do you feel about that comparison? Or the new daytime soaps, right? I absolutely think that these shows are the modern day version of the daytime soap. In some ways, they are more compelling, more authentic and definitely more real!

“The Real Housewives of Atlanta” airs on Sunday night on Bravo 8/7c