

## “It has to be educational. People need to start believing in themselves, they need to be taught and shown how the State bureaucracy obstructs and we have to try to correct it”



**Alexander Lebedev, Deputy Chairman of the CIS Committee of the State Duma, has been lobbying for the show to come to air and already has a script in progress**

**You have publicly argued for a reality television show on corruption and bureaucrats. Is the idea that secret cameras would follow the business people?**

Partially, yes. It is one of the technical ideas. The idea is very simple. I was eager to actually come forward with funding. First of all you have trial stages, where people have to pass certain exams showing some, lets say, expertise and ability in knowing what the exchange rate is, how you go to a bank to make a loan, what the interest on a average loan is, how do you licence a business, how do you cope with your tax and so on and so forth. After, once you pass that exam, you have five groups of three people. Each group is given a \$100,000 loan, say, which is not repayable, but they can then actually come and ask for additional money and they would enter into agreements with the bank, be held responsible, and have to pay it back. There would be different businesses: a restaurant, a small shop, a tourist company, a small transportation company and so on and so forth. The cameras and all the tricks they use on television to make it entertaining would, I think, make it 30% entertainment, but 70% would be real life.

**So it would be educational and entertaining?**

Sure. For me, as a politician, that's the most important element. It has to be educational. People need to start believing in themselves, they need to be taught and shown how the State bureaucracy obstructs and we have to try to correct it.

This would also be good for Russian TV channels which are heavily criticised for not doing anything positive, but instead becoming a State propaganda machine.

If it is a big show, with a large audience, if we come across a large stumbling block to business, which is created by the state,

I will call Mr Gref or Mr Kudrin, and we can change things. It might expose, for example, that there is a lack of insurance systems for mortgages. Or that in housing construction there is nowhere for a person to build a house.

**When President Putin suggested that anyone who sets up a small business in Russia should be given a medal, do you think that this means that he realises that small business must be encouraged or was it merely political posturing?**

I think that he fully realises and understands that this is a huge task facing the government and the Kremlin. However, it does not necessarily mean that they would give somebody a chance to stage a reality TV show as we are discussing!

The last thing I want is to make a programme that looks like The Apprentice! Firstly, there is a problem with the image that Donald Trump has in my eyes. Secondly, Trump uses his own casinos and hotels, which is a show. We need such a demonstration only to the point where people like to be entertained, otherwise we want it to be a serious point about government policy: how people start small businesses.

**It is no secret that there are still dangerous elements in the world of small business in Russia. Is it realistic to have such a programme with hidden cameras?**

I don't think it will be impossible. But it will be hard work to really actually pick up what happens in life, as opposed to what is produced in a reality show, and is not real life but probably 90% staged, 90% prepared, and is not real life.

I am very much interested to do it in areas outside the centre, where there are not a lot of businesses in any sphere, to show the bureaucracy and all sorts of

controls, which are numerous and trying to block the guy being successful.

I lecture in high schools and I find that even people with the highest high school grades understand nothing about businesses. But they understand one thing: that it is not possible at all to succeed and convince themselves that they shouldn't even approach it. Psychologically, only one per cent of the population is ready to try. The most important element is to try to convince the population that there are ways of succeeding.

For four years I was unsuccessful. I tried dozens of things which failed.

**What progress have you made in getting the show on air?**

I am trying to persuade the state television. Actually, I have succeeded more in Ukraine. In Russia I'm still not getting any answers from the people in charge of the two main channels, One and Two. I didn't receive a negative answer - but nor did I receive a positive answer.

**Are they ignoring the suggestion?**

Let's wait and see. I have approached them a couple of times, informally. The response has been, 'Wow, its interesting'. However, I have very poor relations with the First Channel, because as na MP I was highly critical of them regarding their financial discipline. They are a government corporation, and should be held responsible. They should be more transparent and they probably would have their own interests for not having me as one of the people who lead the show.

I have a script and have been working on this for a year – but I haven't had that much time to work on it and was looking for someone else to lead it other than myself. **rir**