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# It's so much more than a TV show

■ For South Florida professionals, favorite programs move beyond relaxing entertainment to become topics for bonding with co-workers.

BY SHARON HARVEY ROSENBERG  
Special to The Herald

On a given week, the average man in America watches 29 hours of television; the average woman, 34, according to a study in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. Although many South Florida professionals who log in full work days and lots of overtime aren't plugged into the tube for as long as the national averages, TV viewing is still a popular after-hours pursuit. Indeed, from high-brow fare on PBS to reality-based network shows such as *American Idol* and Donald Trump's *The Apprentice*, favorite TV shows are creating a buzz at the office water cooler.

Consider the dynamics at Becker Public Relations in Coral Gables. *The Apprentice* — where teams of hard-driven men and women compete to earn praise and prizes from real estate maven Donald Trump — is frequently the topic of discussion at staff meetings and during informal conversations, according to Jeanne Becker, president of the firm.

### A DISAPPOINTMENT

Although Trump's reality-based show is a favorite among business professionals and offers engaging scenes, Becker and her staff give it mixed reviews. Their strongest criticism: *The Apprentice* lacks substance and provides competitive business scenarios that are "atypical of what you would find in business," Becker says. For instance, Becker was dismayed by the earlier episodes in which a team of women used sexually charged attitudes and behavior to sell lemonade on a street corner in New York City and later to hawk drinks at a popular restaurant. That behavior received a thumbs-down from Becker.

"I was hoping it would be more of a thinking person's show," she says, conceding that she watches the weekly broadcasts despite her reservations. "It's definitely interesting. It's better than the

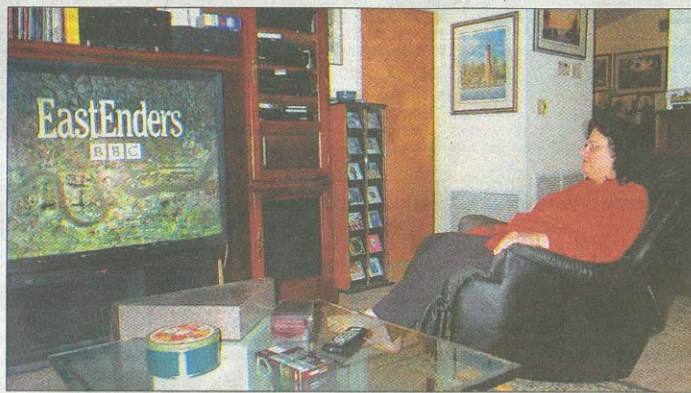


PHOTO COURTESY OF DAYLE JACOB

**DEVOTED VIEWERS:** Dayle Jacob, an office manager at Frye Farms nursery, is a fan of 'EastEnders.' After work she enjoys watching videos of earlier episodes in her home in Homestead, above. At Becker Public Relations, below, co-workers regularly gather to talk about 'The Apprentice.' From left are Dolores Fernandez, Bertha Diaz, Jeanne Becker, Marielena Santana and Yadira Valdes.



PHOTO BY SHARON HARVEY ROSENBERG

other reality shows because it has business."

What's more, Becker gives high marks to a recent episode in which the competing teams were let loose at a flea market with \$1,000 to spend on items destined for re-sale. One team, for instance, purchased T-shirts, which they then decorated and sold. Now that's business, Becker says.

*The Apprentice* also ranks high on the list of favorite reality shows for Kristy Carrerou, a billing assistant at Miami-based law firm Steel Hector & Davis. Her list of favorite shows includes other so-called reality shows such as *Temptation Island* and *Newlyweds* (with small screen sweethearts Jessica Simpson and Nick Lachey). But *Charmed* — a story about three sisters with special powers — ranks as her favorite.

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— KRISTY CARREROU, a billing assistant at Miami-based law firm Steel Hector & Davis

tape them when I'm not home," Carrerou says. "I've been told by my loved ones that I might be a little crazy when it comes to my shows."

### A TRUE TREKKIE

Meanwhile, in the partner's office, Richard Bernstein, a lawyer at Steel Hector, enjoys *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. He enjoys the message of optimism that the show delivers on a regular basis. It's a sharp departure from the business of law and creates a universe in which there is "no hunger, terrorism, poverty or

discrimination," Bernstein says. Instead, self-actualization and exploration are emphasized on the sci-fi show.

In contrast, *EastEnders* — another drama with a cult following — heavily scrutinizes the human condition in a blue-collar community in England. This cutting edge drama is produced by the British Broadcasting Corp. and has an ardent fan base in the United States. Among the show's devotees is Dayle Jacob, an office manager at Frye Farms, a nursery in Homestead.

Jacob and her son James

became addicted to the drama in the late 1980s. What most intrigued them was the unique slice of life that the show offers compared to the typical fare on glossy American soaps. When Jacob is in the office, she discusses the drama — and especially its more moving episodes — with co-workers and her boss. Most of all, she appreciates the show's gritty plot twists and the true-to-life characters.

### BELIEVABLE SHOW

"These people are real," says Jacob, who became disenchanted with American daytime dramas. "I used to watch American soap operas. As I got older, [the cast] got younger and prettier."

Since its launch in the United States in the late 1980s, the show has developed a devoted following. American fans gather for *EastEnders* special events and guest appearances by cast members, says Deborah Gilbert, who writes a column dedicated exclusively to the show for *Union Jack*, a newspaper for English ex-patriots. *EastEnders*' U.S. fan base recently launched an aggressive protest against BBC America, which canceled U.S. broadcasting of the show. Although local PBS stations, including the PBS channel in Miami, continue to broadcast older episodes of *EastEnders*, American fans no longer have direct access to recent episodes, Gilbert says.

Jacob, from Homestead, is among the disenchanted.

Parting from a favorite show also has been a bitter drama for Maggie Antich, a marketing coordinator at a Miami law firm. A faithful fan of *Sex and the City*, Antich has watched each episode of that HBO series at least three times and considers herself an expert on trivia related to the show.

"I have been hooked on it for years," Antich says. "The story line is great."

With the show winding down to its final episode this month, she's already looking for something else to do with her Sunday nights.

Send ideas and tips about what South Florida business professionals do in their hours off the clock to sharonhr@gate.net