

## “UNDERCOVER BOSS” GIVES WORKFORCE-MANAGEMENT LESSONS TO POPEYES'



“Undercover Boss”, the new television series that is fast gaining in popularity amongst viewers, takes actual existent senior executives of large corporate houses, and plants them, incognito, in entry-level positions in their own companies. Their personal identity is withheld from the workers and they work amidst them, to see what really goes on in their work-places and what goes on in the minds of the workers. This week’s episode, aired on the March 2, featured Lynn Zappone, Chief Talent Officer, of the second largest fried chicken chain, Popeyes Louisiana Kitchen, more popularly known as Popeyes. Lynn Zappone plays the role as Pam Hawkins, a contestant of a fake reality show called “Job Swap.” As ‘Pam’, Zappone was assigned to train with four employees. Interacting with them, her imaginary role soon turned to reality, when she realized how the hurricane ‘Katrina’ had changed the lives of her workers and how the company’s attitude and approach was greatly instrumental in influencing and determining the course of their lives. Moved by the workers stories, she in the end reveals her true identity as Lynn Zappone. She expresses her regrets and apologizes for the companies shortcomings. She offers money and supplies to the employees and assures them of the company’s commitment to better the lives of the company’s workforce, through a string of benefits that she promises to implement. Even though doing such a program, has the risk of bringing a negative side of the company to the people, Lynn Zappone said, she happily agreed to do it, adding, “I’m going undercover to have a great look at our long term investment, which is our people”. “It’s a simple equation – if you have happy team members they deliver a great experience to your guests and those guests keep coming back, and that equals profits.” There are lots of lessons to be learnt, and each employee she interacts with teaches her one. Aaron calls his bosses, “corporate clowns” who don’t spend sufficient time with their employees. He comes across as a flippant character. Not too serious about his work, but still nursing unfulfilled ambitions. The second employee is Gina, a 27 year old, whose life has been indelibly altered after the hurricane. She tells, Zappone, that there is a leaking pipe in the bathroom that has never been fixed and is a nuisance to the customers. She also, much to Zappone’s chagrin reveals, that she was fired from her job, because the hurricane prevented her from joining on time. The third employee Josh provides the classic moment in the episode, when he takes Zappone for lunch to Taco Bell. When a stunned Zappone tells him, “I can’t believe you’re eating somewhere other than Popeyes.” He cheekily replies, “It’s cheaper and Popeyes’ no longer has an employee discount. Finally, she meets Doug, a maintenance worker at a Mississippi Unit. He keeps the place keen and is a conscientious worker. “If your restaurant ain’t clean, you’re going to lose business. I think if the customer comes here and they’re walking through garbage, they’re not going to come back to my store,” Doug said. Doug lost whatever he had to “Hurricane Katrina” and turns Zappone misty eyed; when he tells her that he paid from his own pocket to purchase a special oil soap, to enable him clean the kitchen to the exacting standards he had set himself. Zappone eventually unveils herself and discusses plans she intends to implement. She puts Aaron up with a trainer to help him achieve his goals. She appreciates Doug, and promises to ensure that cleaning supplies are not only amongst the best, but also plentiful. She initiates an award for recognition of outstanding employees and recommends Doug to be its first recipient. She makes a \$10,000 donation to Doug’s Church to help with the Soup Kitchen efforts. She tells Josh, that he was great fun to work with, and whilst reinstituting ‘employee-discount’ schemes, she hoped that “Popeyes’ employees don’t have to eat somewhere cheaper.” She set up a \$20,000 scholarship to help Josh achieve his educational ambitions and pursue a degree in hospitality management. An additional \$10,000 was given to him to buy a car to ease his travel to and from work. A teary eyed, Gina is grateful to receive a \$10,000 donation, the first receipt of the employee-relief fund and the icing on the cake is when Zappone promises her that Popeyes will make arrangements for a reunion, with her family, in New Orleans, which will be the first time they will meet together after the devastating hurricane. Zappone said that spending time with the crew members was an enriching experience. “It proved to me that they are so important to the success of our business. I’ve seen some challenges and opportunities for us to fix some things. There’s a lot more work to be done and a lot more to learn.”