

EPISODE 430

[SPONSOR MESSAGE]

[0:00:34]

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[INTRODUCTION]

[0:01:34.4]

FT: It's time for some So Money advice. How is everyone doing today? Look, this show, we have all sorts of guests right? We have people like Tony Robins, we have people like Margaret Cho, millionaires next door, early retirees, inspiring entrepreneurs and occasionally, I like to sprinkle in my guilty pleasure, which is the Real Housewives of New York and Ramona Singer has been with the Real House Wives since the beginning, this is now the eighth season of Real Housewives of New York.

How do you stay on a show like a reality show that long? How crazy and dramatic and interesting do you have to be? Well, Ramona Singer is in the So Money clubhouse today and it's strange to call her a housewife because she's anything but right? She was a very successful business woman prior to the show, still is and she says she actually rejected the idea of being on a reality show when Bravo first approached her.

She's glad of course that she finally said yes, the platform of reality TV can be incredible, it can break you, it can make you. For Ramona, I think the exposure has been pretty successful from a career standpoint and she has some advice on how to properly leverage a reality show to your benefit. If anyone out there is interested in joining a cast out there.

Some behind the scenes of what really goes on during production, what's real, what's fake? She also opens up about her childhood, it was a little rough but her mom gave her some advice that was very progressive, I thought, and she credits that for fuelling her ambitions as now a successful woman.

Here is Ramona Singer.

[INTERVIEW]

[0:03:12.0]

FT: Ramona Singer, my favorite New York City housewife. Welcome to So Money.

[0:03:16.2]

RS: Thank you for having me.

[0:03:17.3]

FT: Where am I catching you right now? Are you at home, are you?

[0:03:20.2]

RS: No, I'm actually — I just finished doing some things at the Sirius radio.

[0:03:24.8]

FT: I have to ask you Ramona, this season is pretty intense and I just finished watching — I just caught up last night with season eight, can you believe it? How does it feel to be one of the, I guess, the matriarchs of the show. You've been on the show since season one, not everyone can say that at this point. What has kept you for all this years wanting to be a part of this show?

[0:03:47.4]

RS: I only did the show to help my ex-husband to bring to light the website that we developed together [inaudible]. I was already a very established woman with a business, a multimillion dollar business and so I didn't financially need to do the show but I did it to help him.

I didn't do it to be famous and through doing the show, it got of course my creative business juices going and I was the first housewife to be on HSN, I had jewelry line there for four years, very successful then I also developed a Pinot Grigio and now I'm involved with Lux Beauty Club and I enjoy it, I have fun doing it and I like it.

[0:04:24.1]

FT: To be a part of a show called real housewife, you were far from it. You were running a business like you said, do you feel that the show is a true representation of who you are?

[0:04:34.5]

RS: Well it doesn't show the whole picture of me, shows pieces of me. We filmed for thousand hours, they'll never show me on HSN doing my jewelry line, they never show me doing my deals to close out, they'll never show me working my deals with the Pinot Grigio, they don't show what I really do because that's not as boring when they go to edit, I was boring when they go to edit

and there's other things with me doing other things with the other characters of the show with the other cast mates.

[0:05:03.8]

FT: You're very fortunate Ramona I think because we know that not all reality stars perform on a show and have the amount of success that you do, the financial success, the business success that you come across as likeable. I mean surely there's drama and we all have our haters but truly the fact that you've been able to stay on the show for this many years, what's the secret to maintaining a career in reality and keeping your sanity and also your reputation, to some extent?

[0:05:33.3]

RS: I believe you have to be true to yourself, which I am and I say what I feel. I don't really make up stuff, I mean I don't make up stuff and I don't lie.

[0:05:39.3]

FT: People do make things up, people lie?

[0:05:42.8]

RS: Of course they do, yeah.

[0:05:42.9]

FT: In Real Housewives of New York, people are lying.

[0:05:49.8]

RS: Or they conveniently forget. Like for instance, Dorinda said I was never invited to John's party. I was invited, she invited me last minute because she and I were getting along very well at

Luann's event. That's the only reason I came, but he conveniently said in her confessional, "I was never invited," because maybe she's so upset about what happened that she wanted to make Kim look better and make me look worse. She's protecting her man which I guess I get but at my expense.

[0:06:15.2]

FT: You and Dorinda had been friends for very long time, once the cameras are rolling, that friendship, it becomes fragile, it becomes almost threatened in some ways because you're put into these situations, there has to be some sort of back and forth, do you feel that going in, you're maybe even a little worried that some of your friends are now going to be cast mates? Because you might be pitted against each other.

[0:06:36.3]

RS: Well I just think if you have a deep friendship, you'll resolve in them eventually, it reflects life, reality is reflecting life and sometimes life is stranger than fiction. Only this time it gets played out in the camera, so therefore people will get some hard feelings.

[0:06:53.7]

FT: If you were to advice anyone, if they got an offer to be on a reality show, what would be your advice to them? Should they do it just for the hopes of getting famous and that could lead to things?

[0:07:05.6]

RS: No. I think people who do it for fame only is a kiss of death, you don't do it for fame, you do it because — I mean I did it originally but not knowing it, what it was. Because it was originally called it the Housewives of New York. I did it because I wanted to show women, be inspirational that, "Hey, you can be a mother, you can be a wife and still be sexy and appealing. You could have a business, you can be a home maker, you can be social, you can have it all." They didn't

really show all that. They showed more whatever they would show. So you have to have a more of — if you just do the reason for popularity, to me it's a kiss of death.

[0:07:45.5]

FT: For exposure, right. These opportunities...

[0:07:48.2]

RS: Maybe you do it for the exposure, for like — okay, Aviva did it for exposure to people with prosthetics. Heather did it as for her son who has a problem. So if you do it for those kind of reasons, I think it's good. Or if you have, because you have a business you want to promote, because maybe, you know, business is tough and it's a great way of getting organic advertising because it's what's part of your life.

[0:08:12.1]

FT: Does Bravo allow you to enter in any partnerships? I know there was some talk about when Bethany for example made her millions with Skinny Girl. Basically thanks to the exposure on real housewives. That Bravo was a little — they learned a lesson there which was that maybe we should be more involved in these businesses because we are doing a lot to help promote the companies and then you'll want to get gold for millions of dollars. Is there truth to that? If there is, what are the parameters?

[0:08:40.2]

RS: I don't think Bravo is like that but basically they're hiring women women who are authentic and if you are authentic and you have a business or you developed a business, who knows how long they will be on the show for? So I don't think that really, I don't think that rings true to me. As a business woman, it doesn't make business sense that anybody would do that with Bravo. So I mean, I don't know.

[0:08:59.0]

FT: how do you evaluate your business ventures? You have the wine, you have hair extensions, HSN, what are the most important things that you need to establish before saying, "Okay, this is a good idea, I'm going to go with this." Because I'm sure you get so many offers all the time to partner up with brands, to license your name or your likeness?

[0:09:19.0]

RS: Right, well you have to do brands that you believe in. With HSN, I no longer do it because my daughter was going to college and I had to concentrate on her. It was too much, I couldn't handle it all but it was always jewelry that I really liked to wear myself.

The Pinot Grigio I developed because fans came to me and they said, "What's your favorite pinot?" I didn't really have one so I said, "Okay, let me develop it." So that's how that came about. I like looking good for my age so I did a skin care and I developed that. I just kind of did things also to show my daughter. To show her like, "Listen," I start to be really her mentor to say, "Hey, look what I did, I started from nothing and look what I'm doing, I'm selling this here and there."

Whether it lasted for a year or four years or six years, it doesn't matter. The fact that I took a concept and I heaved it and made it happen, anybody can do that. Anybody can do that, and that was kind of the message I was trying to put out to the viewers, to other women but they really don't show that.

[0:10:14.9]

FT: Not everyone's as driven though, just to give you more credit, what has driven you all this years? You start it out as many young women may, going to college, getting that first job in retail but you parlayed that in to a multimillion dollar business. I believe you bought your own home in the Hamptons for millions of dollars.

[0:10:33.3]

RS: I'm very driven, I won't take no for an answer, and I just go for my goals. I don't question myself, I just say, "I'm going to make it happen." I mean I remember when I was in the Hamptons, many years ago it was like over 20 years ago and I bought that home. I said to my husband, "I would like to buy a home in this area," and he said, "Well you'll be lucky if you buy one or we buy one in Scarsdale like this or Westchester." I just said, "No, we're going to have this kind of house," and I just hit the pedal to the metal.

I just figured out ways to make money, I'm just very — my mother grew up, rather I grew up with my mother and father and my mother never went to college because she gave birth to me and she was a very smart woman and she always said, "Make your own money so if anything happens in your marriage, you can take of yourself and also more importantly, you don't have to marry a very wealthy man because you'll make your own wealth." So I decided to make my own wealth and I got married later and I was very successful.

And I had a great marriage for a long time and I believe people can have many careers and it's never too late to do anything. You have to believe in yourself. If you believe in yourself and just have your strong belief, positive energy.

[0:11:41.9]

FT: Were you the bread winner in your marriage?

[0:11:44.2]

RS: Was I the bread winner in our marriage? I contributed very strongly in our marriage.

[SPONSOR BREAK]

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[INTERVIEW CONTINUED]

[0:12:48.8]

FT: In some ways I think your mom was ahead of her time to tell her daughter that you should have your own wealth, because a lot of young girls grow up thinking and still, that they're going to wait for prince charming.

[0:12:58.6]

RS: Right, that's the point. You have a very valid point. I mean I've taught my daughter that, make your own money.

[0:13:03.7]

FT: Tell me more about your childhood. We talk about childhood a lot on this show because I think there's a lot of correlation we can make between how we were raised and how we deal with our own lives and our money as adults. Going back to childhood, what was your most distinctive earliest money memory?

[0:13:20.7]

RS: I think what made me very driven, about money, is after I finished my two years of FIT, I told my father I want another two years of college and he said, "Why? Why should I pay for that?"

You're just going to get married and have kids anyway.” That lit a fire under my butt big time. I said, “You know what? I’m going to prove you wrong,” and I put myself, I took a loan, I put myself through the next two years of college and I always think you should think three steps ahead.

So I knew I wanted to eventually be a buyer at a department store, so I got a job first as a sales person then I got a job as a sales manager and then I got into the training program. When I first started working, I knew what my overhead was, what I needed to spend a week, I knew the rest of it I had to — I couldn’t over spend. So I didn’t really use charts cards or anything. So I remember taking home, a \$150 net a week, \$75 went to my phone, rent, electricity and the other \$75 is like spending my, I lived in New York City...

[0:14:16.7]

FT: What year was this?

[0:14:16.3]

RS: ...for 30 years plus for \$75 a day. Subway is only 25 cents then a week, right, \$75 a week I lived on, and I lived a nice life.

[0:14:24.7]

FT: Yeah, tell me a little about that life, what does that even afford you back then?

[0:14:28.7]

RS: Well I had a one bedroom apartment that I shared with a roommate on the upper east side, which that same apartment now will go for \$5,000, then it was only \$800 or whatever it was or \$300. You go out on dates, the dates would pay for your dinner.

[0:14:45.0]

FT: A girl's got to eat so you go on the dates, right.

[0:14:46.8]

RS: I think the reason I went into the clothing business was so I could get clothes wholesale. After Macy's I went into the whole sale business in sales and management, you get your clothes for free or really inexpensively and I would make my own food, mussels is really cheap, mussels. I go buy mussels and they're not fattening.

[0:15:03.4]

FT: What would you say is your financial philosophy today? Are you frugal, do you live below your means, do you believe in splurging and enjoying your money more?

[0:15:13.2]

RS: I believe living within your means, I save a lot of money every year. It doesn't matter how much money you make, I don't care if you make \$10,000 a year or \$50,000 a year or \$5 million a year. You always are spending more. So better to say, "I have to save this amount." I never — I would pay off my charge cards install, I don't carry debt, I don't believe in debt because that can get you into trouble.

[0:15:35.9]

FT: When you were in the midst of divorce, what were the lessons you learned, the financial lessons you learned as you were going through your own divorce? Maybe some things you wish you'd known.

[0:15:43.7]

RS: Make it quick as possible and don't argue over money.

[0:15:46.2]

FT: Yeah, because Bethany's divorce is taking years.

[0:15:49.0]

RS: Yeah, I got to go for the three months. I mean we were married a long time and you know what? Listen, maybe I could have gotten more? Maybe he could have gotten more? But just — if that had happened, the lawyers would have just gotten more. So better to come to a quick settlement.

[0:16:01.1]

FT: On the show you had mentioned that Mario, the way you settled it basically was he got cash, you got property, am I correct in that?

[0:16:10.1]

RS: I don't really want to talk about our financial settlement but basically we split it amicably.

[0:16:16.4]

FT: Can I ask you...

[0:16:16.5]

RS: We're married a long time, it's basically 50/50.

[0:16:20.2]

FT: So I guess my only question is, why was the property more important to you?

[0:16:24.8]

RS: Number one, I didn't want my daughter's life to change so dramatically, so quickly. So that's about it.

[0:16:32.9]

FT: What are some of the lessons you're hoping to instill in your daughter? She's now 21, right? She's in college. What are her goals, hopes does she see the merits of mom being on a reality show or is she, like most kids would be a little eye rolling at it?

[0:16:49.9]

RS: I don't know, she accepts me for who I am. She knows the reality show is just a portion of who I am. She knows how driven I am with business, how successful I have been, I'm a great entertainer, a great home maker, a great care giver. I'm very hands on with things, and I get things done and she's just like me. She knows how to make things happen and get things done and she's very efficient. She has a strong sense of self-worth and I'm very proud of her in so many ways and she knows how to have a good time, she knows how to work hard and play hard.

[0:17:19.1]

FT: Ramona, what was your most successful financial moment?

[0:17:21.8]

RS: Here is my most successful moment, this is like unbelievable. I was pregnant with my daughter at 39 years old and that's a mature age. So I was nervous about when I gave birth to her, would she has any problems? Would I have to stay at home and not work? I made three deals in a row where I made a quarter of a million profit each, I made \$750,000 within six months 21 years ago.

[0:17:44.6]

FT: What were those deals?

[0:17:47.2]

RS: One deal was buying a close out from Ann Taylor, it was all Ann Taylor pieces, another one was, what else? It was another, I don't know. Three deals, I just remembered I made a lot of money. If I buy clothes from one vendor, so it's basically one big deal. Because usually when I do the deals, I'd buy and there would be hundred thousand, \$50,000. But this is I made literally a quarter of a million over three, I mean I had my best year ever. I shipped a millions and millions of dollars that year.

[0:18:14.5]

FT: Because you have a deadline. you're going to give birth. So if there's any...

[0:18:18.0]

RS: You know what? I believe I'm blessed in life. I believe that God is watching out for me because I had such a horrendous childhood that once I left home, the world opened up. I mean, who am I at 21 years old to work at Calvin Klein with a Brooke Shields day under Carl Rosen when I had men twice my age looking at me, they used to call me the young shiksa because I was half Jewish, half catholic. They'd call me the shiksa and like, "Why are you here?" They were intimidated by me, I was just always — gotten great opportunities and always very successful at what I did.

[0:18:50.2]

FT: What is that about? How do you find this opportunities, the grace of god yes, but you have to give yourself some credit too Ramona, right? Because you were ambitious, you created your own luck.

[0:19:01.7]

RS: I think you have to be focused and believe in yourself. I mean I really — there was this book that came out and there's another book now, but that book called — what's it called? *The Secret*. It's all about, I believe if you envision what you want...

[0:19:14.1]

FT: That little book yeah.

[0:19:17.1]

RS: I read the book, people call me back, "That's how I've been living my whole life." My life was always a secret. I worked for Flora Kong. I ran a huge division for them. I got them into major stores. You know what I would do before I'd call the buyer? I write down, Marshal Fields and then I put down like 5,000 units or \$100,000. I knew I called that buyer beforehand, I would get in order and it would be a large order. I would just — if you visualize what you want, it really does happen. Visualization is such a key and by people underestimate the power of thought.

[0:19:47.9]

FT: What are you visualizing for now?

[0:19:50.3]

RS: What am I visualizing now? That's a good point. I'm not really visualizing anything right now because — well, I'm visualizing the next onset of my life. I always, I'm visualizing to be very happy, to find eventually another partner in my life because I like being settled with someone whether it is being married or just being with someone one on one. I'm looking for my next business venture, yes I have Lux Beauty Club, which I enjoy doing because I wear it all the time, I love the way it makes me look and feel.

I'm now looking for other opportunities in business. What I should be doing and even with when it comes to the reality TV. Something more creative that I can do which brings out more of my intellect and my heart and core, essence of who I really am and doing maybe another type of

show, whether it's inspirational to other business women. It's just something different. I still love the Housewife Show.

[0:20:42.0]

FT: The show is meant to be more light and more fun and dramatic but I think at the core, you're all real women, you have real experiences, you got through hardships, and you're just like people at home. What do you think has been the most incredible thing anyone has said to you from watching you and maybe has come up to you at an event, that has really stuck with you, that makes you think, "You know what? This is good work that I'm doing."

[0:21:09.6]

RS: When people come up to me, they always say, "You know you've done such a great job with your daughter Avery, you're such a great mother and I just love the relationship you have with her, it's so special. You're just a great role model." Then other younger women would say, "You're such a great role model, I want to be similar as you." What else? On a superficial level, they I appreciate how I look. They say, "Wow, I mean, how old are you? You look so incredible."

[0:21:33.9]

FT: Yeah, what's your skin care regimen?

[0:21:37.7]

RS: Oh it takes too long to tell you.

[0:21:38.1]

FT: It's a long process.

[0:21:39.5]

RS: No, but it's really working out. You know, when you work out, you produce things in your body, certain things happen that make you look younger because your body gets tighter, your face gets tighter, your body releases something, it's not estrogen, I forgot what it's called, it's something else. So I mean I look better now than I did 10 years ago.

[0:21:59.1]

FT: I have to say, your relationship with your daughter, for the little moments that we see on television, I am really impressed because too often you see the opposite, the kids aren't around, the parents aren't involved.

[0:22:10.5]

RS: No, we eat dinner at home every night. I would make my ex-husband come home every night, we have dinner at the table at 8 o'clock or 7:30. So then when she was younger, she would have dinner by herself first at 6 o'clock and then she sits down again at 7:30, have two meals sometimes. Dinner at home was a big important thing, we had it four times a week.

[0:22:30.9]

FT: The show, it seems could go on for another decade at this point. How long are you going to ride this reality train?

[0:22:39.3]

RS: You know what? I always say, "I'll keep doing the show as long as I keep enjoying it." To me, to be successful in business, you have to love what you do. If you don't love what you do, you're not going to be successful.

[0:22:49.5]

FT: Some women don't get invited back. Is there pressure to make sure that you get invited back because I think that if you're boring, you get booted.

[0:22:57.8]

RS: You know? I don't really think about that, again, I'm just me. So I remember when they interviewed me for the show and I said, "I don't want to do the show because I can't do A, B and C, I'll be boring." The producer said, "Ramona, you're anything but boring." It's so funny she said that.

[0:23:15.8]

FT: In some ways, you're very lucky to be on the show, a lot of people I know would love to have that sort of exposure to be able to promote the things that they're passionate about and get those opportunities...

[0:23:24.0]

RS: Well it's a double edged sword though, because you know what? You can't go somewhere without being recognized and I can't even imagine what it's like to be a real major star. I'm just a reality star and it's just, as much as I like the support of my fans, you don't want to have to take a picture with every other person because you want to have your life.

[0:23:41.9]

FT: Yeah, so how do you maintain your reality outside of the show?

[0:23:46.6]

RS: Well I have my good friends and my core group. Then I meet people, I date people, the last thing I want to do is tell them I'm on a TV show but then the kind of figure it out when people are acting a certain way towards, or saying, "Hi Ramona, hi Ramona, hi Ramona." "Do you know that person? Do you know that person?"

[0:24:01.6]

FT: Last question.

[0:24:02.3]

RS: Because I'm basically the same person because I started later in life. I think that's why a lot of child stars gets so messed up because they started at 18, 19, 20, 21, 22. But I started when I was like 40 I think, right? I don't even know how old. My 40's, right? I already had a strong essence of myself and who I was. So I am not — my essence isn't the show, I have my essence already and that's very important.

[0:24:26.3]

FT: Well, Ramona, thanks so much for joining us. Season eight is, we're in the midst of it right now, can't wait to see how everything wraps up or doesn't wrap up. Would you say this is your favorite season so far?

[0:24:39.0]

RS: I would say it's the most intense season so far. It just gets very intense and I feel like I'm trying to put fires out everywhere.

[0:24:46.2]

FT: Yeah. You do have no filter? Ramona which is fun to watch.

[0:24:50.5]

RS: That's why I'm on for eight seasons.

[0:24:53.9]

FT: Exactly.

[0:24:54.8]

RS: But what am I supposed to do? You know what? I call it like I see it. What I'm saying is what everyone else is thinking, it's not meant to hurt you, it's like, "Hey, this is what's going on, recognize it."

[0:25:09.2]

FT: All right, just tell me one thing. Is Dorinda still going to be dating John by the end of the season? Please tell me no.

[0:25:15.5]

RS: No, Dorinda is with John, she's madly in love with him, she's been with him for four years.

[0:25:17.7]

FT: Gosh, still, okay. All right. A girl can hope. Thank you so much Ramona and congratulations.

[0:25:25.1]

RS: Thank you so much.

[END]