



# **Undercover Boss: Inside the TV Phenomenon that is Changing Bosses and Employees Everywhere**

*Stephen Lambert, Eli Holzman*

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**"For a popular television series, *Undercover Boss* has an unusual knack for raising deep and weighty questions."**

—*Forbes*

On February 7, 2010 the CBS television series *Undercover Boss USA* premiered to a staggering 38.6 million viewers, the largest post-Super Bowl audience for a new series and the most-watched premiere episode of any reality series in the history of television.

Now, for the first time, the bosses and employees featured on *Undercover Boss* share the lessons they learned as well as the formative experiences that resulted from being on the show. Show creators and executive producers Stephen Lambert and Eli Holzman reveal how they came up with the idea for the show, how they got a major network on board, and of course, how they found a dynamic, charismatic group of bosses willing to go undercover—on camera—in this thoroughly new experiment.

Featuring all-new interviews and insights with the bosses and employees of the nine businesses featured on Season 1 of the show, as well producers' notes on what you didn't see behind the scenes, this book is a must-have for fans of the show everywhere.

## Q&A with *Undercover Boss* Creators and Executive Producers Stephen Lambert and Eli Holzman

### How did you come up with the idea for the show?

Stephen Lambert had the idea for this show in 2008, when he was reading press about the opening of the new British Airways terminal, and there were all sorts of problems. One journalist mused that if Willie Walsh, the British Airways boss, had himself worked anonymously on the front lines, doing luggage sorting and basic functions, he would have anticipated some of these problems and headed them off. But the reporter quickly acknowledged that it would never work--that Walsh would be too easily recognized by employees. Stephen wondered if that were true. Would anyone really recognize the boss, out of context and working in the trenches? We suspected they wouldn't. Fortunately, Britain's Channel 4 agreed, and ordered a pilot that would let us test our theory.

### What should fans expect from the book?

The book tries to capture the experience that each of the bosses had on their undercover journeys in a bit more detail, and with the benefit of 20/20 hindsight and the ability to reflect on what they were experiencing. It also follows-up many of the stories of impressive employees from the episodes to see how that are now faring.

### Are there any extras?

We also reveal how we chose each boss featured on the show and additional behind-the-scenes moments that you didn't see --some funny, some touching. We show you how the show comes together, and also bring you up to date on what has happened with the bosses and employees since the show aired.

**What is your favorite behind-the-scenes moment?**

In Covington, Kentucky, we had White Castle owner Dave Rife stay in a “budget” motel to enhance the experience of posing as an entry-level employee at their frozen products factory. Dave was a remarkably good sport, despite such red flags as a sign by the entryway that read no refunds after 10 minutes. Despite the lack of linens in the room and the decidedly unhealthy odors, Dave remained in high spirits, even cracking a few jokes about the bugs climbing the walls--which he referred to as his “new roommates.” But insect infestation was the least of our worries that night. The high volume of people going in and out of Dave’s room that night, including our small camera crew, attracted the attention of the local authorities. Just after we realized that the Covington Police were monitoring our comings and goings, we were surrounded by squad cars--headlights blazing--and officers asking us a barrage of questions. To make matters worse, we had to maintain the confidentiality of the show, so we couldn’t even tell them what the cameras were for. Dave’s official White Castle ID eventually put them at ease--but *Undercover Boss* came disturbingly close to becoming *America’s Most Wanted*.

**What kind of feedback have you gotten from executives who have appeared on the show?**

Employee engagement means the difference between someone who cares, who's focused on work, taking a little more pride in it--and someone who is just punching the clock and going through the motions. Engagement apparently went way up at Waste Management after their episode, in ways they could measure. COO Larry O'Donnell had tried so many things, all with an eye to making the workforce engage more--they have company newsletters and corporate videos, off-site retreats. But just the one episode that was aired touched their workers so much more. For some companies, maybe there's a publicity benefit. But there was just as much publicity risk.

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