

# LESSONS LEARNED FROM AMERICAN IDOL

## AN A&R PERSPECTIVE

Written by Gian Fiero

American Idol is unquestionably the machine in the history of the music promote, and transform obscure talent into release a single, is unparalleled and love it, but everyone has an opinion about 35.2 million dollars in only 59 dates and the season coming in at a whopping 37 million franchise *with* a show – and the show is a



greatest marketing (and money making) industry. Their uncanny ability to position, household names *before* they record or unprecedented. Some hate the show, others it. With the American Idol 5 tour grossing Nielsen ratings for the debut of the sixth viewers, it's more than just a show; it's a runaway hit with no signs of slowing down.

This article sheds light on five invaluable lessons that are imparted upon music artists who watch the show with dreams of one day becoming a commercial music success, or the next American Idol.

**5.) MAINTAIN UNDERDOG STATUS.** Taking tons of voice lessons, having a previous record deal, a famous family member, or great looks should be *downplayed*. America loves to root for the underdog in general - and on this show in particular. The show's viewers recognize that there's a thin line between confidence and cockiness. Chris Daughtry (season five contestant) crossed that line and walked into a brick wall of humility and exited from the show wearing a genuine expression of shock and dismay on his face that was perfectly captured by the cameras and replayed constantly by the media. Lesson learned: *The minute you display cockiness, people pick up on it and are less willing to help you.*

**4.) USE THE FEEDBACK.** Simon, Randy and Paula provide "constructive feedback" to contestants after every performance for the purpose of correcting flaws and improving future performances. Some use it. Some don't. Every American Idol winner does. This feedback (as entertaining or critical as it can be) often proves to be the tipping point for contestants on the edge like Elliott Yamin, who was advised to loosen up. Had he taken heed to that advice, the American Idol title would not have eluded the competition's best male vocalist of season five. Lesson learned: *Use the advice offered by those with experience to your advantage.*

**3.) BE HUMBLE.** Justin Guarini (a crowd favorite among the show's coveted female viewers) fell from grace and front-runner status in the first season during an egotistical exchange with Simon Cowell (while he was getting constructive feedback) in which he pronounced, "I don't care what you think...they like me," he said, pointing to the crowd and being rooted on by their cheers. "That's all that matters." He apologized the next week...but it was a mistake that would haunt him and inevitably cost him what appeared to be a certain victory. With one ill-timed (and ill-advised) exchange, he displayed cockiness *and* arrogance, which allowed Kelly Clarkson to surge from behind and clinch the victory. Lesson learned: *Don't cheer for yourself; let the voters do it for you.*

**2.) BE LIKEABLE.** Taylor Hicks (winner of season five), ingratiated himself with his animated personality and off-beat dancing. The light-hearted sassiness of Fantasia (winner of season three), the mild-mannered southern charm of Ruben Studdard (season two winner), and the wholesomeness of Carrie Underwood (winner of season four), exemplify the endearing qualities that American Idol viewers relate to and vote for. Lesson learned: *We are motivated to do things for those we like – voting is just one of them.*

**1.) CHOOSE THE RIGHT SONGS.** Ruben Studdard did a masterful job of choosing songs that not only showcased his vocal talents and strengths, but also his versatility. His rendition of Lynyrd Skynyrd's "Sweet Home Alabama" distanced him from the pack and assured his victory. Fantasia's rendition of "Summertime" assured her of a record deal, and Kelly Clarkson's courageous cover of Aretha Franklin's "Natural Woman," helped to position her as a *true* vocalist. In each scenario, the *consistent* selection of the right song and its perfect marriage with the singers' voice, vocal range, *and* performance skill, proved to be the winning formula for American Idol winners, and it's also the formula for a successful career as a commercial recording artist.