

BRINGING TREASURY TO REALITY TV

'I FEEL IT IS TIME FOR THE ASSOCIATION TO SPONSOR ONE OF OUR YOUNG PEOPLE TO BE A CONTESTANT ON BIG BROTHER'

Treasurers shouldn't watch *Big Brother*. I try to follow that ACT membership rule but still I'm addicted whenever it's on. For those treasurers who behave like true professionals and don't have the first idea about what I'm talking about, I should first explain the nature of *Big Brother*. Every so often on Channel 4, a group of young people are brought together in the *Big Brother* house. They all wear concealed microphones and there are lots of CCTV cameras dotted round the house to capture their every waking and sleeping moment. Every week, the housemates nominate two people for eviction and we, the viewers, vote for one out of those two to leave the house on the Friday evening.

The housemates cook for themselves, tend chickens, splash about in the pool in the garden, carry out *Big Brother* tasks and stay up drinking to the early hours. The surviving contestant wins £70,000.

At first sight, the contestants on the third series of *Big Brother* seemed to be the usual collection of male models, show-offs, fantasists, nose-pickers and wannabee E-list celebrities.

But this time there was an exception in the person of Jade, a cheerful blonde from Bermondsey, South London. Jade came fourth, and, when she left the house, she admitted that she was not the sharpest tool in the toolbox. Her self-assessment seemed accurate.

We had an early clue when she asked: "Is Portugal in Spain? What language do the Portuguese speak?". A small mistake in geography is forgivable, we thought. Later, there was a jaw-dropping conversation in which Jade said: "Inspector Morse was related to Mr Heinstein and Mother Teresa." My daughter reckoned Jade was played by a RADA-trained actress, who was just acting the role of a bubbly blonde from Bermondsey, and pretending to be unintelligent.

I have spotted one contestant who claimed to be a barrister (although, under pressure, she later admitted to being only a trainee barrister), but I have never come across one who claimed to be a corporate treasurer, not even a trainee, apprentice, pupil, novice (or whatever our young people are called nowadays).

I feel it is time for the ACT to sponsor one of our young people to be a contestant on *Big Brother*. Why sponsorship? Well, any of our young people, with a proper knowledge of probability, would realise

that with only one winner out of 12 contestants, and with a stay in the *Big Brother* house of nine weeks, resulting in a prize for the winner of only £70,000, the likely financial return is pretty derisory.

Granted that the contestants get free accommodation on a full-board basis in the *Big Brother* house. Granted that the final four will be given contracts to host chat shows on cable TV, release their own exercise videos or model hair gel, and possibly make a small fortune in the process.

Yet, as a retired corporate treasurer, I reckon that, apart from the wealth for the final four contestants, the rewards are still derisory – go on, work out the risk/reward ratio for yourself.

Imagine you are sitting at your desk at 5pm on a Friday, having piled all those papers into your briefcase for the weekend, but there is still so much to do, so much that can't wait.

One of your novitiates knocks quietly on the door. You must always have time for your novitiates. Perhaps it is some juvenile puzzlement – like the difference between the calculation of the Payoff to the Holder of a Straddle and the Payoff to the Holder of a Strangle – which can only be untangled with your grandfatherly wisdom.

"Just to say that I won't be in on Monday," says the novice. Not a hint of "Sir", you note, but "Sir", you remember, fell out of use around the time of the Bretton Woods Agreement.

"A funeral?" you ask with concern. "No, I am going to be a contestant on *Big Brother*," he replies. "Oh, jolly good, well done," you say, "but do you expect to be off work for long?"

"Well," comes the answer, "I might be voted out by the viewers after one week, if they reckon I am not contributing to the house, not helping to clean out the chicken run, that sort of thing."

"Surely not," you say encouragingly, "but what is the longest absence?"

"Well, if the viewers reckon I am supportive and interesting, and sexy, they might vote me the winner after nine weeks," he says.

"You more than deserve that result, although nine weeks away from work seems an awfully long time," you shake your head sadly.

"Of course," he explains, "if I win *Big Brother*, I won't be coming back to Widgets Treasury."

To avoid these embarrassing conversations, I think the Association should organise sponsorship contracts, under which novitiates are given paid leave of absence for an uncertain period on the condition that they return to treasury once their adventure has ended.

And, by the way, the Association ought to run a simple test on the candidates for sponsorship, to make sure they know things such as what language is spoken in Portugal and where "East Anglar" is in the UK. JF