

# 'STRIVE' FOR SUCCESS

Offshoot of East Harlem job coaching workshop is subject of new TV documentary

BY ELIZABETH LAZAROWITZ  
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**I**f getting hired is hard in this economy, try doing it with a rap sheet.

For people with histories of substance abuse and jail time, the often daunting challenges of finding work have only increased, said Rob Carmona, co-founder of the East Harlem-based employment coaching workshop STRIVE.

"This is absolutely the worst that I've seen it."

The hardcore career boot camp, launched more than two decades ago, works with struggling job hunters, many of whom have troubled pasts.

"Before, our clientele were competing against each other. Now, they're competing against people who have long work histories and got laid off because that's show business," Carmona said. "It's a much more competitive market."

But self-pity isn't part of the program at STRIVE. While it acknowledges the particular challenges faced by people of color in low-income communities – who make up a large portion of its clients – it also presses participants to own up to their poor decisions, Carmona said.

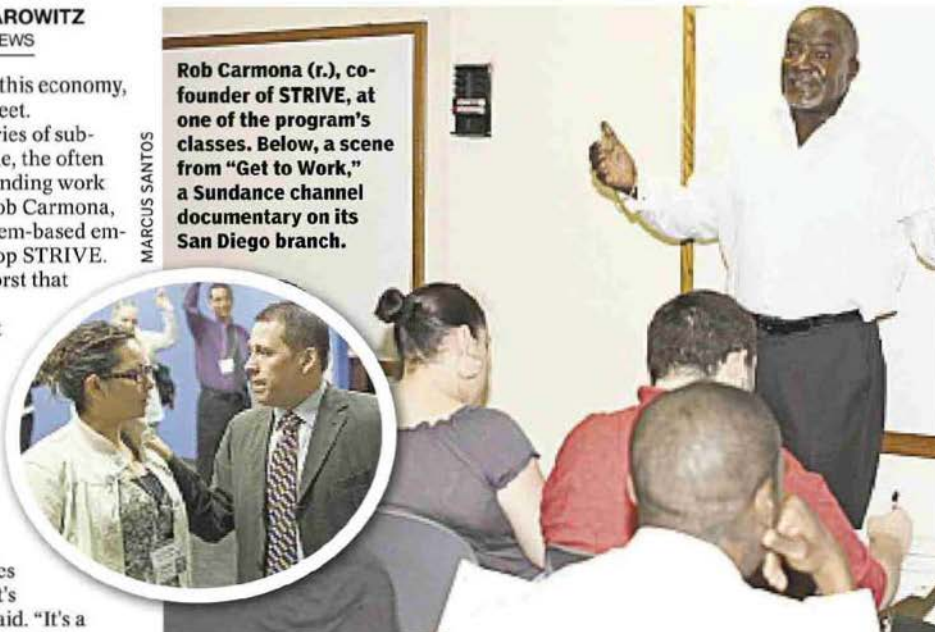
That tough-love approach is the focus of a new documentary series, "Get to Work," premiering Monday night at 10:30 p.m. on the [Sundance Channel](#).

The eight-episode series follows participants in STRIVE's San Diego offshoot as they progress through the four-week program.

STRIVE has spread to about 20

**Rob Carmona (r.), co-founder of STRIVE, at one of the program's classes. Below, a scene from "Get to Work," a Sundance channel documentary on its San Diego branch.**

MARCUS SANTOS



locations across the U.S. and as far away as Israel, and recently received a \$5 million grant from the Department of Labor, Carmona said.

Despite a difficult economic environment, it manages to place about 60% of its graduates in jobs – although that's down from 80% in better times, he said.

To keep up with employers' increasingly high demands, STRIVE has added vocational training in areas like green construction, office operations and medical billing.

The focus, though, is still on so-called "soft" skills, like smiling at an interviewer.

People from rough-and-tumble communities "tend to adopt a look of threat,"

Carmona said. "That same look that may protect you is harmful to you when you're going out to a job interview."

Many of the program's instructors – including Carmona – have overcome their own troubles with the law and drugs, and they use their own experiences to encourage participants.

"We assure people that if you keep your chin up and don't lose faith and don't lose heart, you will get a job," he said.

"What STRIVE is about is giving people their dreams back."

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## LESSONS IN MANDARIN

A QUEENS program that offers training courses for home improvement contractors is going bilingual.

Last winter, the Queens Economic Development Corporation launched "Home Improvement Contractor Training," a Mandarin-language program for existing and aspiring home-improvement contractors.

More than 100 participants completed the program and then passed the NYC Department of Consumer Affairs examination to obtain city licenses to work legally in the construction industry.

This fall the program will be offered again, only now it will also be taught in another language: English.

A preview class for the English version of contractor training program will take place on Aug. 21, from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m., at the JFK Corporate Square Marketing Center, 93-43 Sutphin Blvd. in Jamaica.

The English classes will then take place on three consecutive Saturdays: Sept. 8, 15 and 22, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., at the same location.

A preview class for the Mandarin version of the program is scheduled for Aug. 23, from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. at Compu21, 93-43 Sutphin Blvd. in Jamaica.

The Mandarin classes will then run on three consecutive Sundays: Sept. 9, 16 and 23, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at Compu21.

Classes cost \$200. For more information, call Nicholas Hardie at 516-366-9674.