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Interviewee: Allison Mooney

Interviewer: Stuart Cameron

Stuart Cameron: Hello and welcome to the Robert Half International Podcast series. Managing differing personality types in the workplace can make the difference between having harmonious productive teams and toxic environments where staff turnover is high and efficiency is low. In this podcast, I speak with Allie Mooney, an expert at mapping personality types and creating strategies to help manage teams to maximum effectiveness. Allie Mooney, why is it important to understand different personality types at work for leaders, managers and employees?

Allison Mooney: Each personality sees the world differently, they work differently, they respond differently and they process things differently. So if we don't have an understanding or insight as to how people view their world, we get frustrated by those who don't see it as we see it. To manage people we need to really tap into everyone's style of influence. I believe personality traits and behaviour show us how. And I also take the view that we should not treat others as we would like to be treated, but as they would like to be treated.

Stuart Cameron: So what are the four personality types, and what are their strengths as employees and as leaders?

Allison Mooney: Well there are four dominant personality types, in fact there are many testings out there, there's a trillion of them. The language I use for my model around four dominant styles is the playful, they are the talkers, the powerful, they are the do-ers, the precise, they are the thinkers, and the peaceful are the watchers. Now I'll tell you what desire they have, because if we don't know their desires we will never be able to relate to them. The playful's desire is to have fun, the powerful's desire is to actually take charge, they are take charge types, the precise, they want to get it right, and the peaceful, their desire is no conflict. Now around that, if you're looking at real strengths, the playful's strength is that they love to communicate, they articulate well, they create fun, they are really energetic, and you might be able to tell that I'm one of those. Powerful's, they like to take charge of anything, they're great under pressure, they're confident, they're visionary. The precise are very organised and structured, method and logic is really important to them, they have great critical skills, the more difficult the problem the better it is for them. And the peaceful, well they are the ultimate diplomat, they are great at mediation, they are very good listeners, they are loyal and dedicated, and they don't live life in the extreme. So you can see how different the four are.

Stuart Cameron: So they're the strengths, what are the weaknesses of these particular types?

Allison Mooney: Weaknesses are quite easy, weaknesses are your strengths out of balance, or pushed to extreme. My ability to communicate is a strength but when it becomes a weakness is when I overtalk, I button and I get louder. Now for a powerful, their strength is their desire to lead, take charge, what happens pushed to extreme, they become bossy, tyrannical, and they become very demanding. Now the precise, their strength is the way that they detail things, the way that they look at things, facts and logic are really important to them. Pushed to extreme, they become pedantic and they spend too much time on planning and preparing. And the peaceful, well they really listen well however pushed to extreme what do they do, they don't talk or speak when they should and they could. So you see, strengths pushed to extremes become our weaknesses.

Stuart Cameron: So if you're in the unfortunate position, or fortunate for that matter, of managing all of these different personality types, which I guess reflects reality, how do you get the best out of each of them and make sure they don't tear each other apart?

Allison Mooney: Well we give them what we need. I believe that we all have a tank that needs to be filled and each personality has a different need. We are motivated differently, we need to know how to fill the tank of the different personality styles. We need to give them what they need. So the playful, what do they need? Attention, affection, approval and acceptance. The powerful don't want that, they want credit, they demand loyalty, they want appreciation for all that they've done. The precise, what do they want? Sensitivity, space, silence, support. And the peaceful want respect and value. So those are the four quadrants of how to fill the tank, that's really important if you're going to be a great leader.

Stuart Cameron: When we're processing our reaction to people, we're usually not thinking in those sorts of terms, we just have a kind of an emotional reaction to somebody's personality style. So what are some of the common misunderstandings that happen between different personality types at work?

Allison Mooney: Well as I mentioned earlier, that because we see the world differently from other personalities, that's where the communication starts to break down, it begins there. We get frustrated by others that just don't get it with us. Understanding the way each work, the way that we pace, the way that we question, all of these things can take the heat out of the misunderstanding. Take for example how we work, playful's work fast, not always perfect but fast. Powerful's, they work hard. The precise work accurately and the peaceful work constantly. So in just understanding those frustrations, we can start to talk to that rather than coming from our premise where it just doesn't work. I'm just thinking Stu, just now in the market place there is change happening and each personality reacts and responds to change differently. Playful's will love change, they love variety and flexibility. Powerful's are the instigators of this change, they're the ones that like to take charge and try to instigate change. Precise's will change if you give them the information and data. Now the peaceful unfortunately, they are the greatest resisters to change, most often because people don't give them the reason why. So even in our questioning we cause conflict because we don't listen to people's questions and we don't see it from their perspective, that's where it all goes wrong.

Stuart Cameron: Those misunderstandings, wouldn't it just be easier to group similar personality types who understand each other altogether and put teams together in that manner?

Allison Mooney: Yes, isn't that interesting, I thought that at one time too. Why is it that most people are attracted to an opposite? It's the principle of life isn't it Stu, is that opposites actually attract. There is real strength and diversity. So at work we need to, each type on the team to bring their different strengths to the table. The strength of the playful is their creativity, innovation, energy, ideas. The powerful's strengths is focus, assertion, vision. The precise, what do they bring? Method, procedure and structure. And the peaceful, they bring clarity and mediation. So we can't thrive without the others, there's just no flow. Take one type out of the equation and that's when the conflict starts to begin, and really if we try to work without them, the team weakens and then we are forced to do stuff that we're not naturally, it's not our natural bent and strength. So it's really important that we value each type in the team.

Stuart Cameron: So we're two people are constantly clashing because of their different personality types, what's the best way for the manager to turn that situation around?

Allison Mooney: Transformation starts when we see the world through the eyes of those we're relating to. Ron Willingham says it so beautifully, he says people are more apt to relate to you when they perceive that you view their world as they view it. Like get into their shoes and see it from their perspective. And you see, managers firstly need to know their own leadership style and there's different leadership styles. The playful is inspirational, powerful's visionary, the precise strategic leader, and the peaceful, a diplomatic leader. So you have no idea how much potential is locked up in your people waiting for you to bring out as the leader. So in summing up Stu, I feel that number one modify your own style and flex to those who you are speaking to, that means move toward those people that you're speaking to, try to mirror who they are. And number two, I truly believe in educating your team around the styles of influence, position them where they will thrive. There's no use putting me in the back of house with numbers, I don't do that well. Remember, no-one is better, just different. So filling the tank is in front of line when dealing with those who we're spending, who are spending unproductive time working out their weaknesses. And this is what we have, they say that in New Zealand it's dreadful, 97% of people are disengaged, not engaged, totally engaged in their workplace. And I wonder if we could use these pro finding systems and personalities to really get people motivated and want to get out of bed and go to work.

Stuart Cameron: How much self awareness is required on the part of a manager in order to firstly understand at a conceptual level what's going on here, and then secondly to be able to actually put it into practice?

Allison Mooney: Well this model is so simple it's embarrassing, and that's why I love to use the simple tool, there's many complicated tools out there. But self awareness is first knowing who I am. I cannot begin to understand my staff if I don't know my style because as a manager, I need to be doing the modifying. That's what a great leader is, a leader, what does John Maxwell say, leadership is influence, nothing more, nothing less. So I have to do the moving so I need to know who I am, my traits, and how am I offending or am I bringing the best out of my people? It's tapping into their brilliance, that's the important part.

Stuart Cameron: Do you find that there are certain personality types that perhaps have a more cohesive or perhaps even a more toxic sort of relationship?

Allison Mooney: Well that's interesting, it all depends on the other person that's relating to them, like we all can have clashes. Like this is why in marriage we don't have

two the same, most often we are attracted to an opposite, why? Because that brings the grounding force, we balance ourselves, and it's like that within the team as well. You see from a precise perspective, they look at playful's and they think oh, they're ditzs, they're always talking, they speak to hear their thoughts, because playful's do that. But playful's get offended by a precise because a precise in their non verbal will not give them praise if they haven't done it perfectly. Now peaceful's get freaked out by the powerful's because the powerful's are do it, decisive, and they have no tolerance to peaceful's that can't make up their minds immediately. So look there's toxic in every quadrant, it's just how do I modify that, how do I audit myself that I'm not bringing offence so those people I work with, and how do I stay in the flow of my strengths, that's the key.

Stuart Cameron: By the time we get well into our careers, we've probably had 20 or 30 years of practice at being our particular personality type, are people willing to change or are they willing to see that different personality types are just different?

Allison Mooney: Remember Stu, we never change until the pain of not changing becomes too great. Now when people don't get on well at work, what happens? They either leave or they burn out and they blow out and they walk out. So it's usually change comes under pressures. There's change happening in the market place right now and there's pressures, and I think these simple people tools are the things that are going to make businesses or break businesses, because at the moment we need to be relating to our customers well and this is a communication style that will do that well.

Stuart Cameron: Allie Mooney, thanks for your time today.

Allison Mooney: Thank you Stu.

Stuart Cameron: Thank you for listening to the Robert Half Podcast series. For more information on global employment opportunities and career advice, visit www.roberthalf.net.

End of Interview.