

## ADVENTURES IN BEHAVIOUR CHANGE - GHILAINE CHAN

(Katie Elliott & Ghilaine Chan)

On today's show it's my pleasure to welcome Ghilaine Chan. Ghilaine describes herself as a 'people-centric' coach and consultant with a passion for working with businesses and individuals to help them learn to perform, communicate and work together better.

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My guest today is Ghilaine Chan. Good morning, Ghilaine.

Hi there, Katie.

I'd love to find out a bit more about the work that you do.

Someone said to me at the weekend, I'm a solution-finder rather than a problem solver, which is an interesting angle on it. I work with people, generally in business, who wants to do things better. So a lot of what I do is about personal effectiveness, business effectiveness - but what it comes down to is how people interact with other people.

So the interpersonal side of things, yeah?

Absolutely.

Tell me something about the work you do around communication.

Well, the way I approach it is, everyone has their own preferences, and what we struggle to do is actually ask people how they want to be treated. I mean, I grew up in a religious household and one of the things was always 'treat people as you wish to be treated'. And then about 10 years ago, someone said to me, you should treat people how they wish to be treated. And that was kind of a mind-blowing thing. But we forget to ask people what they prefer, how they want things to happen and we all have our stories and we all have our backgrounds, and by being interested in people and finding out what they like, you can actually work to their style and things just go a bit more smoothly. So I essentially say to people, "How about you? What matters to you? How do you like to be treated?" And then, as far as possible, try to accommodate that.

I love that. So are there ways to make it easier for people to share those kinds of things about themselves? Because often, you know, in the world of small-talk or in a work environment, having the kind of conversation where it feels safe for somebody to actually disclose who they are as an individual - it doesn't always feel as though there's time or a safe space for that to happen. Have you got any tips about how we can make it easier for one another to communicate that kind of information?

I actually think things like LinkedIn and Facebook have done us a disservice. I know a lot of people will kind of come to meeting me and say, "Oh, I've read your LinkedIn profile", and it almost breaks down all conversation, because you feel like you know someone. And so I, first and foremost, I actively don't go and look at people's profiles and things before I speak to them because I actually want to start the conversation from a perspective of "I don't know anything about you, I'm going to ask questions". And actually sometimes just asking questions and being interested does allow people to open up. I think the other thing we have to honour is, people will only open up as far as they feel comfortable. So you're not going to hear their whole life story in a five-minute coffee, but you can ask questions and you can dig a little and just be interested in what they're saying. In a more formal environment, I suppose, I personally have a thing called a User Manual that I've written. I appreciate that I am quite a jarring personality in that I'm quite happy for you to take me as you find me. So if you don't like me in the first instance, sadly I don't really care - and that can be quite jarring for a lot of people. And I also have an upbringing where sarcasm is very heavily laden over most conversations, which again some may not appreciate. So two, maybe three years ago I wrote my User Manual and I actually shared it on LinkedIn, so anyone who works with me can read it. And so now I use the User Manual with teams that I work with and people that I work with so that they can turn around and say, "This is me. If you want to get the best from me, this is how to do it". It's not, "You must deal with me in this fashion", but "If you come to me this way, you will get the best reaction from me". I used it first of all in a team that I led about 10 years ago, and I don't even know where it came from in my head, but the activity we did was 'How best to communicate with me' and it was absolutely profound within my team. I learnt about things like small-talk of "Hi, how are you?", that grease the wheels for some members of my team - they can't open up without that kind of entry into a conversation. Whereas I am, "Come to me, ask a question, go away". So if I treated people in the way I want to be treated, I was getting the worst of two of my team members. And the other side of it was that I realised that I'd compartmentalised my life quite heavily and, as a working mum, I did that very specifically for career advancement and not being seen as a mum at work - and so I wouldn't bring my home life into my office life. And I started opening up to some of these people and sharing my stories or my husband's stories, and that really opened up conversations. And getting to know people is the only way to actually get the best from them because you know what

they like, you know where they come from, you know what drives them. And I think people that are fearful to say "This is me". They feel that they have to fit into a box or they have to do things a certain way and this is our way to say "Actually this is how I am. Please just react in a way that is helpful for me".

So I'm interested, because not everybody listening will be in a work environment where this would be relevant for them - they might be self-employed or they might just be with friends or family. I'm trying to think how one might have an equivalent activity. Would you say it's worth everybody creating their own User Manual if they find it an interesting idea?

I think it is very useful. I have it on my signature for my email so it gets shared with anyone who emails me, so that includes my family. I think it's a useful exercise from a personal perspective because it lists all the things that you do and then you've got that situation where you can turn around and say, "Okay, I don't want to do that any more. Maybe I'll work on it". And I use it as a development tool as well. So, "This is where I am - this is where I want to be - what can I change?" So I would encourage anyone to do, whether personal or business, obviously mine is a bit more business oriented, but you could do it as a relationship... Both me and my husband have one and we read each other's and I'm like, "Yeah, that's true. That isn't. That wording needs to change", and he'll be the same. So it gives insight in lots of different ways. You can do it for many different angles. And I think yeah, it's just useful sometimes to document your preferences or even just go, "You know how sometimes we get into a massive fight? Perhaps you'd want to read this..." It's like a rule-book really, it just makes them go, "Oh brilliant. I now know how to interact with you".

If somebody was inspired by this to start creating one at home, what might be some good kind of all purpose questions that they could ask themselves in order to start writing the manual? What kind of categories might they be looking at?

The main things are, your values I think are really important because if someone goes against your values, that can be a massively emotional trigger. How you structure your day, how you structure your time can be important things. I don't work at the weekends, I don't check email at weekends, all of those kinds of things. How best to communicate with you. If someone is contacting you out of the blue, what's the one way that we'll just really annoy you and what's the way that you'd prefer? So for me, a phone call out of the blue can be really disruptive because I tend to focus my time. So if I'm deep in something and my phone rings, the immediate reaction is "What!", you know, it's kind of like, "Okay..."

I imagine there are probably also some physiological things?, So I know for example, that I definitely don't do my best work in the evenings or when I'm hungry. And I can tell you that if I drink more than one cup of coffee a day, you're going to have a much faster conversation with me.

So I mean for me it's similar things. I go to bed early, I get up early, I will take lunch. Those kinds of things that... I mean it doesn't really matter, it can be a laundry list of stuff and how you organise it can be down to how it fits with your life and who the User Manual is for. The things I sort of make people think about is, "How would you like to work? So what is your ideal?" You want to go towards that. So if you say, "My ideal is this, this and this", that's useful information for someone.

What I find really interesting about that is, in order to write a User Manual, it sounds like that requires quite high degree of self-awareness. So what I've noticed in my life is that for a lot of it, I was completely oblivious to the fact that other people were different from me. I know that this sounds ridiculous...

No, not at all.

...but I've spent my life assuming that other people's preferences were similar to my own and other people's ways of doing things were similar to mine. And it has come as the biggest surprise to me - somehow I didn't learn that lesson that we can have radically different viewpoints and preferences and styles of being. So in order to write your User Manual, you have to know yourself quite well. How do you help people to do that? What kind of questions do you ask people to help them figure out what their own style of being might be?

One of the questions that I use to elicit a response is, if there's something that really annoys you about someone else, dig deep, because the thing with it is, it's probably the thing that you do to others. And that can really tell you a lot about some of the things you might want to put in there. So the main things I say to people are, there's no good or bad. If you fear judgement, don't put it in there. And if it's really short and sweet, that's absolutely fine. It will get longer as people react to it in a really positive way, because people do. And, and the last thing is really, once you start writing it, you actually start going, "Wow, and this and this and this and this". And so it's just as much as you feel comfortable to share. And I would always say once you've written it, give it to someone who cares about you and knows you quite well, as many people as possible, because if you're not very self-aware and they go, "I'm sorry, you think you do that but you never do", it starts raising that self-awareness in a really comfortable and friendly environment where you don't feel judged. And that's important. It's not there to make you feel judged.

It's there to just say, "This is how to get the best from me". Simple. And it's a dynamic document. It's never going to be finished really, in my mind.

Like us.

Yes, exactly.

What I love, the example that you gave about if somebody phones you up out of the blue and you're deeply involved in your work and you don't respond well to being interrupted unexpectedly in that way, so you might be very short when you pick up the phone with the person that you're speaking to - what I love about this is, not only does it give people the opportunity to not interrupt you in that way or to plan their call with you or to do whatever makes it easier for you, but also, should they happen to do that before they've read your User Manual and then they read the User Manual, it makes it much less personal, doesn't it? Because in that situation it's very easy to think, "Oh no! She hates me".

Yes, exactly.

And in fact, what the User Manual does is, is tell them, "No, she hates being interrupted when she's concentrating deeply. It's not you. It's not personal". And I think the more we know ourselves, the more we're able to articulate things about us and learn those things about one another, it stops throwing us into that tailspin of, "Oh no! This is a personal thing and this particular person does not like me", or, "I did this wrong", and it just puts it out on the table, doesn't it? It makes everything a lot more transparent.

Yes. You're absolutely right. It takes the person away from the behaviour.

So you talk about, in the User Manual, being able to identify things that you might want to change about yourself.

Yeah.

There's that space where sometimes we do things and we don't actually want to do those things - we're being very reactive - but I find, there's nothing more difficult than behaving in a way that feels bad, knowing that that's not really who you want to be or who you feel you are, but somehow it happened anyway. And anything that creates a little bit of space between the person and some of these messy behaviours that can come out, can be enormously helpful for people if what they want to do is learn and grow. Because I think when they feel very criticised, it's very

easy to become more entrenched in old behaviours even if you hate the old behaviours, isn't it?

Yeah, absolutely. A lot of those are emotional reactions, you have no chance to think and almost be the person you want to be. They are triggers. It's an emotional reaction, it's visceral. I don't think, I just do. And I think the key thing is, none of these reactions are good or bad - they just are. People have different ways of being. People have different perceptions of life. We don't all think the same. And I have the same history of like, "Why doesn't everyone think that way?" and this is our way to say, "Actually this is not good or bad. It just is how I am".

I ask each guest if they can come up with a *Little Challenge* for the listeners and I wondered, what would your *Little Challenge* be?

So I kind of split this into two. The first thing is to end your day and really think about what you're going to do tomorrow. So reflect back on it. Say, "Have I done everything I wanted to do? No, I haven't. Right, what am I going to do tomorrow?" And keep that list very short, maybe one, two, three things. But really have a sense of stopping today and having an intention for tomorrow. And the reason I say this is, giving your brain intentions, it's amazing how much your brain goes, "Oh, you've given me an instruction, I'm going to go and do that. So at nine o'clock I'm going to do that. And then I'm done". And then, linked to that slightly is, make your bed every morning. They teach it in the army, or in the armed forces, specifically to say - if you've done nothing else, you've achieved that and it sets you up for the day. And so those two things, I think are very straightforward, very simple, that anyone can do. But just close down the day. Think about what you're going to do tomorrow. And then, first thing when you're ready, make your bed in the morning. And if nothing else you'll come back to a made bed in the evening, which is lovely! But those are the two things I think that, if you get into the habit of doing that on a daily basis, your life will improve, even just a smidgen.

Thank you. Thank you. Actually those are two of my favourites as well. I really love both of those. I'm so glad that you suggested them. Ghilaine, it's wonderful talking with you. Before we go, I'd love to ask you how people can find you online if they'd like to find out more about your User Manual?

I mean, mine is on my LinkedIn profile, so you can go and have a look at it. My name is my website, so [www.ghilaine.co.uk](http://www.ghilaine.co.uk). Ghilaine Chan, if you spell it the same way, I am the only person with that name on the Internet, so you will find me.

Thank you so much for talking with me. It's really, really interesting to hear more about you and I hope perhaps you might join me again at some point.

I'd love to, thank you very much.

Thank you.