SM MJS

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**SUMMARY KEYWORDS**

Organizational tiers, performance conversations, leadership skills, coaching feedback, development objectives, relationship dynamics, operational challenges, low EQ, high EQ, delegation issues, trustworthiness, performance management, behavioral scales, development plans, actionable objectives.

**SPEAKERS**

Michael Smith, siobhan mulvey

**Michael Smith** 00:00

Yeah. So what are your impressions about the relevance for an organization like yours, and what are the issues that you'd have in your mind

**siobhan mulvey** 00:15

of the tool? Yeah, yeah.

00:19

So very relevant.

**siobhan mulvey** 00:23

Picking the tier in the organization that we that you pitch it to with most effect would be really critical, yes, so you're talking to quite senior execs as part of what you're doing, and it would be applicable in that context. But where we have the biggest challenge in our organization is managers at the tier four level having performance conversations with team leaders at tier five. So that is, that is the weakest link in our organization, yes, inconsistency in the managers capability and leadership skills and team leaders feeling like they're not getting effective Coaching, constructive feedback and equal opportunities across the board.

**Michael Smith** 01:22

What? What does tier three, tier four, tier five, mean,

**siobhan mulvey** 01:26

layer in the organization, tier two. CE, it's tier one. My directors are tier three, right? Their managers are tier four, and their team leaders are tier five, so and everyone else is tier six,

**Michael Smith** 01:40

right? So it is tier four having conversations with tier five that you're talking about. So I don't have any experience in that one of one of those is a high potential 21 year old woman who's probably been the most responsive. Yeah, to the engagement. But what was in my mind is that it wouldn't be much use to somebody like you, because you know what you're doing and you're really good at and you're highly trained.

**siobhan mulvey** 02:20

I'm not sure that's true, but that it wouldn't be much use to me

**Michael Smith** 02:24

possibly then. But I guess what I was thinking, but I don't have any evidence to support it. But you know, when I was thinking, you know, this is where would this help? And I was thinking, somebody's not trained, yeah, you know, well intended, but clumsy, yeah. And it would build a framework and assistance around them was but the other thing I was also thinking, though, is the people that are inclined to use these things the most need them the least.

**siobhan mulvey** 02:55

Yeah, yeah. I mean, I guess for me, reflecting on the development conversations I have with my directors. I've got five I think that report to me. I feel like I have the same conversation with them every year, yes. And so something's not working, yes, because I shouldn't be having the same conversation with them every year. Yes. So I think what I've probably the biggest challenge I face, I've faced, is translating the feedback into what are we actually going to do to help you address that feedback?

**Michael Smith** 03:40

So if we think about that in three levels, strategy, relationship, operation. So if you were having a development conversation, you've got in your mind, I'm wondering what they need to do to develop and improve. Then, if you think about your relationship with in a high quality relationship, you know them well enough they tell you enough that informs the strategy part and going the other way is that they are capable of being persuaded because they offer trust and have regard for you, versus somebody who's resistant to a relationship, doesn't share much and is defensive about what you're told. And then you've got so I think there are some indicators of that, and then you've got the operational eyes open, you know, that we talk about. This is where you've got to be developed. I agree. And then I don't do enough about it. It's sort of the issue. Yeah, so is, is the problem that the development conversation doesn't produce clearly defined, smart kind of objectives. So that's it falls at that hurdle.

**siobhan mulvey** 05:04

Okay, so I'm just trying. I'm thinking of two people in particular, because I've got one who is on the spectrum, low EQ, well intentioned, incredibly smart, but doesn't have that soft side. Yep, I can give him the most direct feedback that someone gave that feedback to me, I would be weeping, and he takes it right on board. And we've had really great success in coming up with strategies. Had people shadow coaching him, providing feedback after meetings about things he could have done better. How did he think he would and that's been super effective, and I'm having those conversations about his EQ and needing to listen more carefully, let people speak. Don't just jump to the conclusion because you're smarter than everyone else. Let you've got to touch people on the journey having less of those conversations, then I've got someone who's got highly developed EQ, very soft, very touchy feely, etc, cannot delegate, will not delegate, never delegates, and then complains about the fact that She's working 16 hours a day I have the same conversation with her every year about you have to step back. You have to stop getting down into the weeds. You have to delegate more. You have to trust your team. And the same feedback is given back to me. I can't trust them. They're not on top of things enough. If I don't get into the detail, things won't go right. It'll all fall apart, and then she'll come back three months later crying because she's got too much work. She's not coping with the pressure. She can't rely on her team. I have the same conversation about, you need to step back. You need to let them step up. You need to coach them. You need to help them. You need to do all of these things. That's your role as a leader. Then we have the same conversation again three months later, when she comes back crying, I'd have this because she I don't know what it is about that maybe it is we don't get to the smart, kind of actionable, objective kind of things to do. Or is it just that there's this innate resistance on her part because she is such a control freak. What? I don't know why. It is probably the control freak thing.

**Michael Smith** 07:46

She is a control freak. Yeah,

**siobhan mulvey** 07:50

she is. And her team aren't as good as they could be because she's not letting them step up in the way that they need to

**Michael Smith** 08:05

Well, I guess there's a few things going on. So one is the extent to which it's even coachable. So if it's personality, which shows up over time and remains persistent, it's even a genius isn't going to do very well at coaching. Out of that, if it however, is the coaching style or the development conversations are inconsistent with what would work with her looks like you've unlocked the key to the person on the spectrum. Then part of that might be, you know, how do I get into into that? So in the case of, if I think about this sort of thing, in the case of the on the spectrum thing, I would build into the panel, somebody that's neuro diverse, yeah, and I would build in somebody who was a psychiatrist or psychology expert in handling those conditions, and would have some interrogation in there,

**siobhan mulvey** 09:06

yeah. So I'm just guessing it's on the spectrum. I don't know that he's been

**Michael Smith** 09:13

diagnosed, but he's, yeah, well, let's call it low EQ, yeah, whatever that Yeah. And there's, you know, test away. You could, you could look at that. I think one of the things this panel might say in the case of the second one is diagnostic questions, the degree to which there were consequences that were explained and felt and delivered, you know, and if there's Okay, the degree to which there was follow up that reflected your sense of risk. In other words, I think she's going to walk out this door and do very little about what we've just said or try for a week. So is the cadence of follow up matching the degree to it, the idea of new habits is what would create some new habits in it. And building a habit is something quite intense at the start. So it might be that you need to develop a new habit where you have delegated three significant items every week, and that there's a weekly regime until that stops. And if you don't do this, we're having another kind of conversation. There's a whole lot of regime in there. And so I think part of these kinds of things can help at two levels. And I like the fact that it pitches the sophistication. So your limit, you could have a very sophisticated conversation that then might look what the other thing I'll do is, I'll say, Now link me to relevant information in Google Scholar, so I can see what the academic literature is showing, whereas a level four manager would have a less sophisticated interaction in the case of hypo, in her 12 week plan. So what she's done is, look, this is the focus area. This is the goal I'll have. This is what I'll be doing for this week's progress, and this is what I think the impact will have, yeah. So she's built that, and she's running railway track along that, yeah. And I, I speak to her kind of once a fortnight, and yeah. And one, one of the things I've found out of this is, if you're starting with somebody that's got a big problem on you, if you've got, let's say it designs to have 12 conversations. Have the four, four, first four really close, you know? So, yeah, we learn to trust each other, you know. We're learning to have a conversation. We can bank a couple of just on relationship. Yeah, you know. So, and there's another module in this which is about giving constructive feedback or negative feedback. Yeah, yeah,

**siobhan mulvey** 12:08

yeah. It's interesting, because there are a couple of my directors that are quite new. So the two I've described, I've worked with for quite a while now and then there are two that are quite new that I can't quite figure out, and I'm Not quite sure how much I trust one of them,

**siobhan mulvey** 12:45

two of them in terms of their truthfulness and in terms of their intent, so how well intended they are about the workplace and the people and our shared goals and things like that. So for them, this is interesting conversation for me, because we're about to have all of our PD conversations like we're at that point in the cycle of having RPD conversations. So with those two, I'm actually not quite sure what conversations I'll have with them.

**Michael Smith** 13:40

Are there specific instances that you could point to that make you doubt your their trustworthiness?

**siobhan mulvey** 13:53

Um, one of them, yes, definitely. Have

**Michael Smith** 13:57

you raised that? Yeah, and what was the response?

**siobhan mulvey** 14:03

Well, it's a bit cloudy, because the acting chief executive that we had for eight months was bypassing me and going directly to that person, okay, and so that hasn't helped, yeah, and so she sort of blamed a lot of misunderstandings, as she would describe them, on her being compromised, because he was going directly to her and telling her to keep things confidential. But he's gone now, and she is going to some lengths to let me know when things are someone might come directly to her to let me know that that's happened and whatnot. I still don't trust her. So, for example, she always seems to be having crises that mean that she can't be at work. I'm sure she's had covid Three times in the in the last year. Okay? There's just something not right anyway, and I'm not sure about her relationship. I've keep asking other people that work for her about how they're going with her, and, you know, in a not in a way that would suggest that I don't think that she's any good, and there and everyone seems okay with her. So I'm just not sure. I don't know. It's just an instinct.

**Michael Smith** 15:44

Let's say about two things. One is how you could be more sure? So you touched on something that I think is exactly right, which in my language, would go to mindset. So if the little line I use is what I believe, shapes my attitude, shapes my intentions, shapes my behavior, so behavior looks untrustworthy, you can sometimes trace that back to look. I just believe you do good enough, and nobody if you don't look after yourself, no one else will look after you. That kind of thing. And I guess finding some way you can interrogate that, you know, how could you work out what their mindset and fundamental beliefs were? Yeah, because if, if you worked out they actually were well intended and had a set of beliefs that match what you wanted, then dealing with behaviors a different thing, and I'll come to that in a second. But how, how would you go about working out, you know what? What's the attitude, what's the belief set, what are the attitudes they're bringing to work?

**siobhan mulvey** 17:11

I don't know. Well I don't know, because normally that would happen in a fairly organic way, as someone settles into a role and you get to know each other,

17:27

but I.

**Michael Smith** 17:51

10. I want us to have a great working relationship. I want you to be really successful in this job. So let's have a conversation about how we we do

**siobhan mulvey** 18:01

that, yeah, which I've kind of done, yeah? Well,

**Michael Smith** 18:04

I'm not surprised, as I say, though I think people like you are really expert at this, what, what I ended up doing with one of the people, which I use is for I said, you know, I'm not, I'm not sure I'm feel like grassroots smoke, but I'm trying to get you to tell me what's really important to you. What about I give you a set of forced choice questions. Yeah. See what that tells us. Yeah. So I then went back to this, and said, Give me 15 for first, forced choice questions. This was about her next career step. Yeah, you know, and let's just see what it tells us. And said, you know, we'll use, use this. It's not me judging you, but it's just what does that information? Then went through the and it turned out to be quite revealing, yeah. And said, well, because we chose that, it sort of says this about it, yeah. And I guess I tripped over that conversation I referred to a minute ago where somebody actually told me, Well, if you don't look after yourself, who else then you could get into why you're portrayed as being selfish or acting in your own Yeah, yeah, stuff like that. But one of the conversations you can have with this is, this is my problem. I don't know why. I don't trust this person. They haven't given me a lot of evidence. In fact, we could ask it, yeah, and then how would I go about looking at this? Yeah?

**siobhan mulvey** 19:31

See, it's, it's, it's, isn't it? It's a funny thing, isn't it? Because I've told her that I don't trust her. I told her, you know, like when I kind of said, like, we have to have a conversation, yeah, basically, I don't trust you. And here are all the reasons why, yes, and it feels like we've got off to a really big start. These are the kind of expectations that I have of, you know, behaviors and how we work together and, you know, and she obviously had some things to say herself, and I still don't trust her. And because she's the director of HR, I think she's probably documenting everything very, very carefully. She knows that she's probably she probably senses that she's on thin ice, and will be making file notes, left, right and center, about anything I say, anything I might do, anything that she thinks might build a case.

**Michael Smith** 20:45

And have you got

20:48

objective

**Michael Smith** 20:51

evidence that you could point to as legitimizing your concern.

**siobhan mulvey** 21:03

I do, yeah, I probably do. I probably can. I'm Yeah, I could do. All I need to do is to tell my office to stand down and stop fixing up all the shit work that comes through from her before it gets to me, and just send it through unchanged, and then I there'd be enough. Yeah.

**Michael Smith** 21:33

So what does this go back to the earlier conversation we're having about you have a development conversation and nothing happens. You end up with is she an example of that?

**siobhan mulvey** 21:43

Well, no, because I haven't had a proper development conversation with her yet. So I've had that conversation that I described. Yeah. Um, that was probably about four or five months ago, and things have improved. But now I'm about to have my proper development, the first proper development conversation I'll have had with her. She's only, I've only been she's only been reporting to me for probably about 10 months.

**Michael Smith** 22:15

And what do you think she would say about your relationship?

**siobhan mulvey** 22:24

I think she'd say it's not great. What would she say? I

**siobhan mulvey** 22:35

she would probably say she doesn't trust me, if she was honest, I think that's what she would say.

**Michael Smith** 22:42

Would she have a reason in her own mind for that, or is it just a general feeling?

**siobhan mulvey** 22:52

I think, I think she knows that she was really struggling to perform because she was quite, she's quite new to the organization, so she's been there for about 18 months, and then for the first sort of eight months of that, she was reporting to someone else because I was offline, but I think she, she knows that she wasn't performing very well, and so I think she had a sense that potentially she was going to be pushed out because of non performance. And so i i This is where I think a lot of that mistrust has developed, because then she really cultivated this relation, direct relationship, with the chief executive. That meant, yes, that I was I couldn't do anything. I couldn't address her performance, what I saw as being performance issues, because she was effectively reporting directly to him on a whole bunch of things. And so I didn't even know what was in her portfolio of things that she was managing, how much time she was spending on those things. And I didn't have a great relationship with him. I didn't have a bad relationship with him, but I think he came in with an agenda to basically get rid of most of the exec team, so, and she would have known that he would have said things. So I think she felt she was in a really powerful position, and she kept it, you know, she maintained it because of that. So now he's gone, and she's probably feeling quite vulnerable again.

**Michael Smith** 24:59

That all makes sense. I can guess the answer. But why didn't you raise it with the GPT? I did? Oh, you did. And what did he say?

**siobhan mulvey** 25:10

Nothing much. Just that's why he likes to work. Okay,

**Michael Smith** 25:16

how would you describe your relationship with her? Then,

**siobhan mulvey** 25:28

fairly superficial, I would say so doing what we need to do to get to get along okay in the workplace. Do you like her? No, she like you? Probably not. Okay.

25:45

So I'm it feels like

**Michael Smith** 25:51

you're nervous about what you would say to her, because she might be assembling a case of bullying and yeah, and she's nervous about what she's going to tell you, because she thinks you're out to get get her potentially, and that you don't have much time for each other anyway, so you're not spending much time together, yeah? That would be just that you might call investing in a relationship, because there's a million people I like that I can speak to, and you're not one of them. Yeah? So so to speak, so the conditions for it improving are pretty poor, yeah? So what do we do about that?

**siobhan mulvey** 26:36

I have to find a way of managing her out of the organization. I have to start really knuckling down on her performance.

**Michael Smith** 26:45

So you that sounds like you've reached a position. You've seen enough, you know, enough to feel whatever I do, there are better options for somebody to fill this position than her, and that I need to manage a dignified but move on and get a replacement. Yeah, yeah. So that then changes,

**siobhan mulvey** 27:07

but then I kind of have this constant seed of self doubt. Is it is it just me, or is it actually really her?

**Michael Smith** 27:18

Well, what?

**siobhan mulvey** 27:20

And so there's, there's a step that, like, ethically, morally, humanly, I have to make first, which is to be 100% sure. Like, how do I be sure myself that this is actually about her, and not just like, you know, the fact that I don't actually like her that much.

**Michael Smith** 27:47

So what if you were standing once you're Siobhan from another organization, talking to a colleague you, and how would you then advise, well, what would be sufficient information and evidence to say that you now need to move on to the next phase, or look, you need to do more? There's not enough.

**siobhan mulvey** 28:29

I'm just not sure really,

28:33

she's really slippery.

**Michael Smith** 28:35

Well, why don't we think about what this is? The the kind of holding position we've got is she's not the best HR leader that we can for the organization, you have an obligation to make sure that we've got the best available and that it's then a basis of thinking how, with due regard to our culture and her you can get confident about what decisions that you go to make. So part of that is to say what level of evidence and information would I need to be professionally and morally satisfied that we've done enough to give her a process of a just appraisal in that and then so rather than worrying about Anything else, let's worry about what would that look like? Because embedded in that is probably the notion of if there was a chance of her succeeding and meeting expectations that would reveal it. So you then find yourself at this imaginary fork in the road that there is some chance if these opportunities and clarity, and I'll come to that were followed, that she could, she could make it probably as a, b, b plus but, you know, never an A grade, but not bad enough to sack or performance manage or look, I've done all We reasonably could plus some, and now I'm I need to move down the other fork in the road, which is removal kind of thing, yeah. And the ambiguity and lack of clarity about that's stressful, yeah? So if we sort of that out, we'd have a basis of working it, yeah. And one of the things that might think about, and this, is this idea of behavioral scales. And so what I found in the firm is I'd be talking to people, and I'd sit down for a performance discussion, and they'd say, I'm doing an amazing job. And I think, well, you're actually being very well paid. You're doing the job you're very well paid for. So you should be operating at this level. That's what that's fair. So the behavioral skills, I'd start with this and say, Look, if you show up, you're thoroughly prepared. Your people like you, you give clear instructions, you don't leave misses for me to follow up, and things like that. You This is a good exchange. This is what for you to do. Better than that is that there's a surprising inclusion of other cultural elements, where you invest in people that are not necessarily in your your circle, that you come back with some ideas, and that rather than come and putting problems at my desk, which we share, is you're taking some of my desk. What would be disappointing the level below that is that if I keep redoing your work, and I'm actually almost like a proof reader in this, and I'm spending time repairing things that this next level up should be doing, and etc, and this is stuff we'd part on, you know, because I now found that you hadn't been truthful with me, your people don't want to work with you and things like that. And the top one is, this is what I'd be looking to promote you for. You know that this is, you know, it's an exceptional leader. You know, you add value to the entire organization. People want to follow you. And there's a bulletproof thing, and that that kind of conversation linked to the sort of development plan linkage might give a clear picture that you'd say, I'll now roll through 12 weeks of that, and I'm going to have a sense of you're on target, you're below the target, you're above the target in some kind of objective way, which might inform the question, yeah, yeah. If that was helpful, I'd show you an example.

**siobhan mulvey** 32:31

Yeah, yeah, no, I mean, I, yeah, I've got to bite the bullet with this one so, but I, but it has to be fair and objective and grounded in real truth about performance, so clear expectations, and then clear measures of what that looks like. And then,

**Michael Smith** 32:59

so when, when would you do that?

**siobhan mulvey** 33:03

Sometime, pretty soon. Do you

**Michael Smith** 33:05

want to have a talk about it? When you Yeah, okay, yeah, you better. Sorry.

33:13

So I mean, sure you'll

**Michael Smith** 33:17

do that while I grab this. Sure.