Holly: Hello and welcome to the Social Holistic podcast episode 37. This is your host Holly Worton. And I’m here with today’s very special guest, Alison Green from Ask a Manager. Alison is a Management Consultant and the author behind Ask a Manager. Welcome, Alison.

Alison: Thanks so much for having me.

Holly: I am so excited for this interview. You are one of my favorite bloggers. I so look forward to your blog posts when they pop into my feed.

Alison: That’s so nice to hear.

Holly: I’m a huge fan. So why don’t you tell us a little bit about your background and what it is that you do.

Alison: Sure. So about, gosh, I guess it’s been seven years now. I started Ask a Manager on a whim one day. At the time, I was the Chief of Staff for a National Lobbying nonprofit. So I was doing the day-to-day managing, the hiring, the staff development and I am full of opinions. And so I was sort of bursting to find some way to give advice on some of the more common mistakes that I saw people making from workplace and career mistakes to mistakes that I saw applicants making in the hiring process.

And I thought, you know, I will start a blog. I’ll do it for a couple of months. I’ll give some advice and I’ll get it out of my system. And it pretty quickly turned into a Q&A format where I started answering readers' questions on all of these topics. And after a couple of years, the blog was doing well enough that I thought, maybe I could cobble together between the blog and some outside consulting, maybe I could just quit my job and do a combination of those things. And so I’ve been doing that ever since.

Holly: That is fantastic. I love how you’ve moved from being employed in the nonprofit to self-employed now as a consultant.

Alison: It has been very satisfying. And as with the blog, where I thought I would do it for a couple of months and...

Holly: And now it’s been seven years.

Alison: Exactly. The same thing with consulting, I thought, there’s no way this will really work. I’ll give it six months and see what happens. But it’s been about three years now and I am very happy with it.

Holly: Fabulous. Why don’t you tell us a little bit about your business journey? How did you get to where you are today with your business?

Alison: Sure. So I have worked in nonprofits my whole career. I kind of fell into it, I mean like many people getting out of college, I was sort of a mess, I didn’t really know what I wanted to do, wasn’t the
most motivated at the time and I thought, you know, if I’m going to have to get up and go to work every day and actually be reliable about it, I need to do it somewhere where I care about the work that they’re doing, where it’s actually going to make a difference.

So that is why I started in nonprofits, and I kind of moved my way up from there. I started doing writing and communications, a little bit of editing. And I ultimately ended up in a management position which I never thought in a million years I wanted to do. I mean, management. There’s so many headaches that come with it. I might’ve been wisest to listen to that instinct but discovered that, I mean, the great thing about management is that it gives you the power to run things the way that they should be run. And...

Holly: In some cases...

Alison: And in some cases, if you’ve got the right management job and the great people above you. But yeah, I mean I think all of us there at our careers, I mean, bad managers are plentiful. And if you’re someone who sort of pays attention to what’s going on around you and has opinions of how things should be done, also known as bossiness, then it can really be frustrating to see things being run badly and spend a lot of time at work thinking about how we would do things differently.

And so what I really liked about moving into management, despite the headaches that come along with it, was having the ability to make some of those changes and hopefully make things run a little bit more effectively.

Holly: And what are some of the biggest challenges you experienced when you first moved into management, because that’s a huge shift in a career?

Alison: It’s so hard.

Holly: And you’re so often not prepared for it.

Alison: No one trains you. There aren’t a ton of great role models for most people. No one really tells you how to do it, and the craziest thing is that in other positions, as you move up and become more senior, you’re usually staying on that same path of doing the thing that made you good continues to make you better and better. Management is a completely different skill set, and so you can end up managing because you were great at something else.

You were great at writing or you’re great at communications or software, or whatever it was. And suddenly, as a result, you’re put in a management role which is a completely different skill set, often draws on none of the things that made you successful up until that point. So it’s really, really hard. I think, I mean for me, I was terrible in the beginning. I have no qualms about saying that.

Holly: So was I.
Alison: Yeah. And I think that people, I think all good managers will tell you that they were bad in the beginning. If someone doesn’t, that’s an immediate red flag for me. I think they’re probably not very self-aware or very thoughtful. So yeah, I mean there are a lot of hard lessons in the beginning. I mean even just, I mean, what wasn’t hard about managing? Just finding your voice as a manager, I mean I think one thing that people really struggle with in the first year or two of managing is what is it really mean to exercise authority in an appropriate way?

And people usually go to one or two extremes. They either go way too far down the authoritarian path then they become sort of a tyrant and a jerk. Or they’re sort of a pushover and a wimp and decisions aren’t getting made and problems aren’t being addressed. And I think people really struggle in the beginning to figure out where is the balance between those two things. How do you walk that line and not fall into anyone of those extremes?

Holly: It’s fascinating that you say that because my ex-business partner and I were each of those extremes. I was the wimp and he was the tyrant. So our poor, poor employees had to deal with both of us, just not very good managers.

Alison: Well, sometimes we even see both of those in a same person because you get someone who starts off like sort of a pushover, not really wanting to do unpopular things or have tough conversations. And then as a result, things go haywire. Work isn’t being done. It’s not being done well. And so they kind of swing around to the other extreme, thinking like, oh my gosh! This is not working. So I have to really crack down on these people. And then you get the tyrant coming out from a person who used to be the wimp.

Holly: And then that’s terribly confusing for the people who work for these terrible managers.

Alison: Terribly confusing, it is hard. So I pity all first year, second year managers and also all the people who are working for them, it is very difficult.

Holly: One of the things that I absolutely love about your blog and your answers to the people that write in, is your common sense. I think you have the most common sense of anyone that I’ve ever seen in my entire life. It’s just astonishing. So how do you think you developed this? It’s just absolutely fantastic the way you answer people’s questions with just extreme common sense.

Alison: Well, thank you. That’s very kind and very nice to hear. It’s much easier to do when you’re the objective outsider. I mean, it would be ludicrous for me to ever claim that I was able to apply that common sense across the board in my own life. It’s so much harder when it’s your own situations. I mean your ego is tied up in it, and emotions, and it can be hard to see the forest through the trees. And the thing that I have going for me with Ask a Manager is that I’m not involved in any of these situations.

Holly: It’s not your drama.
Alison: It’s not my drama. And it’s, you know, I mean I think one reason that I think people have responded to Ask a Manager as well as they have is because they share in that common sense. So I don’t think I have any special claim on it. I think we’ve all got it. It’s just, it’s hard when it’s your own situation, and it’s hard when you’re the friend, or the significant other, or the relative who’s hearing those stories because you have inherent biases toward the person who’s telling you. So it’s a lot easier to do it from where I’m standing over here.

Holly: That’s interesting. So one of the things that I love about your advice is that you talk about managing as just simply a way of getting things done.

Alison: Yes. It’s so interesting. I do some hiring for management positions still in my role as a consultant, and one of the things that I ask people when I’m hiring managers is what would they say about the fundamental job of a manager is. And the answers are fascinating. They’re all over the map. I mean I hear everything from just making money for the company to help to developing staff to their fullest potential. And most certainly, it is important to make money for your employer, and indeed it’s also important to develop your staff.

That’s not really the fundamental job of the manager. The fundamental job of a manager is to get things done and not only right now, but over the long term. And the reason I add that last bit about the long term is you could probably get an awful lot done if you say, did all the work yourself or terrorized your staff into working around the clock for the next month. But you would not be getting results in the long term. You would have a burned out staff. You, yourself would be burned out. You wouldn’t be able to attract and retain good staff members.

So every management practice that I espouse follows from that belief that it’s really about what kind of results you’re going to get in the long term, and then that’s your fundamental role. So when you, yes, you do want to develop staff members to their full potential but you’re not really doing it just because you’re a nice person. I mean hopefully you are but you’re doing it because that’s going to get you better results in the long run. And really, there’s nothing that I believe about management that I can’t trace back to that.

Holly: I think that’s just, again, such common sense. Now, a lot of our listeners to this podcast are women in business, mostly solopreneurs, who are often hiring freelancers or part-time, or even full-time staff, often for the first time in their careers. What advice would you give to someone who’s just getting started as a manager?

Alison: I would say be really deliberate and thoughtful about it. I think so often, where we go wrong in management is where we’re sort of winging it: flying by the seat of your pants, and it’s understandable. I mean especially entrepreneurs, you’ve got so much else going on. There are so many demands for your time. It is a real challenge to make your self sit down and focus on things like: what are my expectations for what this person should accomplish in the first month, or the first quarter, or the first year? What kind of training and support do I need to give them to set them up well to do that?
What are the challenges going to be and how can we work around that? What does my role need to be with this person? How am I going to interact with them? What are the systems that we need in place to support that? I mean these are things that it’s so easy to push off in the rush of day-to-day work. There’s always higher priorities coming at you. But this is also the stuff where if you don’t sit down and really plan it out thoughtfully, in the end, it’s really going to hold you back from achieving what you could otherwise do.

Holly: And it’s also going to be terribly confusing for the person who’s working with you because they’re going to have no idea what your expectations are, how are they supposed to do things properly. I think so many times when people get hired, they get not enough training and not enough explanation and they just kind of get thrown into the work and they’re kind of drowning.

Alison: Yeah, I mean I feel like we’ve probably all had that experience where you show up for your first day at a job and you’re so excited about it. And then you get there, and they’re not ready for you, I mean maybe you don’t even have your computer set up yet. You’re just sort of shoved into a corner and told to actually sit over there and read some brochures about their organizations while they get ready for you. I mean just from the get-go, it’s so, I mean it’s pretty demoralizing and it really sends signals about what your time there is going to be like and what their culture is like, and what their expectations of you might be. It’s such a bad foot to start off on.

I mean again, it’s so understandable. I’m not casting blame on anyone for doing it. I’ve probably done it myself. But you’ll get so much more out of the staff members who you are paying money to. You should want to really use their time as wisely as you can if you are just deliberate about planning for it. Even just, I mean, most people aren’t great at training new employees. I mean unless you’re actually a professional trainer, which most of us aren’t. But just, sitting down and walking through like what are the key things this person is going to need to accomplish, what are they going to need to know in order to do that, who do then I need to introduce them to, to ease that path? I mean, it’s none of it’s rocket science. It’s really just about making the time to be thoughtful and deliberate.

Holly: And just being there for that person to help their transition.

Alison: Yeah, absolutely.

Holly: One of the things that you discuss a lot is how it’s important for managers to have those difficult conversations, because there so many difficult conversations that come up when you’re managing someone, and just in the day-to-day of running a business. And so many people shy away from having those conversations, and that just kind of leads to chaos.

Alison: Yes, tough conversations, no one wants to have them. I mean if someone is really eager to have some of those tough conversations, I would wonder what was going on there.
Holly: They want some drama.

Alison: Yeah. It’s hard to do. It’s awkward. None of us are good at sitting people down and saying that they’re not measuring up to what we need or that they’re falling short in some way. I mean no one, those are hard conversations none of us are trained on how to do that. And so often, it just comes down to just being direct and straightforward and honest with people. I mean so often, and in my work as a consultant, I do a lot of coaching of managers who are grappling with issues that very often come down to this very thing, this fear of having a tough conversation and just finding their right words to use. I think 25% of all management problems would be solved if managers would just find, maybe even higher, if managers will just find a way to take what the thoughts are that they have in their head, and somehow get them outside of their body, and so that the other person could hear them.

A lot of what I do with managers is just working through that process. I mean, and it’s not just tough feedback either. I mean it’s delegating work. I mean, how often have we seen managers delegate work without fully sharing the vision for that project that they have in their head, and so the person, their staff member goes often does the work and things they know that the manager is looking for and turns the work in and the manager is sort of befuddled and doesn’t understand why this work product doesn’t look at all like what she was picturing in her head at the time she delegated it. And it’s because we’re so bad at getting these thoughts out of our head and verbalizing them to the other person.

Holly: Because of course, they can’t read our minds.

Alison: Right, but it’s so easy. It’s so easy to assume that they can, especially as a manager. I mean, you’re busy and you’re running around. And this person is there to, in many cases, anticipate and take care of the needs that you have. But you’ve got to find a way to articulate that stuff.

Holly: You have a very interesting article in your blog that talks about the deathbed advice that you would give to managers. And I love that because it’s, I think it’s five very, very simple things. But one of them was to ask for help. But I think that’s something that so many new managers are afraid to do or they just don’t think of it or they don’t know where to go. So what would be your advice as far as getting help or support when someone is a new manager?

Alison: So the best thing, well, two best things that you can do. One is to really try to build a strong relationship with your own manager. Now, my caveat always has to be, there are some managers where that’s actually going to be detrimental because they’re horrible people or they’re completely incompetent. The majority of time, I mean, most people don’t have perfect managers but most people have decent managers who are going to be able to act as a resource in some way. So the first thing I would say is to try to build a really strong relationship with your own manager, and really have open lines of communication about the challenges that you’re facing as a new manager.

And, I don’t know. I think so often, new managers feel like the demands of the job are such that they are supposed to project authority all the time. And that somehow means that they can never let on when
they don’t know any answer or when they feel like they’re struggling. It’s just not true. I mean, I am super alarmed if I have a new manager working under me who seems to be acting like she has it all under control, because there’s just no way that that’s true. So the first thing I would say is use your own manager as a resource if it’s all feasible.

And second thing I would say is whether your own manager is good or not, find other managers who you can use as mentors. Even if it’s like a secret mentor, like even if you don’t feel like there’s someone you can approach or they won’t have time for you, that’s fine. It can be a one-sided relationship, just to watch and really pay attention. If there someone whose management style you admire, if there someone who you respect, pay attention to what they do. Watch how they handle tricky situations and how they word things and how they carry themselves. And that can be sort of a role model that you have in your head for handling some of this.

But obviously, it’s better if you can go beyond making them your secret mentor and actually form a relationship with them. Most people are really happy, really flattered to be approached by someone who wants, who’s more junior in their career and wants some guidance. So most good managers are really happy to talk to less experienced or even just as experienced managers about some of those issues. And so people shouldn’t be shy about taking advantage of that.

Holly: That’s good advice. And where would you recommend that entrepreneurs could go for this kind of help? Because I think, again, sometimes you kind of get into that place where you’re all alone in your office at home or whatever it is that you work, and you just don’t know where to go to get support.

Alison: Yeah, I think so, I guess there’s a couple of options depending on what someone on personal style is. I mean for people who maybe aren’t the most outgoing introverts, the internet is really a God-send. There’s so many groups on LinkedIn and other groups online for people who are in your same shoes. But maybe a few years ahead of you on the path that you’re on or even more, who you can reach out to and talk about this kind of thing. For people who are more extroverted, there’s all kinds of in person groups that you can go to. So finding local groups, whether it’s for your industry or just sort of local businesswomen groups, whatever it might be.

There’s always going to be people around who have faced similar challenges, who are walking in your shoes, who can be great sounding boards, and even if you feel like you don’t have access to people who are a little bit ahead of that path, a little bit in front of you, find people who are in the same place as you and people bring different things to the this type of work. And someone who is up here and struggling with similar issues to what you’re currently struggling with can also be a really good thought partner.

Holly: That’s excellent advice. And one of the other things that you mentioned on your deathbed advice list is to look for trouble. What kinds of things would you recommend looking for as far as kind of being alert for trouble?
Alison: This is a really big thing with me. I feel like most managers do not do this enough. So the tendency in most managers as far as I have seen is to sort of assume that if they’re not hearing work problems, the work has probably getting done. And sometimes, it is. However, often they are then blindsided when a horrible problem pops up and they’re wondering why didn’t anyone tell me about this earlier, why did they, how did they miss the warning signs. So as a manager, you want to really be probing into what’s going on in the areas that you supervise. That doesn’t mean like some sort of crazy micromanagement where you stand over people’s shoulders or ask to be CC’d on other emails. And anything crazy like that, it means having regular conversations with the people you manage, having regular check-ins where you talk about the key work that they’re involved with. And those conversations should not sound like, so how’s project X going? Oh, it’s going great. And that tells you nothing.

Holly: Which just gives you that false sense of security.

Alison: Yeah. And an astonishing amount of check-ins actually sound like that. That’s not what it should sound like at all. It should sound like, tell me: How do you know that it’s going great? What are you doing to check on that? Can you take a specific piece of it and walk me through how you’re handling it? Have you thought about how you’ll approach it if challenge X comes up? Really, digging beneath the surface so that you get a really good feel for what’s going on. And then going beyond that, going beyond just talking but actually seeing the work in action, finding ways to really see what it looks like on the ground. Whether it’s, if you’re overseeing people who do training sessions, sitting in on a training, watching what it actually looks like if you’re...

I don’t know. I’m trying to think of good examples here. Looking at slices of report on data that they might be gathering, but whatever it is, just keeping your hands dirty so that you’re actually not just taking someone’s word for how things are going. I mean, I don’t say that to indicate you should always mistrust your people. You shouldn’t mistrust your people. I mean not unless someone gives you really good reason to. But just because, you’re ultimately responsible for success in that realm, and so you want to have your hands dirty enough that you have pretty good reason for feeling confident that things are going well.

Holly: That’s excellent advice, because I think it’s so tempting to just kind of swipe at the surface and say, is everything okay? Fine, okay, that’s fine. And then of course, you have no idea what’s actually going on.

Alison: Yeah, I think people are really afraid of being seen as a micromanager. I mean that’s such a dirty word. No one wants to be called a micromanager and with good reason. But there’s a difference between micromanagement, which is controlling every detail of how is something is being done, and just good hands on management. And it is appropriate to be hands on. I mean obviously, you adapt that to fit the context, if you have someone who’s very senior or has a track record of success, of course, you back off and you give them space to do the job that you hired them to do.
I would never suggest otherwise. But you can be hands on in terms of really digging into getting aligned about what their goals are, and what success would look like, and how they’re planning on meeting those outcomes and what challenges they’re finding along the way, and how they’re planning to course correct those big picture pieces, you’re not going to dictate the details of how they do the work. But you’ve got to be involved enough that if there is a disaster someday, that you aren’t totally blindsided by it.

Holly: And how would you recommend that a new manager kind of find that happy medium between not micromanaging and actually being hands on?

Alison: One of the biggest things that people can do in this area is to put a lot of energy at the outset into getting aligned with their staff members on really clear and specific goals for their staff members’ work. One thing that I find a lot in consulting work is that if I ask a manager: Take your staff member, Jane. What would a really successful year look like for her? I mean if it’s December, and you’re looking back on her year, what would she have needed to accomplish to make this a widely successful year? And then if I asked the staff member that same question, I’ll get two completely different answers. So that’s a huge problem.

Holly: Yes.

Alison: So putting a lot of energy in the front end and to really making sure that you and your staff member are aligned about what success would look like and really getting specific, and then people tend to talk in very lofty and broad terms. But you want to really drill down to make sure that you’re both working with the same definition. At the end of the year, the two of you, that two reasonable people wouldn’t disagree on whether that bar had been met or not. If you do that, if you got really aligned in the front end about what those goals are, then your job becomes just checking in along the way and monitoring how progress is playing out toward those goals. I mean there are still details that you need to get into here and there. But that process of alignment around the big stuff that someone is there to accomplish, that takes care of a lot of how to navigate that road between being appropriately hands on and appropriately hands off.

Holly: Excellent. Another thing that you say, and I think it’s really, really important because it’s so easy to forget is, you say that you can’t give too much positive feedback as long as it’s sincere. And I think that’s so easy for new managers to forget. They just don’t know how often or when or how to give that positive feedback.

Alison: It’s really true. If I could wave a magic wand and change one thing about all managers in the universe, it would be to have them give more feedback, both positive and I don’t want to say negative, I’ll say developmental. Managers just don’t give enough of it for the most part. I mean I think we’ve probably all seen that manager who just gushes so much positive feedback every hour of the day. It’s stops feeling sincere and obviously, you don’t want to do that either.
But so often, I talked to managers who have someone on their staff who they just think is absolutely great, who they would be devastated if the person walked in to their office tomorrow and resigned. And that staff member has no idea that their manager feels that way about their work. And if you have someone like that on your staff, you want to make sure that they really know that they feel appreciated and they know why you appreciate them. Then even taking rock stars like that out of it, just normal everyday, workers. I mean if you’re seeing things that they’re doing well, the way to make sure that you see more of that behavior is to let them know how much you appreciate it. People just don’t do it enough. And again, I mean it goes back to we’re all busy. We’re being pulled in so many different directions. It can be hard to remember that people need to hear that. But they really do.

Holly: Yeah, I think that’s so important because you don’t know what you’re doing right if you’re not indicated.

Alison: Yup, absolutely. And the same is true for other types of feedback too. I mean, so often, I’ll talk to managers who are really frustrated with some particular thing that someone on their staff is doing, whether it’s a question of their quality of work or some particular way they’re approaching their work, or an attitude thing, and the staff member doesn’t know. The manager hasn’t told them. If there’s something that you have in your head as a problem about a staff member and they don’t know it, the problem is really with the manager at that point, more than with the staff member.

Holly: Yeah, definitely. So you’ve got a book that’s called Managing to Change the World. Could you tell us a little bit about that?

Alison: Yes. So I co-authored that book a few years ago with Jerry Hauser. Jerry runs an organization called the Management Center which I do some work for, part-time. He’s the former COO of Teach for America, and so we both come from nonprofit backgrounds and we’ve both seen in our work in nonprofits that the stakes are so high with the work that nonprofits are doing. To us, it’s more important than in any other sector that nonprofit organizations be managed well. But nonprofits as with every other sector, suffers from the lack of training through managers, the lack of role models, you know, they’re not special in that regard, every sector suffers from that.

But we really felt like it’s so important to see nonprofit organizations be well-managed because the work they’re doing is so important. And when you start off with really lofty, noble goals, you want an organization to have the systems in place that allow them to deliver on those goals. And so we wrote Managing to Change the World as basically a handbook for nonprofit managers. Although about 99% of what’s in there applies to managers in any sector. It’s not at all nonprofit specific. The principles are the same no matter what context you’re managing in. And so it’s really, we’d looked at a lot of other management books before we wrote that one. And most of what we saw were books that were pretty theoretical or sort of talking about management theory and abstract concepts and that’s great.

But when you’re a manager, and you need to start getting better results immediately, it’s not going to do all that much for you. You need to know like what does it actually look like. What is the language that
I use when I am delegating work or giving someone tough feedback or letting someone go? Or how do I really hire? What do I really say in interviews and what should I be asking references? So we wanted to make, really a handbook that will just walk people through the nitty-gritty of all of those topics. So we, that’s basically what we put together. It’s been, it’s probably the hardest thing I’ve ever written. But it’s been really fulfilling. We’ve gotten great feedback from people who say that really made a difference in how they’ve approached their jobs as managers.

Holly: Sounds very, very practical, as most of your advice is.

Alison: Practical is definitely what we wanted. I felt like when I first started managing, I remember going to the library where I spent a lot of time looking through their management section and just so much of what I read just seemed very corporate or just very theoretical. I mean that was interesting in a way. But I really wanted someone to tell me like what does this actually look like? So what do I do after reading all this theory? Like what do I do tomorrow when I go into work and I just have people to manage? And so that’s the book that we tried to write.

Holly: That’s excellent, sounds fantastic. Alison, do you have any women business mentors or are there any women in business who inspire you?

Alison: That’s a great question. Suzanne Lucas who is a woman who writes a blog called Evil HR Lady.

Holly: I love her.

Alison: She’s great. It’s at http://evilhrlady.org. She actually inspired me seven years ago to start Ask a Manager. I’ve been reading... I’ve stumbled on Evil HR Lady one night. I don’t remember how I got there. And I, it’s a Q&A formats, similar to what I do in Ask a Manager. But with more of an HR focus. And I was so excited to find her blog. It was practical. It was common sense. And I just devoured her archive like candy. Like in a week, I think I had read them all. So her blog is really what inspired me to start Ask a Manager. And as a result of doing Ask a Manager, I’ve actually been able to strike up somewhat of a friendship with Suzanne, which at the time, she just felt like a celebrity to me. So it was so exciting to be able to do. She’s someone who I really respect and who has ended up in some ways, taking her career in a nontraditional direction as I did as a result of her blog as well. So I really look up to her.

Holly: It sounds like your blog has been a huge influence on your career.

Alison: It has and it’s very odd for me to think about because again, I started out in a whim and didn’t think anyone would read it. I remember my boyfriend at the time, when I told him I had started it, just looking at me like I was crazy, clearly he did not think it was good use of my time.

Holly: And now, seven years later...
Alison: Right, I feel vindicated. Yeah I think it has. It’s done a couple of things for me. I mean for first and foremost, it’s become a source of revenue in it’s own right which I never anticipated. But it’s been really instrumental in my ability to make a living as a consultant, I think. And the reason for that is when I quit my job, and struck out on my own, I was sort of paralyzed by the thought of, like how do you get clients when you do that. I am not a marketer. I don’t like selling myself. I am terrible at it. And I think the reason that I was able to get clients was because of my blog. Because there’s years of post there, really illustrating how I think about the staff and what my approach is. And I mean, when you’re writing several times a day every day for years, you’re really as transparent as it gets.

It’s hard to be something that you’re not when you’re writing about publicly and that frequently. And so I think it played a really instrumental role in not only attracting clients but in attracting the right clients. Because, I mean, my approach isn’t for everyone just like any consultant’s approach isn’t going to be for everyone. And it made the process of doing that initial screening and self-selection really easy. Because it’s all right there in the internet, who I am and what I do. And so I think it sort of self-selects out people who aren’t going to be a great fit for me and attracts the ones who are. So it’s been really useful to have that website as a consultant.

Holly: And I think that’s so important that you’ve said that because you are so transparent and honest and authentic on your blog, and I think that’s something a lot of new entrepreneurs struggle with because they feel like they have to kind of appeal to everyone and of course, that’s exactly what you don’t want to do because you want potential clients to self-select and say: yes, she’s for me or no she’s not.

Alison: Yeah. You know what, when I first started consulting, I felt like I had to take on every client that I could. And that I mean, that’s I think normal to feel that way, you feel like you don’t, I mean you’re sort of scared at the prospect of having to earn your own income through the clients that you attract. But I realized pretty quickly that, I mean it just doesn’t work well if clients aren’t the right fit for you. They probably won’t get exactly what they’re looking for and you won’t be happy doing the work, and you don’t get the good word of mouth that you get when it’s the right fit.

So I mean, if there’s one thing that Ask a Manager has really driven home for me, it’s that just being authentic and using your own voice with all of the foibles and downsides and weaknesses that come with it because we all have them, I have plenty. Just doing that and being willing to just be who you are will lead to such a more satisfying career. I mean it’s similar to the advice that I give people in regard to job searching. You don’t want to go into an interview and try to be someone who you’re not. And so often, people think they have to be super polished and artificial. You can do that but you will lose the ability to self-select for the places where you’re going to be the most comfortable. And I think that’s true in regard to the consultants and clients as well.

Holly: I think that’s so, so important to point out. Now, Alison, where can people find you online?

Holly: Fabulous, and I have to say, I have been a fan for about, I think four years now. But I truly wish I had discovered your blog back when I had my previous business because I could’ve used your advice so much.

Alison: Thank you.

Holly: I’ve learned so much from your blog and I really, really recommend that any entrepreneurs or new managers, anyone that is looking to manage people, please read your blog because it’s just full of advice and it’s got massive amounts of archives, so much to learn there. I really, really recommend it.

Alison: Thank you. I so appreciate that.

Holly: And thank you so much for joining us today.

Alison: Absolutely, it was my pleasure.

Holly: And thank you for listening, and remember to visit http://socialholistic.com/shp37 for the show notes on this episode. Thank you.