

# W Network: Reality TV Uses the *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator*® Assessment to Understand Participants

## Behind the Scenes of *Save Us from Our House*

A sure-fire way to bring relationship issues to a head is to do a home renovation. It tests a couple's ability to work together to set and follow a budget, a project timeline, and a work schedule. Home renovations also require a great deal of creativity and flexibility.

We had the good fortune to talk to Alex Gellman, the chief negotiator on the W Network's *Save Us from Our House* television show. In this fun and moving relationship–renovation reality TV program, the “house-saving team” responds to frantic families who have been suffering in their space. The show deals with all aspects of renovations, from the budgeting, design, and construction side to the emotional impact that the completed renovation has on the couple.

Behind the scenes, Alex helps couples negotiate their on-air renovation projects. She has 30 to 45 minutes to figure out what each half of the couple wants out of the renovation and what each of them needs to carry it out. She says she “always reaches happy resolutions with the couples.”

So how does Alex do it? For a successful negotiation she needs to understand how each person makes decisions, thinks, gets energized, organizes his or her life, and sees the world. To do this she has couples complete the *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator*® (MBTI®) assessment before she meets them at the negotiation table. Alex said that participants are sometimes reluctant to do an assessment, but she convinces them that it would greatly improve the negotiation process and save a great deal of time. She said that “without the MBTI tool it would take me a good five hours to find this same information out.” Because of her 30- to 45-minute timeline, she tends to focus on one or two of the dichotomies per couple.

“ I always reach happy resolutions with the couples. ”

Alex Gellman,  
Chief Negotiator, *Save Us from Our House*  
W Networks

Alex noticed that Judging–Perceiving differences between a couple often causes problems. The person with the Judging preference usually wants a set plan, and he or she wants to get things done quickly. On the other hand, the person with the Perceiving preference usually wants to explore different options and likes to leave room for spontaneity and creativity. Here are a couple of her adventures related to Judging–Perceiving differences.

### CREATIVITY VERSUS EFFICIENCY

Dax is an ENFJ; a man who relies on structure, routine, and plans to organize his life and projects. Once a direction is set he is happy, because he knows he is working toward an end goal. Colleen is an ISTP; a woman who is open to anything, including new ideas, different ways of doing things, or a change of plans at any stage of a project.



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I am sure you can imagine the potential for conflict! While meeting with them Alex realized their Judging–Perceiving difference would be the main contributor to renovation friction.

Alex worked with Dax and Colleen to communicate how the other operated, and how this influenced how each of them would like to carry out the renovation. Dax needs a plan and a budget laid out so he is comfortable spending money and time on the renovation. Colleen needs an outlet or an opportunity to be creative and explore ideas before they start. With this understanding they were ready to begin their project.

### AFTER THEIR 50TH ANNIVERSARY

An Italian couple who had been together for over 50 years was about to renovate their house. Even before the renovation they had been fighting so severely they were on the brink of separation.

Sarifino is an ENFP who has been retired for a couple of years and who enjoys his free and flexible lifestyle. Before the renovation he was spending his days with his buddies, shooting the breeze, playing cards, having a couple of beers... just enjoying hanging out. Beatrice is an ISFJ who just retired from being a school teacher. However, she likes structure and plans.

Sarifino was used to taking off with the family car and coming back when he pleased, but Beatrice wanted to know his plans so she could organize her days around when she had access to the car. Alex realized that if their renovation was going to be successful, she would have to focus on his need for freedom versus her need for structure and plans. She worked with them on understanding why each operated the way they did and how to compromise for each other in life and in their renovation.

### TWO TO TANGO

It is not only type differences that cause problems in home renovations. Alex also looks for type similarities that can lead to problems. For example, two Introverts can struggle through a renovation, because they do not communicate enough.

Nick and Harry are both Introverts, and they were not getting along well before their renovation project. Neither was good at self-expression, and their main problem was they did not want, or even know how, to air their disagreements. They both tended to withdraw rather than express their feelings, so their conflicts tended to play out through indirect means.

Introverts tend to like to receive prior notice, because they do not like to be put on the spot, and neither Nick nor Harry were an exception to this, especially Nick, who really did not like to have things sprung on him.

Alex worked on teaching Nick and Harry the importance of being more direct in expressing their concerns and worked with them to create a structure to air their issues. They built an arranged way to communicate, which included giving each other notice if one of them wanted to discuss a concern, and approaching the issue with a mutual understanding of the importance of being direct. With an established communication process Nick and Harry were ready to start their renovation project.

**Alex Gellman** is an executive coach, motivational speaker, author, and team facilitator. Alex is also working with the MBTI tool on a new reality TV show about rehabilitating criminals to become sous-chefs.

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