

HW S2 EP 10

Speaker 1: [00:00:00] How's Work is an unscripted, one-time counseling session focused on work. For the purposes of maintaining confidentiality, names, employers, and other identifiable characteristics have been removed, but their voices and their stories are real.

Speaker 2: [00:00:21] He is the, the pastry chef. He's the creative guy. He is busy with the products.

Speaker 3: [00:00:46] He is anything to do with customer contact, customer care, the, the logistics. Basically everything to do with what happens to the macarons from the door out. And it's a lot.

Esther Perel: [00:01:03] One of them is the creative and the other focuses on operations. Usually that can be a good division of responsibilities. And it works for them. What doesn't work for them is that they can't communicate anymore. They're exploding at each other. They're selling happiness in those beautifully-colored French cookies. And the more happiness they sell, the more miserable they become.

Speaker 2: [00:01:30] The business is doing good and we're growing, but I think we lost each other a little bit in the process.

Speaker 3: [00:01:39] And I think there is a, an action and reaction, and it can be very explosive.

Esther Perel: [00:01:45] When I meet them, they are scared, defeated, and they've reached their limit. But they don't know how to get out of these negative escalations that keep repeating themselves on and on.

Speaker 2: [00:02:00] I take his way of communication way too personal. Uh, I'm getting angry, I'm getting frustrated, and I don't recognize myself in this kind of behavior.

Speaker 3: [00:02:17] I contemplated recently, I was like, "Shit, I'm leaving. I have to leave." And it's so hard. I, I really love the guy. In a lot of ways, he brings that best in me.

Speaker 2: [00:02:28] Despite all the situations and despite the difficulties we have, I mean there is also another reason we are doing this. Because, deep inside, we do know that we belong to each other.

Esther Perel: [00:02:41] And what I do hear is, "Things are bad, but I still love him. I can't take this any longer, but I still deeply care about him. Help us manage our love relationship so that we can manage our business."

What does it stand for when he says. "He's the creative."?

Speaker 2: [00:03:15] Well, I mean it especially as like the product itself.

Esther Perel: [00:03:18] Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Speaker 2: [00:03:20] You know, the colors, the flavors, the, the way to attract people to get our macarons. And I can be also creative but on another subject like, "Okay, how do you get the macarons to the clients? How do you organize the company?" So, in that way, I know what he means. He means like, okay, together we have a company. It doesn't matter that he's the pastry chef and I'm the organizer, but still-

Esther Perel: [00:03:49] This is such an interesting, um, division, right? It's like one person creates the pastry and the other person is seen as the organized, efficient person, even though there may be plenty of creativity in the way that you get the macarons to the lips of your customers. Is that a division you have just in your company, or also in your relationship?

Speaker 2: [00:04:18] Also in our relationship it works like that.

Speaker 3: [00:04:22] The relationship at work comes home with us. And whenever we're at home, the subjects which will also involve me being the productive guy in the kitchen, him being the organizer or anything else that is not to do with, uh, production. Yeah, it comes home with us.

Esther Perel: [00:04:43] In what way?

Speaker 3: [00:04:44] Um, um-

Esther Perel: [00:04:45] You are the chef and he does the dishes?

Speaker 3: [00:04:47] [laughs]

Speaker 2: [00:04:50] No, no.

Speaker 3: [00:04:51] Oh, wow, it's [laughs]-

Speaker 2: [00:04:54] No. [laughs]

Speaker 3: [00:04:54] Well, uh, for the record, I cook the most and he does the dishes the most. [laughs]

Speaker 2: [00:05:01] Yeah.

Speaker 3: [00:05:02] Um, he is also a good chef. He, when he gets his mind into it, he, he, he can be amazing at anything that he does. And that's what I, I really admire on him. Uh, uh-

Esther Perel: [00:05:12] Can you say that to him?

Speaker 3: [00:05:16] Um, you are, I f-, I find that you are amazing at, uh, everything that you do. And whenever you cook, I love it, just as an example. But, uh, usually anything else that you dedicate almost your soul to it, um, makes everything that you do better.

Speaker 2: [00:05:37] Uh, thank you very much.

Speaker 3: [00:05:39] Yeah, we don't do this very often, eh?

Speaker 2: [00:05:41] No.

Esther Perel: [00:05:41] Do you know what happens in a distressed partnership is that whatever is good is taken for granted, whatever is problematic is amplified. And then you develop a negative sentiment override. Only the bad stuff gets talked about because the good stuff, what's to say? It's obvious.

Speaker 2: [00:06:09] Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Esther Perel: [00:06:10] Now, when you said it, because you're sitting both of you facing me, you weren't talking to him. But I'd like you actually to connect with him when you say it. Just look at him. Because it's through the eyes that the trust gets established. Turn around, just face each other for a moment. I will watch. [laughs] But-

Speaker 3: [00:06:36] I'm gonna start like this. Um-

Esther Perel: [00:06:39] And look at him.

Speaker 3: [00:06:41] Um, I want to, I would like to stop being seen here in the house as the pastry chef, as, as the one that, uh, um, has to [inaudible 00:06:56] the macarons and to be wired about the production and has to be, uh, over-worried about everything around it, and start being seen as the partner in life and not all those elements that actually come with being connected to you at work.

Esther Perel: [00:07:23] But that's not what you said to him before. So, I just was asking you to say back again what you had told him, which was not about you. Because when you start where you just did, "I don't want to be...", that's not a wish.

Speaker 3: [00:07:43] Yes.

Esther Perel: [00:07:44] A wish is usually, "I want something."

Speaker 3: [00:07:47] Okay.

Esther Perel: [00:07:47] If you start with, "I don't want something," you're gonna have an argument.

Speaker 3: [00:07:52] Yes. You are good at anything that you do. And that is something that I really admire. You are determined and you get it done, and you do it very well. Um, but there is one thing that you, um, that I believe that... Uh, it's difficult, eh?

Esther Perel: [00:08:18] Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Take a moment. It's okay.

Speaker 3: [00:08:27] It even causes me to get stuck because there's so much stuff that we haven't been talking about.

Esther Perel: [00:08:34] When people are stuck in a relationship, they are caught in these repetitive loops or they can be in a state of chronic bickering. Or, like here, they find themselves trapped in these roles that are like straitjackets, "You are the creative," "You are the pragmatic." And it doesn't give them the tools necessary to communicate and problem solve. And they need both at this point. And for that, they need to loosen the straitjacket so that they can become more flexible and more nimble.

Speaker 3: [00:09:27] And I believe that is the cause of what is happening now to us. Um, we almost forgot that we can be ourselves and not the business partners here in the house.

Speaker 2: [00:09:41] Yes.

Speaker 3: [00:09:43] When we have to talk about business and we have to talk about stuff that has to be delivered, it goes into our personal field and it takes over. And that took over me. I just couldn't let go of too many worries, um, as a pastry chef or as a person that has a company a- a- and it has to deliver. So, maybe that came out of the fragility because I had to go after the stuff that had to be delivered, and I was worried about you. I was worried that you had too much. And sometimes priorities were taken, and maybe not the ones that had in my mind to be taken first. And then I would come to say, "Hey, so where is this and where is that?" And that's where I understand we went in different directions. Wow, [laughs] you're good.

Esther Perel: [00:10:42] [crosstalk 00:10:43].

Speaker 3: [00:10:42] You're very good. More than I thought that you were. [laughs]

Esther Perel: [00:10:48] What does that mean? You didn't think that you would be saying all of this so soon?

Speaker 3: [00:10:53] No.

Esther Perel: [00:10:54] But you've been holding all of this in.

He's been holding so much in. And when it just floods out of him, he turns to me on the screen and says, "You're good," as if I'm the one who made him say all of this. But he was holding it all in. I didn't do anything. He was so ready. He just needed a safe container so that he could speak his truth.

You have been talking to him in your head, both of you-

Speaker 3: [00:11:43] All the time.

Esther Perel: [00:11:43] ... have been talking to each other.

Speaker 3: [00:11:46] All the time.

Esther Perel: [00:11:46] When you say to him, "I worry that you're taking on too much," I don't know if he feels cared for or criticized.

Speaker 2: [00:11:58] I think I know the reason why he did not say this to me before. Because I think he was afraid of me because I was really on the edge of my nerves. And everything that he said to me wa- was critic or, yeah, it's hard to realize that, you know, we can communicate on a normal way and say stuff to each other which will be quite normal to say.

Esther Perel: [00:12:35] He highlights how they've come to an impasse about their communication. The slightest neutral comment is experienced as criticism. And one of the dynamics that is so pervasive in conflicted relationships is this confusion

between care and control to the point that even a simple statement like, "I'm concerned about you. You're doing too much," it's not clear if it's said because you care about me and you worry, and it's an empathic statement, or if it's actually an attack and a critical statement.

Speaker 2: [00:13:22] You know, there's a lot of love from me for him, and I have a lot of respect for him as a business owner and as my partner. But there's some situations that I find really difficult to deal with whenever it comes to problem solving in the company or make a separation in the relationship and the company. He's really smart. He knows which direction he wants to go to. But he's also a man who is, in my opinion, dealing with problems in a way that is not really my, uh, my way to deal with problems. He always wants to solve it immediately. I need to have time. I need an hour or two, or even a day, to say, "Okay, how are we going to do this? How are we going to organize this?" And I sometimes have the feeling that he doesn't give me the time. So, I feel pushed in a corner which makes me frustrated. And whenever the, it goes o- over and over and over again like that, just sometimes, uh, I get so angry that whenever we have a discussion I become like not myself.

Esther Perel: [00:14:56] This is such a common situation. Could be at home, could be at work. They have different styles for responding to critical situations. Basically, one person says, "Go on the attack," and the other person says, "Wait, wait, wait. Let's think it through. Let's strategize. Let's see what is feasible to do." And then one will tell the other, "You're way too impulsive." And the other one says, "You're way too slow and way too passive." And this dance between acting and thinking is so pervasive in relationships. And the two of them are, uh, experiencing this at this point on a daily basis and multiple times a day.

You implode or you explode?

Speaker 2: [00:15:41] First I implode and then I explode.

Speaker 3: [00:15:46] He explodes. I don't see the implosion, so he just explodes.

Speaker 2: [00:15:50] No, but it, but implosion is something you only notice yourself, right?

Esther Perel: [00:15:55] So, you hold it in, you hold it in, and then-

Speaker 2: [00:15:57] Yes, and then it comes out.

Esther Perel: [00:16:00] Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Speaker 2: [00:16:00] Yeah.

Esther Perel: [00:16:02] And you see his tendency to react immediately as coming from... What happens to him?

Speaker 2: [00:16:13] Well, um, I know he, he hates changes.

Esther Perel: [00:16:20] What makes change so fraught for him? What does he feel, and what's the story around that feeling for him? 'Cause if you're gonna have a conversation, we're gonna try to have you have a different conversation than the one you've been having.

Speaker 2: [00:16:39] [inaudible 00:16:40].

Esther Perel: [00:16:40] You can lean in [laughs]. Lean into the mic and lean into him too.

Speaker 3: [00:16:44] Um, first there is a sense of, uh, a feeling of fear.

Esther Perel: [00:16:49] Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Speaker 3: [00:16:51] And I'm afraid that this will take over my tranquility, which it's also related to the fact that I've been depressed and I've had situations in the past of, that could easily get to me, and I wouldn't be able to, to deal with it. But the first thing is this, okay, something is threatening, something is, um, it might make me go back to a state of not being well, um, or a state of anxiety around it. Therefore, I will immediately look for a solution. And this is why a lot of the times I'm walk, talking over people. I am, I am not listening. I am fixated on what I have in mind because it's a survival thing. Throughout my whole life, I've had situation, a lot of situations that I had, had to just be a survivor.

Esther Perel: [00:17:49] I'm gonna slow you down. Is that okay?

Speaker 3: [00:17:52] Yes. Please do. I get very excited, eh?

Esther Perel: [00:17:55] Ah, no, no. It's a lot. Um, so when a situation occurs, like what?

Speaker 3: [00:18:05] Um, like-

Speaker 2: [00:18:07] The machine.

Speaker 3: [00:18:09] ... a macaron machine that doesn't work the way that it should be. A macaron piping machine that it costs a fortune, it's meant to deliver, and suddenly it's not.

Esther Perel: [00:18:21] Okay. So, there is a bump. And your reaction is fear?

Speaker 3: [00:18:32] Yes.

Esther Perel: [00:18:33] And you experience it as a threat?

Speaker 3: [00:18:37] Yes.

Esther Perel: [00:18:39] And the feeling is, "I'm not gonna be able to deal with this."?

Speaker 3: [00:18:45] Yeah.

Esther Perel: [00:18:46] And you're looking for an immediate solution, but it's not so clear if you're looking for a solution to your sense of overwhelm or if you're looking to a solution to the macaron machine.

Speaker 3: [00:18:58] Right.

Esther Perel: [00:18:58] In fact, it is absolutely clear to me that your solution and your entire psychological engagement at that moment is about how not to feel

overwhelmed, how not to feel the threat of being helpless, and it is not about the machine. How am I going to survive this is not a question that one has when a machine breaks down. It's a question that comes from way back when.

Speaker 3: [00:19:38] Yes.

Esther Perel: [00:19:42] So, can I meet the survivor in you? And what does he, she, they say to you?

Speaker 3: [00:19:54] You mean the survivor inside?

Esther Perel: [00:19:56] Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Speaker 3: [00:19:58] Something, um, is taken from me. And in this case, it is the ability to produce more, to supply more, to, to, to control more production, to have it in my hands as it should be [inaudible 00:20:15] to, to make our way of living.

Esther Perel: [00:20:21] Give me the story to the feeling. When you say, "I've had to survive many times," what did you mean?

When we're talking about a broken machine with words like, "I've had to survive many times," it is clear that we're not gonna be talking about a machine. But we're gonna have to go and find the history of that experience where life has felt dire and a sense of survival has become the mechanism for coping.

Speaker 3: [00:21:07] I was the first son out of four. So, I have two brothers and, uh, one sister. And I was born after three abortions, um, abortions that happened because of, because of fate, a physical debility. And I was the expected guy. I had a lot of love, for sure, from everyone in the family. And then, after two years, came twin brothers. Then everything felt like taken from me. Oh, for the fa-, just another, uh, detail, my mom had to lie down in bed for seven months. One of my brothers, uh, uh, one of the twins also had complications so they, they also ne- needed a lot of care. I almost feel that it prevails in my life these situations whenever something comes to, to take over. It brings me back maybe to that, uh, to that past. And then came my sister, my sister also had some birth complications. There was a, a beginning of a cerebral palsy which didn't affect a crazy amount. But then there was the princess and also took the spotlight.

Esther Perel: [00:22:51] One of the things that he eludes to here is one of his core beliefs, the idea that good things can be taken away from you. They won't necessarily last. And so when you have them, you have got to fight for it. You have to hold on. And he comes with this attitude of, "Nobody's gonna fuck with me." He fights with the provider of the machine like he fought at home for his survival.

Speaker 3: [00:23:25] I grew up with a very difficult, um, it was very hard for me to listen and take a no as an answer. And whenever a threat comes, this is the thing. I have to deal with it almost like, if I don't, I will let this one more thing take over my life. And, and you cannot say no [inaudible 00:23:52] that I need to, yeah, that I don't have the right to do something about it or to overthink a-... Oh, I, I don't know. It's a hard one, eh? [laughs] But I'm not aware of how I cannot let this also, I'm gonna use the word very heavy, but destroy my relationship and maybe my partnership at work. Because it's very hard not to be this guy.

Esther Perel: [00:24:24] Do you know all of that?

Speaker 2: [00:24:29] No.

Esther Perel: [00:24:30] What did you learn?

Speaker 2: [00:24:34] I know him now for five and a half years, and I love him a lot. But it's, of course I had the idea that it had something to do with his history, his growing up and his family and, um, but no, I didn't know this.

Esther Perel: [00:24:50] You can talk to him.

Speaker 2: [00:24:52] Yeah, I did not know this. I guess it gives me a good feeling that he's opening up towards me. And that's why I just stick with him so far. But I also want him to know that he's not alone.

Esther Perel: [00:25:12] Talk to him.

Speaker 2: [00:25:14] I wish for you that you understand that you don't need to do or solve every problem yourself because I'm there for you.

Esther Perel: [00:25:23] What I will suggest to you is that when a situation occurs and he falls prey to this sense of, "Ah, once again my whole world is falling apart and there's another thing that I can't control,"- and, and it doesn't matter if it's a small thing or a big machine, the sense of, "I don't have control over my world that can change under my feet at any moment, and I have to deal with all of this alone," lives inside of him regardless of the size of the problem- when a situation occurs, just put your hand on him-

Speaker 2: [00:26:09] Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Esther Perel: [00:26:09] ... and then you just tell him, "You're not alone." Don't talk about the machine first. Start by just, first of all, grounding him, and just tell him, "You're not alone. I'll deal with this or I'm here to help or we'll figure this out."

Speaker 2: [00:26:28] And I have to admit, in the, in the past when we had these moments, I would do the opposite. I would run away from it.

Speaker 3: [00:26:41] And I, I think that I was scaring him away. Yeah, then, then another thing is taken from me or from my peace of mind. Um, I think what I find more complicated is, um, is the fact that his to-do list throughout these five years grew and grew and grew. And now, his to-do list is bigger than mine. And anything that is added on just feels like suffocating. And whenever I actually come with a request or even, uh, trying to point, point something that has to be maybe brought as a priority in his to-do list, it feels like I am diminishing him. Uh, I feel uncomfortable when I have to ask. Then this, there is this impasse about what do I need ask from you, what can I ask from you, and what is gonna be the reaction? And usually the reaction comes into like, "Oh, what the fuck. I know it. I'm gonna deliver. It's gonna come soon." Or, "Why are you asking me this again?" It became harder and harder now to, to speak to you about, um, anything related to the [inaudible 00:28:12].

Because I almost feel now that all of this is stuff that I, that can be brought up even, uh, related to issues or not, uh, are threatening to our relationship, if we

can actually find a relationship. And this is what I come with. And sometimes I, I am so focused that I, that I probably sound, I feel that I sound like inquisitive. Because I want to get that done, sort it, and out of my way so I can actually be home and live my relationship without the work connection anymore. Because I am tired. Five years are exhausting. I have done this throughout. And now we have shared, we have put our companies into shares. And we have a third business partner. And so I am desperate to start letting go and start disconnecting from all of this that actually is stop us from being the lovable couple that we used to be.

Esther Perel: [00:29:21] At this point in their relationship, when he is agitated, even when he's trying to say something nice, I know that the message received on the other side responds to the agitation and less to the longing. And so I want to take a moment and first repeat and frame and clarify and interpret that which has just been said.

And I heard from him, "My fear is that any problem, small or big, can sometimes completely unravel me, making me feel like one more time I'm losing grip over my whole situation, and I start to feel panicked, that I'm all alone having to deal with a, a world that falls apart." And then I'm listening to you saying with great honesty, "I sometimes move away because I kind of, I want to help, I want to be useful, but since he's fighting me I just say, "Fuck it. You want to do it, do it yourself," which of course throws him further into the abyss. "And his fear is about being all alone, but my fear, as I've come to think of it, is," I [inaudible 00:31:10] [laughs] have come to think of it, "is about made to feel incompetent, not good enough. So, then I leave. You want to do it, you do it yourself."

Speaker 2: [00:31:24] Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Esther Perel: [00:31:26] And so, "I'm all alone," and "I'm not good enough," is what comes home.

Speaker 2: [00:31:35] Right.

Esther Perel: [00:31:35] Those are the parts of you that end up getting into fights with each other. Is there something of that?

Speaker 2: [00:31:54] Yes, there's a lot of that. There's a lot of, uh, insecurity, not being heard, frustration because of that. Yeah, that makes me nervous. That makes me feel like I'm not enough for him.

Esther Perel: [00:32:12] And what's the story for you that accompanies that feeling?

Speaker 2: [00:32:19] Um, I think I've been growing up in a lovely family and everything was really well. But whe-, whenever there was a problem, things haven't been talked about. And, after a while, the whole problem does not exist anymore. So, talking about emotions or situations is not something that I've been used to i- in the past. I grew up, you know, with feeling attracted to boys. Was not a big issue for me, but still I needed to, you know, having this little secret because I was quite late when I was coming out, like 26 or something. I always fight for myself, and I was used to being independent. I think that's also a reason. And I was, I have a partner who I have the feeling does not listen to me or doesn't want to have my help or-

Esther Perel: [00:33:24] But you know that that's not accurate, right? You know he's actually desperate for your help.

Speaker 2: [00:33:31] Yes. That's what I know now. Yeah.

Esther Perel: [00:33:38] But the help that he's desperate to receive is not only fixing the machine or not only the item that he wants you to change on your to-do list. It becomes representative of, "I'm not alone, and I don't have to figure everything out by myself. And my world is not falling apart." That's what you're really helping him with on a personal level. Both things of course exist. "I've been able to figure things out by myself my whole life, and I have a good sense of my competence. Why do you make me feel so inadequate?," you say to him, or that, that part of you says to him.

Speaker 2: [00:34:24] Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Esther Perel: [00:34:27] And, in fact, he chose well because you are very competent. That's the first sentence he said. Tell me something, you started out as lovers or you started out as business partners? What came first?

Speaker 2: [00:34:44] Lovers.

Speaker 3: [00:34:46] Well, uh, we became business partners because I came from London, I was meant to go back after one year, but after I met him I fell in love and I decided to stay. And my decision to stay got me into the idea of opening my own business. And he helped me with the, with the opening. And not too long later, uh, he joined in. And the day that I went out and I said, "I found a production kitchen where I can work," I brought all the happiness, uh, in the world with me that day home. Just say, "I made it. I can share my life with you."

Esther Perel: [00:35:31] Do you remember that day?

Speaker 3: [00:35:33] I remember that day. I will never forget that day.

Speaker 2: [00:35:36] I remember it too, yes.

Speaker 3: [00:35:39] Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Esther Perel: [00:35:40] What's one thing that you remember from that day?

Speaker 2: [00:35:44] The big smile on his face, being proud of that he arranged the location. Yeah, I fell in, I, I fell in love with his s-, adventurous side, you know? I, I really had a lot of respect for him leaving London and jumping into this adventure and staying in Holland.

Speaker 3: [00:36:08] But you also, I, I, I remember that you also felt special because I was actually staying here for you.

Speaker 2: [00:36:17] Yeah.

Speaker 3: [00:36:18] And we have a dream that I could get somewhere. But I knew that, as a pastry chef, I could work anywhere, I could do anything as long I was determined. And, but love was actually the first, uh, the first intention. And, and this is one thing that I remember well, you felt like you were the reason. And I

could see in you that, and I wanted you to see that you were the reason that made me stay. And everything coming after that was just an add-on. And it became our own little world for a while where anything new and exciting happening would make us just have fun. And things changed.

Esther Perel: [00:37:09] It's not just that I'm curious to find out how they started. And it's not even that I just want to go and watch nostalgic. There's a reason for this question like there's a reason for every move in this session. In this one, this moment, it's about poking a hole in the staleness of the narrative that is mired in bitterness and in problems and disenchantments. Do you remember the day you found the bakery, when there was hope and possibility and you were forward looking? It is not just that they remember the facts, it's that they are also connecting with feelings. It's the reconnecting of the broken tread of affect, of emotion. That becomes part of the healing language.

Speaker 2: [00:38:16] I never ha-, thought that I would have our own company selling macarons.

Esther Perel: [00:38:21] What were you planning to do before that?

Speaker 2: [00:38:23] I was just working in different kind of companies and organizations, financial work. And then I met this beautiful man. You know, I like to see people who are creative and have a talent to make something because I don't have it myself. You know, I'm just not a really create person. And that, that's okay, you know? But I like to see other people, you know, becoming a part of a business who makes people happy. You know, we're not selling products which you use for cleaning or, no, we're selling happiness. I had to get used to having a boyfriend, a partner, who wanted to start a business. But, at some point, I came, I got into it and I liked it and, and now it's our dream. But we have to make it our dream again.

Esther Perel: [00:39:26] Well, you can't make everybody else happy while you become miserable together.

Speaker 2: [00:39:31] No.

Speaker 3: [00:39:31] Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Esther Perel: [00:39:34] And it takes someone like you to be able to simply say what you said before, "I'm here for you. We'll deal with this. And a machine is a machine, and our dream is bigger. People will always want macarons because they will always want comfort and happiness. Because a little cookie can go a long way."

Speaker 3: [00:40:05] Oh, yeah. [laughs]

Esther Perel: [00:40:11] Because the cookie is there when you are happy and the cookie is there when you are miserable. And the cookie is there when you're lonely and the cookie is there when you're celebrating connection.

Speaker 3: [00:40:23] Yeah, the cookie is there for you to share.

Esther Perel: [00:40:28] Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Speaker 3: [00:40:30] And when you share that bite, you share the love.

Esther Perel: [00:40:33] [crosstalk 00:40:35]-

Speaker 3: [00:40:35] When you break that cookie in half, you break the perfection of a cookie which is that beautiful to give it to someone special. You let that one have a bite of your happiness. Um-

Esther Perel: [00:40:49] Do you ever come home with a cookie? Do you still enjoy eating them?

Speaker 3: [00:40:53] We do enjoy it, although I really do eat only on very special occasions. Because, for me, it's still a treat. So, [crosstalk 00:41:04]-

Speaker 2: [00:41:04] But when we, but when we bring it home, we know it's special because-

Speaker 3: [00:41:08] It's a celebration.

Speaker 2: [00:41:10] It's a celebration, yeah, exactly.

Esther Perel: [00:41:12] Could you do that once a week?

Speaker 3: [00:41:18] Yeah. Uh-

Esther Perel: [00:41:20] Could you bring him a special one that you make just for him? Remember, it was all about how special he felt.

Speaker 3: [00:41:27] Yeah. It's funny because everything that I make, the first person that I think of is him.

Esther Perel: [00:41:36] Yeah, but he has no way of knowing that.

Speaker 3: [00:41:38] Yeah.

Esther Perel: [00:41:39] If you don't tell him that, show him that, share the bite with him on that, then he has no way of knowing that. Neither of you have any way at this point of knowing how important you are to each other. Because what you actually play out with each other points to the opposite. And then you can talk about the happiness that you provide to others but it doesn't seep into the two of you. And that is a pity. And that doesn't mean you have to be a celebration on a daily basis, but it means that you have to not just dump frustrations on each other. If you can tell him every once in a while, "Every day, when I create something new, I think of you first," then you remember the relationship that brought this whole business into being.

Speaker 3: [00:42:45] Yeah, I always wanted him to try it first, to be the first one to experience something that I, that I put my energy and, and, and love into. But now we went into being that small, full of trials-

Speaker 2: [00:43:00] Yeah.

Speaker 3: [00:43:01] ... full of discoveries, into a bigger, a little bit more, I'm not gonna say mass production yet but where we just made a range that stayed, something that we created as an identity. And it's not as dynamic anymore because now, with the pandemic, we just stayed frozen. It was more about, "Oh my god, how do we get that happiness into the clients despite the fact that we're not happy

ourselves?" But there was always the, the first word about, "How do we get that out of the door and how do we distribute or how do we survive? What, what do we do?" And-

Esther Perel: [00:43:45] That's all super important.

Speaker 3: [00:43:46] Yeah.

Esther Perel: [00:43:47] Then you add, "What would make you feel good today?"

Speaker 3: [00:43:55] Yes.

Esther Perel: [00:43:58] You're both shaking your head.

Speaker 3: [00:44:01] Um, yeah.

Speaker 2: [00:44:04] I think we agree, right?

Speaker 3: [00:44:05] Yeah.

Speaker 2: [00:44:08] Yeah, it's, it's an eye opening. Yeah, we have to get back to the beginning where we felt in love with each other but also ambitious and the happiness we had started a company. And I think deep inside of me I know it's still there. And I know we can find it. I think it's also to, to learn more about each other and to respect each other more, to understand the differences, to respect the differences, and get to the point that, yeah, life is and the relationship is happy.

Speaker 3: [00:45:05] It all sounds really good. It all sounds dreamy and, yeah, and possible. And I know what it, I, deep inside I know what it takes to actually fulfill a relationship. And I think this is my main thing now. And it's good to say that we can be happy, that we can be this and we can be that and there is a lot of love and all of that stuff. But we had to go through a rough path, and I saw something in him that I really dislike. I started seeing things in our relationship that is the representation of all the fear or, or everything that I fear in a person. And I saw it coming towards me. And I'm not saying that I'm the good guy here. I'm just saying that, "Okay, you are, you are right defending your life however you want. But please, it's almost like don't become the thing that I hate most or the thing that I fear most or the thing that I can't deal with." And that means explosion, that means, um, an, uh, a, a strong reaction, a lashing reaction, and then I go into the pile of, I'm gonna say anxiety, but sadness, self, uh, uh, yeah, flagellation, like, "What have I done? I still need this. Am I asking too much? How can I ask, still ask him to do this for me and still to love me after?"

Because I am just constantly nagging about it, and suddenly it becomes like, "Okay, what, what else do you expect from me? I cannot do it this quick enough." But then he comes in an explosive way. And that is when I was ready to leave. Deep inside, I'm still fearing that. I'm still ready to leave despite there is love and, and there is understanding and, and... There is still that fear that I, I, I can be the activation of what maybe he dislike most also. But now we were already ready to leave. And now, because of a pandemic, suddenly a massive row, uh, a massive argument just forced us to stay together and face things in a different way because there is nowhere to go. And I'm glad that this has happening right now because we have you to maybe ignite. And this is happening. I feel a little ignition

already that kind of wake us up for what we can actually maybe, um, love again. But now, how can we make sure that this same scenario is not gonna happen over and over again? Because it has happened, and it has escalated.

Esther Perel: [00:48:04] How do you make up?

Speaker 3: [00:48:07] Uh, how do we make up?

Speaker 2: [00:48:09] Yeah, we don't. We just wait, just be quiet for a few days. And then at s-, at some point it's get back to the same routine.

Speaker 3: [00:48:18] Or when we talk about it, it's just a matter of settling into, "Okay, we love each other, let's just let it go." That's his way to, to approach it. And then suddenly he comes all lovable again. And then I start questioning, "What the fuck am I doing? Why do I need to leave this man? He was the first reason that I actually decided to stop my whole fucked-up life and straighten up and be the best of myself. And why do I have to be leaving? Why does it have to become a threat?"

Esther Perel: [00:48:51] Okay. So, you have got to reverse together the tendency to only point at the negative and the broken and the frustrating, and to leave everything that you do do for each other as invisible. It's distorted. So, this demands self-monitoring. Every day I'm gonna make sure to notice one nice thing that my partner did, said, or showed, something that was good for me, for us. And ba-, this is a training. It's a small little thing. Have I told my partner something? It's not something nice, it's just something that I noticed that they did, that I no-, it, and it could be that they brought you coffee in the morning. And then, it's one thing to say, "Thanks for bringing the coffee," but it's an even better thing to say, "Thanks for being so thoughtful."

The third thing is that as you sit and have meetings about every detail of what you need to do around production, around marketing, around media, et cetera, et cetera, you can see how many aspects of your business relationship you are paying close attention to. And meanwhile, you're letting yourself die on the vine. So, translate what are six or seven areas of your relationship as business partners and as life partners that you need to attend to. If you understand how important it is to share the bite of happiness, then you make sure that on a regular basis, every week, be it at home or away from home, you do something that becomes, "We sh-, we share a bite of happiness." You do it either with a cookie or with something else. It doesn't matter. But the point is that you cre-, you bring that very ritual into your own relationship.

Speaker 3: [00:51:05] Yes.

Speaker 2: [00:51:06] It's so nice the way you said it. And, uh-

Esther Perel: [00:51:09] Say it again in your own words.

Speaker 2: [00:51:10] [laughs] Yeah, if we put the love which we have for e-, for macaron in our relationship, then-

Esther Perel: [00:51:24] We will always want to eat more.

Speaker 2: [00:51:28] Exactly. Yes.

Esther Perel: [00:51:30] We will want to see each other more, be with each other more, seek each other out more.

Speaker 2: [00:51:44] Yes.

Esther Perel: [00:51:46] When I hung up with them, I wished I had asked them to go and get a couple of macarons and share the bite together. Because they talk about the experience that they want their clients to have but I wanted them to have a moment where they could taste their own recipe.

Speaker 1: [00:52:11] Esther Perel is a therapist, best-selling author, speaker, and host of the podcasts *Where Should We Begin?* and *How's Work?* To apply with a colleague or partner to do a session for the podcast or to follow along with each episode's show notes, go to howswork.estherperel.com. *How's Work?* is produced by Magnificent Noise for Gimlet and Esther Perel Productions. Our production staff includes Eric Nuzum, Eva Wolchover, Hiwote Getaneh, and Kristen Muller. Original music and additional production by Paul Schneider. And the executive producers of *How's Work?* are Esther Perel and Jesse Baker. We would also like to thank Lydia Polgreen, Collin Campbell, Courtney Hamilton, Nick Oxenhorn, Sarah Kramer, Jack Saul, and the entire Esther Perel global media team.