

How's Work? with Esther Perel

Season 1: Ep 2 - Sex Work: The Unofficial Resume

Voiceover: [00:00:00] What you're about to hear 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.

Esther Perel: Which names do we want to use? Just so I understand

Guest 1: [00:00:25] The lines are kind of muddling, you know, like now when I'm introducing myself with someone I like. Oh wait, that's not my real name, but it's kind of becoming that

Esther Perel: [00:00:33] and when you become close to each other do you start to call each other by your real names? Is that a sign of intimacy between...

Guest 2: [00:00:40] I think it is.

Guest 1: [00:00:43] I think it is too

Guest 2: [00:00:44] but it's an adjustment like. No, one of our co-workers real names, but I didn't tell her my real name and I was like to add that I'm mixing faux pas here. Like she's been referring to herself as her real name and I haven't been like oh, my name is this

Guest 1: [00:00:54] It is a level of intimacy

Esther Perel VO: these two women work together. We are in the strip club. It is a place where sex gets peddled within highly regulated and controlled environments. One has started recently, she's a baby stripper. The other has been in the industry for a while and has much to teach. They both have graduate school education and they are smart vibrant women in their 20s who have chosen to make their living for the time being in the sex industry.

MONTAGE REEL:

-I just, I feel continually undermined.

-The job has always been that place where I've been needed and I feel important.

-A lot of the people that work for me are like an extension of my family.

Esther Perel: [00:01:52] There's no doubt that your emotional and relational dowry comes with you to work.

-Imagine going to work every day in a really busy place and no one will make eye contact with you.

-I mean it feels like a breakup.

Esther Perel: It doesn't feel, it is.

So how's work?

END OF MONTAGE REEL

In many work situations people have to straddle overlapping relational systems that do not always play by the same rules. So in the situation of these two women, they have the relationship with each other, the team, they have the relationship with the customer. They have the relationship with the manager. They have the relationship with the boss and they have the relational system with the world outside. Their family and friends. And so I decide to start a conversation with them in terms of their relationship with their customers.

Guest 2: [00:02:56] It's so funny to me because with my regular like he will pay for a room with me and most of it we'll like slow dance, which I think is yeah.

It's just like that like full body hug, swaying, and you know, and then like he feels me up but it's like almost an immature type of relationship because I'm reminded of like a middle school dance, you know?

Guest 1: [00:03:23] Like he's like probably thinking, who the hell knows what he's thinking about, but you're giving him that intimacy.

Guest 2: [00:03:28] Because there's like grinding and like...

Yeah, and it just reminds me of like a middle school dance where like a man a boy is just like oh my God, I get to touch boobs and like a butt for the first time. And I'm just like sure buddy. Do hat you gotta do?

Guest 1: [00:03:49] Thank you for the \$100. Okay fine.

Guest 2: [00:03:52] But I think the the it would not just be that like if that's all that he was coming for. He wouldn't have been my regular for a year.

Esther Perel: [00:03:59] No it's anything that sex gives you access to but it isn't sex per se.

Guest 1: [00:04:06] but even the people who I know who do full service and they are getting paid for sex. It's an experience. It's not just the sex, it's you know, sex workers do things by day or by night...the block of time and it's like dinner and it's like a whole experience and maybe you know, maybe some women would consider that infidelity. But if you think about it as this customer or client is paying for practice.

They want that experience of okay, I'm taking a beautiful person to dinner. I'm, you know, we're going to a hotel room. I'm giving them luxury. I'm giving them comfort. I'm giving them, you know pleasure which is obviously like not all clients can give or want to give pleasure. But maybe they do. It's practice for them.

I have customers who come in and they want to discuss books. or I have customers who come in who just like simply want to have a party girl. Like, you know the customer that we both mutually see when I sit with him, I order a beer, you know, and we drink a beer together and I'm like, oh thank God you're here and I can finally order order a beer and be myself like that's the experience that he wants and I cater that to him and it's kind of interesting because they become different people. So it's really a moment for a customer to become who they're comfortable being that day.

Esther Perel VO: [00:05:37] When men pay for sex. What is it that they're paying for? What is the currency of sex giving them access to? Part of what they're talking about is the intimacy, the visibility, that feeling desirable, feeling attractive, being accepted, not being ashamed or humiliated or made to feel small. Somebody who laughs at their jokes, being listened to. Somebody who pays attention, who appreciates their presence. In the end in a very sexualized environment, a lot of these regulars come to talk and what they really are paying for might be much more emotional and psychological than just the mere transaction of sex.

Guest 1: [00:06:27] **One particular girl ends the pep talk with, the man's the enemy, let's take their money, we're going to take their money. Let's have a good night. Every single night and that, you know, it sets the tone. We're like, yeah, like everyone's excited. They're ready for the shift.**

Guest 2: [00:06:40] Yeah, like also just not...

Esther Perel: [00:06:41] Explain this one. The man's the enemy?

Guest 1: [00:06:44] **Well, like, you know, obviously we love our regulars and we love our customers who treat us well, but that is not the majority of the people that come into clubs.**

Esther Perel: [00:06:52] Tell me more.

Guest 1: [00:06:53] I mean you go out, we go around for tips. We dance on stage for 15 minutes and we go around for tips. Some customers will respectfully hand you their tip. Ranging anywhere from 1 to 10 dollars, you know, like a good customer will hand you a 20 and and give it to you respectfully. Some customers want you to turn around and they want to slap the dollar onto your butt as hard as they can and it's like I'm still going to take that dollar, but I'm gonna remember you.

Or even in some situations, strippers straight up slap the customer right back. And some people are allowed to break the rules because of how long they've been coming and some people don't have to have respect for us.

Guest 2: [00:07:35] Yeah. I think that comes back to boundaries too because I feel like in our club, and maybe more generally, because most strip clubs are managed by men and I feel like those boundaries are less clear, like when there are different rules for different customers or when different bouncers want to do different amounts of work or something like that, which is maybe why like, we have as strong boundaries as we have and why solidarity and at least at our club like operating from

this place of trying really hard not to have a scarcity mindset and going into every shift and being like we're all here. We're all going to make our money. We don't have to make it exactly the same way. Everyone has something different to offer. Every customer is looking for something different. So there's opportunity for everyone, but I think definitely with the way that management can be kind of inconsistent, that's why it's really important for us to be like, we know what our limits are and we know what we will tolerate and at the end of the day if I have to stand up for myself, I'm going to do that.

Guest 1: [00:08:37] and she will have support by every single person working with her. No one is going to say your boundaries are invalid.

Esther Perel: [00:08:43] Because management is not protecting you enough?

Guest 1: [00:08:48] Yeah, and that's a great way to say it too because it's not that they're not protecting us. It's just not always up to what we need.

Esther Perel VO: [00:08:54] One of the things that she's highlighting in terms of analyzing the relationship culture is this a workplace that operates from place of scarcity or is this a culture that operates with the mentality of abundance?

There's enough for everyone to go around versus whatever you get is my loss. And you can see every work environment is going to negotiate between these two outcomes in terms of the culture of the workplace. Once they understand that this is a place of abundance, they also gather around each other, they support each other they protect each other and they value solidarity.

They stand united in the event that management will not come to support them in an industry that often does not have an HR representative.

Esther Perel: Tell me more about the man being the enemy. It's a strong line.

Guest 1: [00:09:47] It's I think just a catchphrase because obviously like I said, we all love our customers on a certain level

Guest 2: I don't

Guest 1: [00:09:57] Again, I'm a baby stripper so I have a little bit more energy. And

Guest 2: [00:10:03] I appreciate them.

Guest 1: [00:10:04] Yeah, that's a better way

Guest 2: [00:10:06] Sometimes but sometimes I feel like even as much as I appreciate them, I'm just like you're not paying me enough for this. Like the ego needs of men are so profound and I'm just like, it's so much work. I appreciate them. I feel like I learn a lot

Esther Perel: [00:10:26] you learn you have an insight into the male psyche. What are some of the important things you've learned? Because you don't only learn about sex you learn about a whole set of needs?

Guest 2: [00:10:44] I think the biggest thing that I've learned has to do with how vulnerable men are, how much they need validation and affirmation, how much they want to be seen as sexual objects.

I think that was the biggest thing that I learned because a lot of people, you know going into a strip club you see like beautiful women and we're like dancing and we're taking our clothes off and it's you know a very objectified atmosphere. But at the same time like I'm looking at the men. And part of my job is to make them feel sexy and to make them feel wanted and and sometimes it's on a physical level, you know, and sometimes they want to be told that they're funny and **sometimes they want to...** My main customer deals a lot with chronic pain and like, you know just being in physical contact and making eye contact and breathing together, you know, whether or not this is true. He's told me that the next day after he sees me his blood pressure is like lowered and like he's feeling calm and he's feeling...

Guest 1: [00:11:41] Yeah, funny cuz he tells me every time I see him you're gonna give me a heart attack. So I do the opposite for him. Whatever that means. Maybe he needs to feel his blood pressure up here and he needs to be stressed out, but I don't know.

Guest 2: [00:11:56] Yeah, and I think it's just so much of men wanting to be seen. Obviously it's ostensibly an environment that caters to them where they have the power because they have the money but like genuinely, that is not the power dynamic at least the more comfortable I get and the longer I do this I feel like you know, you're going to be giving me money and there's a transaction and you know in any other place in the world, you have the power because of the way gender is set up but in that place, I'm just like, you know, I'm the one saying yes, so I'm the one who has power and and being able to invite them into my space and let them be themselves I think is that's probably why this customer has been seeing me as long as he has because I don't think he gets that anywhere else.

Esther Perel: [00:12:40] Yeah that's that's why I was curious about the word enemy because enemy can conjure up the sense that the other person or side is powerful. Whereas here I think the paradigm is much more intricate and not nearly as linear. Yes they have the money, but you have the affirmation power, but you can decide if you want to look at them or not.

You can make them feel wanted or completely diminished and small, you know, you can elevate them. You can ignore them, you can, at the end, yes, they pay, there's a lot of transactions between men and women where men pay even if it's not as explicit and deliberate as in a strip club.

Guest 1: [00:13:20] I've learned that men feel really really good when you choose them and choosing them can just be smiling at them when you're on stage, just literally making eye contact with them and being like I like you. They'll love that.

That's, the customer is going to give you five dollars when you come around and ask you to sit with them. Some customers like to feel worked. They like to be like, would you like to buy a lap dance baby? Would you like to buy me a drink? Would you like to tip me? Other customers like to have an experience where they feel like they're in a bar and they're just hanging out with their friends and it really takes a very nuanced approach to every customer but some strippers do not understand that and they try to work everyone. And they're not clued in to what the comfort level of the customer is.

Esther Perel VO: [00:14:09] Some Industries are organized around an intimate interaction between the client, customer and the service provider. This is one of them. It demands a highly discernible sensibility on the part of the provider to know the needs of the customer and then to deliver the service and be paid accordingly.

Esther: So you are acquiring an amazing set of skills. That you can use in the club and that you can use in many other jobs. You have an ability to intuit and read people, to read what's behind the facades, to look for the implicit, to distinguish between five people, but know that they want five different things and that it's not the same thing every time.

These are unique customer care skills, marketing skills, psychological skills, sales skills...

What about your relation to the outside world?

Guest 2: [00:15:17] I really struggle with being out or not being out in school. But as I'm approaching graduation, it's another sort of wave of like how is this going to impact my future once I'm getting ready to like leave dancing and start working more professionally and I really want to work with sex workers and I want to bring more visibility in mental health to sex workers issues, but it's always a struggle of like, you know, what are the consequences of this going to be for me?

And I know several other sex workers in my program. Most of them don't really talk about it. Don't really make themselves visible in that way. Which is also fair, but it's also hard to be the person who's known for sex work. You know, who's known to be that. That's the go-to person because then people will ask me questions out of context and I'll just be like why is it my job now to educate you, like I'm also a student. I'm also trying to get my education. So it's a hard thing to navigate.

Guest 1: [00:16:18] Boundaries drop when people know you're a sex worker.

Esther Perel: [00:16:22] Boundaries drop when people know you're a sex therapist.

Guest 1: [00:16:25] Yeah.

Esther Perel: [00:16:27] You know, it's interesting because you also have an opportunity. I see the burden and I see the opportunity. The burden is why do I have to educate you? You do because you have the knowledge, you do because you have the direct experience and you can do a lot of good.

But it's a question that a lot of people have these days. Why should I explain because I'm the only foreigner here, because I'm the only person of color here because I'm the only trans person here because my difference puts me in the responsibility of having to be the educator and I always thought why not on some level, you know, so when you hide it, do you feel that you collude?

Guest 2: [00:17:12] I try to be very intentional about how I talk about my work. I don't want to come from a place of anger or feeling threatened because I think it's not effective for me to do that. But there are definitely times where like I react to something in one of my classes by like using my identity and I don't think that that's always the best thing to do.

Esther: Give me an example.

Guest 2: So there was a presenter in one of my classes last year who came in giving a presentation about violence against women because she was from a very prominent feminist organization and she had said to me, well, you know, I consider all forms of sex work violence against women. And I was like, well that that hasn't been my experience as a sex worker.

But thank you. And I feel like that's not the best use of my story and my experience so I try to be really mindful of that and not not using myself that way.

Esther Perel: [00:18:24] Why did you think it wasn't a good use?

Guest 2: [00:18:26] I think it's just, I think I used it more for shock value, you know, and I don't think that that is intentional enough because I really I feel like when you're doing something for shock value, it's less likely that people are going to really hear you.

Guest 1: [00:18:42] I would have been impacted by you in that moment. I would have been like proud that you were like well that's not my experience as someone who does that job, so you know, you might not feel like that was the best move but...

Esther Perel: [00:18:56] That it can be a choice, that it can be a financial choice, that it does not necessarily mean that there was sexual trauma in every sex worker's life that, that given that women will often use their sexual powers in all kinds of contexts some say at least I want to be clearly paid for it rather than indirectly paid for it. At least then the rules are very very clear rather than my having to go with the rich person and be nice and then hope that we will go shopping. So that's what you were saying to this person.

I haven't been dragged into this. I made this a conscious choice. And I deal more with the judgments that other people have over it than my own. Or do you feel that a

judgment of other seeps in under your skin and it becomes your own as well? Do you find that you have to justify to yourself and what you do?

Guest 2: [00:20:09] Not so much anymore, but in the beginning, yes, it was difficult to. I would get a lot more anxious either before shift or after a shift.

I don't know you're new so what is your...

Guest 1: I've been doing sex work since I was in college in terms of I used to sell content and I used to be a cam girl. And I wasn't very out about that when I was in college, but once I went to grad school, I went to get my MFA. I really thought. All right this is my moment to advocate and be that person.

So we all had to introduce ourselves on the first day of you know, graduate school MFA program and I'm surrounded by people, you know, standing up saying this year. I'm going to be working on my novel and you know, I you know, I've already work in publishing but I'm gonna just come here to casually do an MFA that costs \$100,000 and I stood up and I was like, hi I'm a cam girl, and I'm here to write about that. And I mean the judgment, the judgment that I faced, so I mean, I'm at a point of going on now 3 years of being sex work almost five months of being a stripper and I'm just bubbling with anger. Just absolutely bubbling over and a lot of that anger is directed at civilian women.

I cannot even begin to express the amount of anger I feel at women in my life who just don't want to be supportive and who just want to put themselves above me and I think a lot of that... I was talking to a friend who's a Dom last night and she said, you know women, civilian women, have anger against sex workers because how men treat sex workers which sometimes can be violent, can be objectifying, can be hurtful, can be degrading, that's how they want to treat all women. So we make them uncomfortable because we allow that for money, because we let men have these moments of finding themselves and kind of figuring out their feelings and sometimes their traumas. So where are the women who aren't doing my job who stand next to me on the subway who are my friends from college, who are those people? And when are they going to stand up for me? So it's I don't know this feeling of, like it's heartbreak, you know, you have to look at... I'm out to my whole family except for my two grandmothers because I just don't want to deal with that. But I've had to have some very real conversations with my mom that have been hard really hard, but I have to be patient.

Esther Perel: [00:22:51] What stood out in your conversation with your mom?

Guest 1: [00:22:58] She went to assumption first, always, she went to anger, she went to disappointment, but now she's doing research on her own and she's trying to understand and she's being empathetic and she's telling me she's proud. So that's that's big.

You know, my dad always asks me, are you writing every night? You make sure you're writing. Because that's what you got to do. You have the good stories right

now. These are the stories you're going to tell. So I feel validation from my family and from a majority of my friends, but I have dropped the amount of friends that I speak to you on an often basis by probably 75 percent since becoming a stripper.

Esther Perel: [00:23:39] So when people say in school for example, or even in your family, why would you do this? Right. That's a question you probably get. When you have to constantly justify why you choose what you do, right? What do you say? What do you think? What do you not say?

Guest 2: [00:23:57] When I came out to my mom it was because she saw me pay for something with singles.

Guest 1: [00:24:05] Oh, that's funny

Guest 2: [00:24:06] Because she was like, why do you have so many singles? And I think she knew. My mom's very perceptive and intuitive. I think she knew for a while cause she knows I was taking pole dance lessons and she was like that seems like a weird way to spend your time. But okay and she saw me pay for something in singles when we were out with family. She really wanted to have a conversation and I was like, okay like we can talk a little bit right now, but I really, I didn't tell you and I'm very close with my family, like I didn't tell you because I didn't want to have this conversation and she didn't really say why do you do this but I think it was implicit in her reaction and she was very curious and and she was very frightened I think and one of the hard things is she put me in this position of being like but they don't touch you? And I was like, no they don't. That's the hardest thing, is when when they want you to give them the story that they want to hear. And she had said, you know when because my family on my mom's side were immigrants from South America and she was like, you know, when your grandmother came here, she came to New York and she came to make our lives better and she came so that we wouldn't have to start at the bottom.

And like now you're doing this and and not not shaming me like she wasn't angry, but she was sad like there's something sad about what I was doing.

Esther Perel: [00:25:58] and stripping is the bottom?

Guest 2: [00:26:00] Yeah. And that and the sort of implication that because we're immigrants we'd been at the bottom before.

I told her I was like, you know, I don't feel like I'm at the bottom of anything. I mean, I know sort of in the eyes of people who don't really understand this work that it's quote-unquote degrading or degraded but I don't feel like I'm at the bottom. I feel like I made a choice for myself.

Because we don't come from money. We don't have a lot of money. I went to college on a full scholarship and I didn't want to take out loans for my Master's program and I also didn't want to continue working in an administrative job because I was just I was really unhappy and I was like, you know, I knew that I needed to do something.

I knew I needed to change something about my life. I knew I needed to get myself in a position where I could be creative and use myself in really creative ways and also make a living and that's something that I'm always really aware of too and it's something that I made sure that I explained to my mom because I was like look, this was not a failure on your part just because you and my dad like just because we don't have money to throw around just because you know me and my brother knew that we would have to really bust our butts to be able to go to school.

You know, that's not a failure on my parents part. It's not a failure on my part to do what I am good at doing.

Esther Perel VO: [00:27:35] Parents often have dreams for their kids. And immigrant parents often have aspirations for their children that will be further away from where they began.

And many people have had jobs that our parents don't understand or are disappointed in or think are dangerous or think are below them, or think will be held against them and these are very difficult conversations to have. To explain to those who often have given us everything they had so that we could become who we want to be, that we're going to take a different course.

Something about working in the sex industry has always taken that to the edge because there is something about sexuality that often connotes the more degraded parts of us and so by definition it is a form of debasement. And that's what these women on some level want to see this as a conscious choice as an intentional service, a form of emancipation but on the other end, it's butting against centuries of the notion that a woman that has had sex is washed up. She's used.

Guest 2: [00:29:07] I think control of the narrative is what's really important to me because I want to be the one who's in that position of being like I'm going to share this with you because you are lucky that you get you know me to share it.

Esther Perel: [00:29:20] It's interesting you want to control the narrative but the narrative of your family which was we came from nothing,

we came to avoid situations where women had no say, we came here to have a better life, and if you go and you do this are you basically taking us back to the bottom? How do you say to us? This is not a bottom. This is me choosing. This is not the same as me being forced to. I mean the moment that stands out is when you say, you know, they worry about me. And then they make me tell them things that they know is not true. So they want me to lie so that I can reassure them.

And in a way, I have to protect them because they're not going to protect me.

You know and I have to tell them that I live within their narrative. And so for someone who wants to control the narrative, it's not necessarily what happens at home?

And then on your end, it's you know, who decides what's respectable here, you know, like who decides which is a woman that is really a threat to the solidarity of women or a threat to the aggression of men.

Guest 2: [00:30:56] Yeah I think maybe some of the the sort of like hatred for sex workers comes from this fear of infidelity.

And you know, I personally don't feel like I'm a threat to anyone's marriage because I'm not going to steal your husband or your boyfriend.

Esther Perel: [00:31:09] No, but what you saying is that I may be a dancer that you come to pay for the night, but in fact I enter a family system of which I become recruited in a play I haven't auditioned for but I am an actor in that play.

ESTHER PEREL VO: What am I trying to say to her? You think that you're only dancing for the guy and that you're only working with this one customer it it's like the tobacco companies saying we don't create addictions. We don't smoke. We don't force anybody to smoke. We just make cigarettes. It's not completely accurate. You do have to understand that in their story once this comes out you are an active participant in a family drama that you don't even know is going on you may not think so but you are. You only control a part of the narrative. That's what I mean by the play you didn't audition for.

Guest 1: [00:32:05] I'm excited because this plays into my anger, but also, I think this is so important I come from a family where we were super poor and my dad was just totally cheating on my mom my entire childhood. I think I found my first like clue of infidelity when I was like 9 and it was a love letter written by like a 21 year old to my then 35 year old dad. It's been so prominent in my life. And now that I'm a stripper. It's like wait what like you think I'm the problem like, I'm not the problem, especially when couples come in. Like couples will come in. The girl will be there and she'll get mad at her husband her boyfriend for tipping.

It's like why did you come here? Why would you come here with your boyfriend if you know it makes you upset and you're just going to sit there and pout. Why are you pouting? Why are you mad at me? This is my job. I don't come to your job and sit there and pout about what you do. I'm not the problem and I don't like infidelity and I like clear and open communication.

That's why I'm doing this job. And we're at the clear dynamic where I'm asking for your tip. Not your boyfriend's like penis. Like I don't want him. I want your money.

Esther Perel: [00:33:19] Have you ever had a wife or a mother or a daughter daughter?

Guest 2: [00:33:23] A daughter. A customer, his daughter texted me and I didn't know that it was his daughter and she was texting me and trying to threaten me and she was like, I know what you do, like leading old men on for money like have some self-respect. I don't use my real phone number for work so I was like, what is the level of risk here? You know, but but other women we work with have had stalkers

and yeah, you know like scary stuff. And that was the first and I think the only time that ever happened to me and then the customer came back and he was like my daughter, she's 17 and I was like, aww.

Guest 1: [00:34:01] but now look from where I am. It's like especially knowing this customer, like I don't want your dad like get get real. Like strippers don't want your daddy or boyfriend your husband. Like we just want our money and it's your dad, boyfriend, husband's choice to come in but when you said that I was like I was almost embarrassed for myself.

I was like, oh I've done that but it wasn't to a stripper. I wish my dad would have been going to strip clubs. Yeah. Yeah.

Esther Perel: [00:34:36] It's a complicated...I understand when you say, you know, I don't make the choice. I also at the same time you are part of their life, even if you think you're not, even if all you think is that you take their money. You're not. And so it's not so simple they come and they make the decision they do. But they bring parts of you back with them

Guest 1: [00:35:07] and they also give deceit to their partners. When I started I started in December which is like a very busy month. The reason why it's a busy month is because when wives go through bank statements, they see ATM, you know transactions, if they go to a strip club and husbands can easily tell their wives I got out cash for Christmas presents which one I heard that I was like Wow, that's so hard. But also like, your inter marital interrelationship deceit is not my issue. That's something that you need to do on your own. But also those situations are our bread and butter.

Esther Perel: [00:35:49] It's interesting. There's more on your anger and there's more on your sadness.

Guest 1: [00:35:53] Yes, and it's so it's also interesting to see where we are in our careers of doing this. Like your like anger has kind of faded into more of a like there's sadness in that and mine is so fresh.

Esther Perel: [00:36:05] I know that there's more anger on your side, more militant. You know, it's not it's not just some anger. It's very directed. It's very clear as much as well is I think the difference between the two of you. I'm wondering how much of that is also rooted in the fact that you emphasize I'm white and I'm privileged and I know my place in society and that you are the child of an immigrant. You are much more confrontational.

And you will that this is not a judgment. This is I watched your Styles and your styles are personality and your styles are your histories and your styles are your Origins?

Guest 1: [00:36:54] Yeah, and that doesn't mean that I'm not fearful of things and I don't have sadness but I in order to feel authentic I need to be confrontational.

I have so much empathy for you know what I mean like you and like it makes me want to cry like hearing the situation because there is a lot of similarity that I've experienced I've just chosen to not have feelings about it because if I get caught up in those feelings

Esther Perel: [00:37:22] No, you've chosen to express your feelings differently.

You process them differently and you each are complementary parts. When you get angry, she says go girl and when she gets sad you say I feel for you because each one of you expresses the feelings that the other doesn't really allow herself to.

Guest 1: [00:37:45] It's funny because when I started...

Esther Perel: [00:37:46] Which is true in many work situations, yeah, but that's means that when you are at work, you know, this is this is what happens in many teams, right?

You could call yourself members of a team. You are members of the group of dancers and when the Injustice has inequities or unfair rules or all kinds of work situations occur. You are more likely to be the one that's going to you know, show your fists and she's going to be the one that is going to do the risk management of your fist and she is the one that's going to respond with more cautiousness and you're going to be the one that makes sure that she does not, you know, just retreat like that in silence and that her rights are protected and that is work dynamics.

The angry one or the confrontational one is doing a service but needs to be managed in terms of you know, when is it useful? And when is it useful and when is it not and the one who goes cautious and retreats and goes more silence and keeps to herself and you know assesses the risks needs to also be encouraged on occasion to stand up.

And you will help her with the standing up and she will help you with the sitting down.

Guest 1: [00:39:07] Yeah, even I think on Saturday night I was mad about something and I was grumpy and stomping around but I was like forcing myself to be out on the floor and I, something happened and I need to go to the dressing room and you were in there and you were just chilling and having a moment to yourself and I was like, I need that also like I need to allow myself that so you inspired me to take a minute and then I kind of was like.

Let's get out there when I was ready and you really alright, let's do this like you need that sort of team dynamic and nowhere else in my life. And other job has that dynamic that I have, that confrontationalness this that push and that energy, it's never been useful anywhere else. It's always aided in my own discomfort or my own hurt, even in friendships.

Like I voice what I feel. But it doesn't always help me and in this job it really does help to have those moments of like well, I'm angry and I need to get loud and now I feel good.

Guest 2: [00:40:04] I think that's what's really interesting about stripping in particular comparing it to my other jobs where I think a lot of the anger that I felt at other jobs at my treatment at other jobs didn't have any place to go and like it does here, you know, I can talk back to a customer and be like that was rude. You're being rude you're not behaving correctly, you know, and you need to really consider what you're doing

Esther Perel: [00:40:29] You can't do that in an office. Mmm.

Guest 2: [00:40:32] I mean, I have set boundaries with like I used to work in a hospital and I used to work in a doctor's office and people would come in and be really entitled and you know because I was young and because I am ambiguous looking and because I was in college, you know, people were really really awful to me and I used to be like, please don't treat me like that, you know, but like at work I can be like fuck off. Yeah, you know and that I don't feel as worn down as I did when I was working in an office or something like that and I used to get angrier at work. But I also I try to be careful about how I use my energy because when I get angry, like it can ruin my night and I'm just like I still need to pay my bills. I can't and that's hard. Like it's really hard to be in control of that.

Guest 1: [00:41:29] But your level of control inspires someone like me who who I do get angry and it does ruin my night and it has happened often. I see how you get angry and I'm, Hmm, like even sometimes I've seen you deal with a customer and then go on stage and like do a bunch of pole and it you're working out your energy.

I've started doing that and it's made my energy last longer. I'm able to go through a shift with a smile.

Esther Perel: [00:41:52] but that's a very interesting part of the work that you just highlighted which is, I need to regulate, I need to self-regulate and need to monitor my own energy level, my own emotions, my own reactivity at the same time that there is a level of authenticity in the way that I can respond to someone who does not treat me respectfully in ways that I'm not able to do in other jobs.

So there is performance and authenticity that are going back to back here and there is intense interaction with others but also intense checking in with yourself.

Guest 1: [00:42:32] Yes. Yes, like you're saying there's authenticity is so important but the self care that goes into doing this job. I don't think I've ever been the type of person to I'm doing weekly therapy, weekly massages, I journal every day.

[00:42:46] I clean my house on such a like meticulous level that makes me feel good. Like I do these things and I never had time to do everything that I want to do or everything that I need to do and then everything that I want to do. So I mean say what you want about sex work, but I'm learning a new language, saving for my future,

planning for amazing goals and things and checking things off of a list that stayed dormant.

Esther Perel: [00:43:13] But the thing that I wanted to to just leave both of you with is that you have a tremendous source of knowledge and experience to write and to teach.

But the foundational knowledge that you bring with you of seeing people, often through a lens of truth that other people don't know. And that is tremendous knowledge.

Guest 1: [00:43:46] Yeah, thank you.

Esther Perel VO: [00:43:48] We all have an unofficial resume and it's the part of our lives that have shaped us or told us so much, those that will actually give us the skill set for the jobs we are to find in the future, but we can't put any of those experiences on the one-page official resume.

CREDITS:

Esther Perel is a bestselling author, speaker and host of the podcast Where Should We Begin?

To learn more about Esther Perel's world, to sign up for her newsletter or to apply to be on the podcast go to www.estherperel.com/howswork

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