

## How's Work? with Esther Perel

### Season 1: Ep 3 - Not Many Men Work For Their Moms

**Speaker 1:** [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:** [foreign language 00:00:18]. Sit, sit, sit.

**Speaker 3:** Okay. [foreign language 00:00:19]

**Esther Perel:** [foreign language 00:00:19]. Sit anywhere you want. We're gonna speak in English.

**Speaker 3:** Okay.

**Speaker 4:** Yes.

**Esther Perel:** And if you have any difficulty-

**Speaker 3:** Yes.

**Esther Perel:** You just say the word.

**Speaker 3:** Yes.

**Esther Perel:** And we will translate for you.

**Speaker 3:** Oh, okay.

**Esther Perel:** So that, it doesn't matter. This office will comes every passports. [laughs].

MONTAGE:

**Speaker 5:** I just, I feel continually undermined.

**Speaker 6:** The job has always been that place where I've been needed, and I feel important.

**Speaker 7:** A lot of the people that work for me are like an extension of my family.

**Speaker 3:** There's no doubt that your emotional and relational diary comes with you to work.

**Speaker 8:** [00:01:00] Imagine going to work every in a really busy place, and no one will make eye contact with you.

**Speaker 9:** I mean, it feels like a break up.

**Esther Perel:** It doesn't feel. It is.

**Speaker 4:** [laughs].

**Speaker 3:** [laughs].

**Esther Perel:** So, how's work?

## **END OF MONTAGE**

I mean for most of, for most of history, you did what your family did. Basically you did what your father did, if you were a man, and you did what your mother did if you were a woman. The seamstress, the carpenter, the shoemaker, you had a trade, and you learned the trade of the family.

This is very recent, actually, that we get to decide what we want to do. And today, all of this has become splintered and personalized and privatized. But still, within our market economy, many, many companies are family businesses. From very small, to very large, and they bring a [00:02:00] cluster of issues that are unique to the melding between family and business.

You call it family business-

**Speaker 4:** Mm-hmm [affirmative].

**Esther Perel:** Or Mom business?

**Speaker 4:** Family business.

**Esther Perel:** Explain.

**Speaker 4:** I think it's because we're together, so it's, um...

**Esther Perel:** So the family business means the two of you?

**Speaker 4:** I think so, yes.

**Esther Perel:** Right, okay.

In this session, I work with a woman who created her own real estate company 25 years ago. She's been very successful. In the past six years, her younger son has joined her into the business, and as you can hear, they are French speaking.

And what would you hear that as a kid or a teenager, young adult began to draw you?

**Speaker 4:** It was a part of daily life. Discussions at dinner, before-

**Esther Perel:** Came with breakfast as well as dinner?

**Speaker 4:** Breakfast, lunch, dinner.

**Esther Perel:** [laughs].

**Speaker 4:** Afternoon snacks. [laughs].

**Esther Perel:** Sometimes it's the opposite. [00:03:00] Like I grew up above a store... [laughs].

**Speaker 4:** [laughs].

**Speaker 3:** And would never do it.

**Esther Perel:** A family shop, and we talked about the store, breakfast, lunch, and dinner. And I told them, I said, "I will never enter this shop." [laughs].

**Speaker 4:** I think it's the energy because as a young child, you don't understand the technicalities of the, of the job itself. But you feel the energy and the you feel the, um, the way that a person is passionate about something. It draws you. If you're attracted to it from the start... because I have a brother who's a doctor, who's doing something totally different, um, who I think reacted in a different way. But for me, the whole idea behind it, um, attracted me.

**Speaker 3:** Look, I think that in every family business, one of the great challenges is to separate the mother/child or the parent/child relation from the, either the boss and the worker or the partners or... Meaning, to step [00:04:00] outside of the mode of family and into the mode of the roles of work, right?

**Speaker 4:** Absolutely.

**Esther Perel:** I imagine.

**Speaker 4:** Most people it's either sons or daughters working with their fathers, um, but I don't know many men that work with their mom. It's, often I think it's the contrary. I might say that I am a Momma's boy. All ways have been, but in the, um, in the workplace, the first years or three, four years, have been very, very difficult because when do I behave as her son? And when do I behave as an employee, or when do I behave as a partner? Those lines are very thin.

**Esther Perel:** Mm-hmm [affirmative].

**Speaker 4:** It's very complicated, and in the beginning, having finishing, have finishing my degree, thinking, "I know it all. I'm the big boss." You know, everything. "I studied management. I will come and I will arrange everything here." Putting your ego aside as a young person who thinks who knows it all, shutting up, listen, learn, [00:05:00] is something that's very difficult.

I think it's difficult in general with any type of boss, or any kind of work environment, but when it's so emotionally close to the person, I think rejection and accepting failure from that person can be difficult.

**Esther Perel:** Mm-hmm [affirmative].

**Speaker 4:** I think in the beginning, it was, um, a lot of shouting, and a lot of, um, deception.

**Speaker 3:** Um, deception, disappointment.

**Speaker 4:** Disappointment. Disappointment.

**Esther Perel:** That's a, a word that in English and in French means something very different.

**Speaker 4:** Ah, okay.

**Esther Perel:** Wha- how do you describe the situation? What is the conversation that needs to happen that wouldn't happen or that hasn't happened yet between the two of you, and for which this space-

**Speaker 3:** Mm-hmm [affirmative].

**Esther Perel:** You hope will be conducive?

**Speaker 3:** Mm-hmm [affirmative]. The situations as follows, um, I created the business from zero, and I did it all alone. Everything, all the things that has be done, from publicity to sales [00:06:00] to marketing to everything, I did alone, but I always was the only boss. And, um, comes a moment when my son phones me after his studies, and he said, "Mom, I'm come to you." I will never forget that moment. "I'm coming to you."

I was happy because in the meanwhile, I, I've put on, uh, an office with a secretary, with people, sales people and so on. And I needed somebody, and who could be better than my own son? Because of [inaudible 00:06:33], because of potential, and so I'm... And I hoped he had the potential, and I'm not deceived about that because this is 100%-

**Speaker 4:** Disappointed.

**Speaker 3:** Deceived? No? Disappointed.

**Speaker 4:** [laughs].

**Speaker 3:** [laughs]. Disappointed. I-

**Esther Perel:** Actually, in this moment, the deceived would have been a good use of the word. "He didn't deceive me," meaning, "He didn't lie to me about how capable he is." [laughs].

**Speaker 3:** Exactly.

**Esther Perel:** It actually-

**Speaker 4:** [laughs].

**Speaker 3:** Exactly.

**Esther Perel:** This word is gonna become useful today.

**Speaker 3:** Um, [00:07:00] you are still young. Coming fresh out-

**Speaker 4:** 22.

**Speaker 3:** From, from university. 22. Uh, and I had to swallow a lot, a lot of things during the first years, but I said to myself, "Look, if I'm doing this with my own son, with whom shall I do it?" But it was not easy at all. There're only women in the office. He came as a, as a young boy. Uh, sometimes arrogant, uh, sometimes very difficult because he's a very difficult character sometimes.

**Speaker 4:** No, no. I was very arrogant, at the time.

**Speaker 3:** Yes.

**Speaker 4:** I'm, I'm not ashamed to tell. [laughs].

**Speaker 3:** [laughs].

**Esther Perel:** You can turn to him as you talk [laughing]. You're looking out the window.

**Speaker 3:** I'm, I'm-

**Esther Perel:** Both of you are looking at the New York landscape [laughing]-

**Speaker 3:** I'm, I'm, thinking. I'm thinking.

**Esther Perel:** Skyscape. You know? [laughing].

**Speaker 3:** Okay.

**Speaker 4:** [laughs].

**Speaker 3:** And, okay. And through the, through the years, I always come to the same point. I said, "[foreign language 00:07:59], [00:08:00] [laughs], shit. I'm, I'm there already 25 years, and he's coming. And he thinks he knows better. And you know what? Sometimes he's doing it better." And that is also frustrating for me because sometimes and the, lately, I feel totally overwhelmed with things that I cannot follow.

When I started the business, I had a fax machine. Now, the way to, to, to do the business, to Facebook, Instagram, and so on, I have to keep it up, keep it up, keep it up. Takes for me, a lot of energy, also, and I'm still in a human business. I mean, selling houses to people is a human business. You have to approach this emotional side, and sometimes I feel that this generation or my son is thinking about the money

and the commission and how to do and this and th-that. And not enough about the human side of the work. And this disturbs me.

**Esther Perel:** [00:09:00] I'm gonna do this, talk to him-

**Speaker 3:** Yeah.

**Esther Perel:** Turn first of all. Your bodies are facing me, and I listen, I enter, but it's almost like a can be a from the back.

**Speaker 3:** Mm-hmm [affirmative].

**Esther Perel:** While you are having this conversation. I don't even know how much you need me.

Sometimes people come into my office, but they don't really want to talk to each other. And sometimes people come, and I know that they're dying to talk to each other. What they need is a container.

In this case, I realized that they've been talking to each other in their heads for a while, and this is the opportunity for them to actually say some of these things out loud. And for that, they need to really look at each other rather than at me. It's, it's not difficult to talk to me. I'm not the one that's involved, so just to turn the bodies to face each other, to look into each other's eyes, this is what happens a session.

A session is uninterrupted. [00:10:00] There is just the human presence of people who are trying to work something out or to connect or to clear out all kinds of old debris.

You just need to f-

**Speaker 3:** Okay, I understand.

**Esther Perel:** Sit and dig.

**Speaker 4:** Mm-hmm [affirmative].

**Speaker 3:** I'm 61, and I have a problem now. I don't know how I will go on and for how long I will go on. You have your whole life in front of you. I-I don't and I-I'm here because I don't know, uh, .

**Esther Perel:** References.

**Speaker 3:** ?

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

I-I cannot find my references a-anymore. Comes a moment when I want to say, "Maybe, there's something else for me." I don't know where I stand anymore. This is my problem, and maybe that's why I'm so nervous sometimes. You know sometimes

I'm at the office, I see that he's, uh, b-bad tempered. I said, "Oh, [00:11:00] maybe he's hungry. I'm going to the supermarket to again."

**Speaker 4:** [laughs].

**Speaker 3:** And I do li- I do like this.

**Speaker 4:** [laughs].

**Speaker 3:** Are you okay? Are you okay?

**Esther Perel:** You str- you stroke his face? [laughs].

**Speaker 3:** Like Momma? [laughs]. Where is the mom, where is the boss? Difficult. Wow [laughs]. Some, and also, when I tell you, "Don't tell, the, the, the clients, 'My mom is busy. She will phone you back.' Tell, 'Mrs. will phone you back.'"

**Speaker 4:** [laughs].

**Speaker 3:** All those things. You have to adapt.

**Esther Perel:** Mm-hmm [affirmative].

**Speaker 3:** Very difficult. But I have, have a question. I have a question, and I have a question to you, do you still need me? This I want to know. Do you still need me, honestly?

**Speaker 4:** The w- the way it has been the last five, six years, it has been, um, a learning curve, and, um, I still learn every day from you. [00:12:00] But it, it's more of a way that I don't need you to hold my hand as much anymore. You can loosen it a little bit. Or, I-I can let the hand go a little bit as well.

For my years to come, it's more knowing that you have my back more than you hold my hands.

**Speaker 3:** There will come a moment when I will not be there anymore. You have... You, you will have to be alone. I'm thinking a lot about that.

**Speaker 4:** Mm-hmm [affirmative]. That's good to know.

**Esther Perel:** Do you know that?

**Speaker 4:** Subconsciously I do.

**Esther Perel:** It's one thing to have your boss say, "I'm not gonna be here forever." It's something very different when it's your mother that says to you 'cause in that moment, she's the mother. When, when I ask him, "Do you know that?" I'm not just asking do you know that chronologically at some point she's gonna get older. It's also that you're basically saying to the [00:13:00] son, "One day, you will not have your mother next to you."

And that resonance, that the same sentence actually speaks at many different level of the emotional layering of their relationship. It's very poignant in that moment.

**Speaker 4:** Y-you're a little bit less present. Um, you come later in the office. Um, you're letting it go one, one day at a time, and, um, to very open, it's, it's that I don't feel supported. I feel very much supported and having the ability to have the freedom to do anything I like at a young age, if I had to do it somewhere else, it would have taken me 10 to 15 years. So I'm very, very much grateful for it.

**Speaker 3:** But you know, this is also one of my problems. He reached a point that he's able to do it himself, and he's he, he's better than I was because [00:14:00] he has, um, relational skills that I did not have. I, I worked my way and I did it my way. And, and he's doing it his, his way.

**Esther Perel:** How would you describe the difference?

**Speaker 3:** Um, he, uh... He works and he knows what he has behind him. I did not have nothing behind me. How can i tell you? Um, he's, he's reassured. He, he's .

**Esther Perel:** You have confidence.

**Speaker 3:** Yes, you have confidence. You, you have a self confidence that I did not have.

**Esther Perel:** What I'm hearing you say is that his confidence comes from knowing that he's not alone. That he can take certain risks or he can venture out because you are there, and that you had no backing. And you were all alone, and so you held yourself back more.

But see, the question is [00:15:00] always, "What is personality and what is context?" Right? Is it that she comes with the same confidence, that developed over the years that comes from his relationship with you and that and the world? And, and he has a level of confidence today? Not when he was arrogant 'cause arrogance is basically a mask for insecurity, and, um, and lack of confidence.

**Speaker 3:** Mm-hmm [affirmative].

**Esther Perel:** Or is it that the structure is such that it also, because it's a could be a both thing, lends him the confidence because he's not alone.

**Speaker 3:** Okay, I'm sure that I gave him confidence. Isn't it?

**Speaker 4:** 100%.

**Speaker 3:** Me, all those years, I did not have that.

**Speaker 4:** Mm-hmm [affirmative].

**Speaker 3:** My parents never said, "It's fantastic what you do." At the contrary, the break, they broke me constantly. "Oh, you're just a broker. Oh, when you will sell you

the few houses, you will be finished." So I never had that, and it's such a stressful work [00:16:00] that you have to speak with-

**Esther Perel:** I never had that belief in me?

**Speaker 3:** They had to, they had to at the end. They had to admit that I became somebody.

**Esther Perel:** Did they?

**Speaker 3:** I think so. They never told me, but I think so. Yes. But at the end, I did not need it anymore.

**Esther Perel:** Hm.

**Speaker 3:** [laughs].

**Esther Perel:** That's what changed [laughing].

**Speaker 4:** [laughs].

**Speaker 3:** I didn't before. It was a hard struggle. For myself? Terrible struggle.

**Esther Perel:** This is such an important moment because now she's also bringing the inter-generational part. "My parents did not support me. My parents, in fact, undermined me and questioned me all the time. That's part of why I did not feel I had that confidence. You, my son, I did give you that sense of confidence. You were not alone, not just because I was there before you, but because of the way that I was there for [00:17:00] you."

**Speaker 3:** He can always come to me, and because I know the business and I know how to do... I'm backing him the whole time, so maybe that's my positive point. Maybe that's what I have to do. [inaudible 00:17:16].

**Esther Perel:** I-i-it's interesting because I'm, I'm a moment when I'm thinking to myself, "Is the conversation about how we continue? Or is the conversation an assessment of you saying to him, 'I think I'm about to want to stop, and I want to know where you are at with that.'?"

**Speaker 4:** It's a bit of both because one leads to another.

**Speaker 3:** Yes, why?

**Speaker 4:** If you decide, "I want to quit." It's not so much about when you will stop, but more about-

**Speaker 3:** How.

**Speaker 4:** How, and how much of the total responsibility are you willing to, to hand over.

**Speaker 3:** And, not only that, after all [00:18:00] those years, I know so many people, and people want me. They come to the office, said, "Okay, Mrs. we want, we want to deal with you. We would like to deal with you." And then I have to say, "Look, my son is even better than me, well..." it's many times it, it happens like this.

And I would like to come to a moment when they're coming for him.

**Speaker 4:** It puts a lot of pressure-

**Esther Perel:** On?

**Speaker 4:** Me because I would have to, to double prove myself-

**Esther Perel:** Yeah.

**Speaker 4:** One to the buis- No, triple prove myself. One, to the business, the people who I work with because I'm the son of, so I have to prove to the other people when the day that you will be gone, that I'm able to handle it to gain their respect. That's one. Then I have you as a mother and a boss together. And I have the people also that I have to. So it's a, it's a lot, it's a lot to take in.

**Esther Perel:** A lot of dynamic that really appears in so many of the family business, when a person enters from the second generation, the [00:19:00] question also remain, "Could I have done it myself? And am I here just because I am the child of, or because I'm here by my own merit? And if a door opens, can I be honest about the fact that this door was open to me because I am the son or the daughter of?"

And sometimes there's a lot of self-doubt that gets generated about it. Sometimes there is a denial of the nepotism that actually takes place, and sometimes there's a deep wish to know that, "I am here because of me, and not because I am the son of or the daughter of."

Now, remember, in many, many parts of the world, we are named, and the next part of our name is 'son of,' or 'daughter of'. You know, , but daughter of. [inaudible 00:19:50] son of. 'Nutzen' in Sweden, son of. I mean, our names really have always been markers of the family chain that we were [00:20:00] part of. We are among the first generations here who are naming ourselves, who are claiming our identity and who are thinking that we can do such a thing as to tell our own story.

All of this, is what gets challenged and lies underneath the old story of family business.

But you started with something that I think really is the piece you wanna hold. You said, "I have been in this business my entire life." And that's the thing you want to convey. It's not just, "I'm 28 and I'm working six years in the business." It's that the rest, the stuff that you've absorbed with that osmosis, you know, breakfast, lunch, dinner.

And I think that family business, that impregnation that children have by just listening to the stories, you know? That's the training. And that is a very different training that

no single school will give you. By the time you [00:21:00] enter, you know the stuff that is actually more intuitive and more intangible.

But the word you haven't used which I think is a, a transition word that could be very useful. That is not boss, that is not Mom, that is called mentor.

**Speaker 4:** Mm-hmm [affirmative]. If I would say that you're my mentor, would you accept it?

**Speaker 3:** Yes. [laughs]. Yes.

**Esther Perel:** It's a nice [laughing]-

**Speaker 3:** Yes.

**Esther Perel:** It's a beautiful role. [laughs].

**Speaker 4:** Problem solved.

**Speaker 3:** Yes [laughing].

**Speaker 4:** Maybe there was no problem, but I think it's... I-I don't think it has to be said because it's obvious.

**Speaker 3:** Um, I don't know.

**Esther Perel:** You know, certain things change meaning when they are named correctly.

**Speaker 4:** Mm-hmm [affirmative].

**Speaker 3:** Exactly.

**Esther Perel:** Or renamed, and you know, when you actually talk to your clients and you say, "My son is as good as me," you're talking from the place of the mother that's trying to [00:22:00] convince the client-

**Speaker 3:** Correct.

**Esther Perel:** You know what? I'm the mother, but, but I can tell you-

**Speaker 3:** Yeah.

**Esther Perel:** You know, if I didn't think he was good, he wouldn't be here.

**Speaker 3:** Yeah.

**Esther Perel:** Stop calling him, "My son."

**Speaker 3:** Absolutely.

**Esther Perel:** On the other you could say, "A family business it is,"-

**Speaker 3:** Mm-hmm [affirmative]

**Esther Perel:** And it's, it's an explicit identity to the business, or you say, "I don't want that to be the, the identity of the business," then stop calling him your son.

**Speaker 3:** It's so correct what you say, so maybe we should change the name of the firm. [laughs]. You know, that sometimes we are going together to, to take a house for sale, and after 20 minutes, it comes, out, "Oh, you're a mother and son." I feel so uncomfortable at that moment [laughs].

**Speaker 4:** Really?

**Speaker 3:** But I feel that, um-

**Esther Perel:** We are devalued?

**Speaker 3:** The, no, the, the, the-

**Speaker 4:** There is a shift.

**Speaker 3:** The . The uh-

**Speaker 4:** There is a shift in the balance.

**Esther Perel:** The balance?

**Speaker 3:** The balance is shifted. [inaudible 00:22:54].

**Esther Perel:** Between the two of you or vis-à-vis-

**Speaker 3:** No. In the situation. Suddenly, it's mother and son who are coming there. It's not the, [00:23:00] the boss with an important person of the office. The fact that, that you are the family at that moment, doesn't, um-

**Esther Perel:** Match?

**Speaker 3:** Match. It doesn't match the, the, the purpose of the work.

**Esther Perel:** So now explain the bias. This is a fundamental bias.

**Speaker 3:** Hm. Look, I enter a house with him, okay? Everyb- look, what is important? The look. How do you get somebody convinced to give his house for sale? The look that you have. The way you are dressed, the way you speak, the way you, you, you, you come with, uh, material to prove that you are very good agency-

**Esther Perel:** Documentation.

**Speaker 4:** Mm-hmm [affirmative].

**Speaker 3:** And so on and so on.

**Esther Perel:** Mm-hmm [affirmative].

**Speaker 3:** But comes a moment when they look, and they say, "Ah, it's mother and son." At that moment, I feel bad. I'm losing the business. Why? Because the strength is away. Cannot explain-

**Esther Perel:** Because mother can't be business [00:24:00] woman? What's the bias.

**Speaker 3:** Because what happens at that moment, "Ah, you are mother and son. Yes, yes. Let me see. You look like each other. Now, you tell me, I should have seen it before." And then you shift into a conversation that's not professional anymore and that's not... The relation is not, is not so strong. This is the word. Softer. It's too soft for business.

**Esther Perel:** Yes, and when a women-

**Speaker 3:** Too soft for business.

**Esther Perel:** A when the woman becomes identified with Mother-

**Speaker 3:** Yes.

**Esther Perel:** She loses-

**Speaker 3:** She loses also-

**Esther Perel:** Punch. Professional, business punch, power.

**Speaker 3:** I'm, yes, but not always. Because when they ask me, "Are you sure you can sell my house?" I said, "Look, all my files," I always say, "Is like my babies. I'm busy with all my files like my babies." And people like that. [laughs].

**Esther Perel:** [00:25:00] No sooner have we established the prejudice, the bias, she then starts to give me a beautiful example of how she subverts the bias, and how she uses the mother metaphor to her advantage.

I think that what you're saying her is something that is archaic. Probably true, but archaic and massively a patriarchal bias.

**Speaker 3:** Mm-hmm [affirmative].

**Esther Perel:** Because there is not a situation where a father, and by the way, a father coming with his daughter for that matter, would not have that incestuous quality that you're talking about, that becomes less powerful on the business front because you have now, now shown your softer side.

**Speaker 4:** Ult-Ultimately, now that we're discussing it, have we lost so much business because of it?

**Speaker 3:** No.

**Speaker 4:** I think we have always found a way to, to be [00:26:00] creative and, and turn-

**Speaker 3:** True.

**Speaker 4:** And turn, and turn it around.

**Speaker 3:** True.

**Speaker 4:** I would say, that of all the times that we went together to a listing pitch-

**Speaker 3:** Mm-hmm [affirmative].

**Speaker 4:** Um, we lost 25 to 30% because of it. Two, two to three out of ten.

**Speaker 3:** Not, yeah. Not even.

**Speaker 4:** No, I think more than we think.

**Speaker 3:** Yeah?

**Speaker 4:** I'm, I'm more pessimistic.

**Speaker 3:** Yes?

**Speaker 4:** Yes. 100%.

**Speaker 3:** Yeah, this is my negative boy.

**Esther Perel:** What is a momma's boy?

**Speaker 4:** What it is for me, or what I think it is general?

**Esther Perel:** Both.

**Speaker 4:** Both. What is for me a momma's boy is a boy that is very attached to his mother. Um, for which he thinks or for whom he thinks the mother will always be there whatever what, whatever would happen. And I think, in general, it also the same.

**Speaker 3:** And you feel like this with me?

**Speaker 4:** I hope that you will always have my back. [laughs].

**Esther Perel:** That's not an answer to the question she just asked.

**Speaker 4:** Oh. Um, [crosstalk 00:26:56]-

**Speaker 3:** Do you feel this way?

**Speaker 4:** Yeah, a [00:27:00] little bit. I always think we had a very special relationship, and I'm not sca- I'm not scared to say it.

**Esther Perel:** I would imagine the opposite. I would imagine that you would feel full when you say it. That your heart fills up and that it's fantastic.

**Speaker 4:** It's nice.

**Esther Perel:** Because you see-

**Speaker 4:** It's a good feeling.

**Esther Perel:** Of course. It's so interesting, right? On the one hand we're talking business and family business and all that, and on the other end, we're talking about a few major, archaic remnants. That's what you're grappling with when you say it like this. Like, "I'm not scared to say it," is actually like, you know, "It doesn't take anything away from me." Rather than to say, "I am so lucky." But you see, men don't do it like that. And you're not alone with this.

**Speaker 4:** Mm-hmm [affirmative].

**Esther Perel:** Momma's boy means generally, can't make any step without Momma, and therefore is a truncated man. It's never-

**Speaker 3:** But this is not the case.

**Esther Perel:** Of [00:28:00] course not. That's why... You, if you're gonna use the term, turn it on it's head. And make it a source of, of the pride and the joy that it gives you ra-

**Speaker 4:** But this happens a lot. I'm sorry to interrupt you-

**Esther Perel:** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**Speaker 4:** This, but this happens a lot. It comes up, and I say, "I'm working with my, with my mother, and we've been doing it a, we've been doing it for a couple of years. But I'm learning from the best, and I'm loving it," and, and I say it very often. "And if there's one person I would like- I would mostly want to do it with, it would be from her because she has the experience. She knows what she's doing, and I can only learn it from her."

**Esther Perel:** What I'm referring to when I think about the archaic remnants is that it seems to me that no man has to worry that if he reveals in a business meeting that he's also a father or that he has children, that someone would question his business acumen because of that very fact.

Whereas that is what's being discussed here, for her, as a woman, when she reveals that she's the [00:29:00] mother. And on top of it, that her son is right next to her.

And the same thing is true when he says, "I have a deep attachment to my mother." Can a young man say, "I'm deeply attached to my mother. We have a uniquely close relationship," and defy the immediate question that follows? Of, "What is the state of your masculinity?"

The disempowering of the woman on the one hand and the emasculation of the man on the other hand, those are the archaic stereotypes that are being discussed here, in the midst of this conversation about, "Where do we go as partners?"

And as the mother of two sons, I really hope one day, a man can say, "I'm very, very close to my mother," without having to add, "And I'm not scared to say it." And I would hope that a woman can say, "I'm a tough business woman, and I have five children." [00:30:00] Then we will have a new world order.

**Speaker 3:** A momma's boy, does he keep the stories of his own intimate life for himself? Because why, why, why I'm speaking about that, he never talks about it. We never talk about that, so it's not that we have a completely, uh-

**Esther Perel:** Enmeshed?

**Speaker 3:** Unmatched, um, yes-

**Esther Perel:** Yeah.

**Speaker 3:** Uh, relation. I have another son. It's not the same. He can talk about his things of with me without problem, but the one with whom I work? He shut it completely.

**Speaker 4:** Are you scared that you are losing your son to an employee?

**Speaker 3:** Sometimes.

**Speaker 4:** So are you scared that the only thing that we will have is not the emotional bond that you created and then nurtured for 28 years, now? But that the [00:31:00] only thing that we will have left is discussing, uh, that house, that apartment, this and that.

**Speaker 3:** Exactly, exactly. Sometimes I have that feeling.

**Speaker 4:** That's interesting.

**Speaker 3:** That when we are out of speaking about the last deal and the last thing and the last that, you go your life, uh, uh, I'm not part of it anymore. Yes, I do. [laughs]. Yes.

**Esther Perel:** Bring in the other people. Like, for example, I'm just thinking-

**Speaker 3:** Yeah.

**Esther Perel:** When you give, if you're gonna give over the business to him, what does, what implications does this have for your other kids? Right? I mean, the-there are issues of legacy and there are issues of succession.

**Speaker 3:** Yes.

**Esther Perel:** There are-

**Speaker 3:** It's a huge issue. I don't even know how to handle it. I love both my kids the same, uh, not the same way, but, as much. Uh, and I, I don't know how to do, not to privileged [00:32:00] one against the other. In, in many ways, m-my concern is also what will happen afterwards between the two brothers. I don't want any, any, uh-

**Esther Perel:** Cain and Abel. [laughs].

**Speaker 3:** Yeah, an-any Cain and Abel.

**Esther Perel:** How does he see the two of you?

**Speaker 3:** Uh, I think it's, it, it disturbs him. I think he's like kind of jealous. Jealous is not really the... But maybe somewhere frustrated not to be part of it. I think so.

**Speaker 4:** You think so?

**Speaker 3:** I think so. Now that we're speaking about it and I'm happy we're speaking about that, also. I'd wish that you would have with him better relationship. It's important.

**Esther Perel:** Is it the same to the other?

**Speaker 3:** Not, n-no. It sh- Uh, it's the first time I said it.

**Esther Perel:** Oh, wow. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

**Speaker 4:** But do you think [00:33:00] we have a bad relationship?

**Esther Perel:** No, let's not go into good/bad.

**Speaker 3:** It's not [inaudible 00:33:04].

**Esther Perel:** What is it that needs to happen, or that you would like to happen? What's your dream.

**Speaker 3:** You, you know, bottom line? I would like them to have more respect, one for each other. They have a brotherly love together but the respect is not there, enough. [foreign language 00:33:27] What do you think?

**Speaker 4:** Hm. I don't think it's an issue of respect. I think I have... I th- I think there is a lot of respect, at the end. I just think there is not a lot of understanding.

**Speaker 3:** True. Respect was not the a, the, the exact word.

**Speaker 4:** It's, I don't think... I realize how difficult it is what he's doing on all levels, 'cause he's a surgeon, technically nor chemically [00:34:00] nor-

**Speaker 3:** Emotionally.

**Speaker 4:** Emotionally, um, all the time and effort and stress. And I don't think that he realizes how difficult and intense our line of work is too.

**Speaker 3:** Absolutely.

**Speaker 4:** It's not a matter of respect. I respect it a lot what he's doing. I think ultimately, he respects me as well. It just it's a, it's understanding.

**Speaker 3:** He never asks questions.

**Speaker 4:** And he never explains either. Nor do I.

**Speaker 3:** So maybe we, you should. That you have to, to [inaudible 00:34:37].

**Esther Perel:** You know, the more listen to you, and the more impressed I am of how many layers of relational systems you straddle. I-I just want you to know wh- I think you're handling an enormous amount of stuff. And I, for that matter, think you [00:35:00] handle it very well. Your awareness of things, your ability to think about how the other person thinks about things. It's very discerning. I just wanted to tell you that.

**Speaker 4:** That's kind. Thank you.

**Esther Perel:** And do- you know, when you talk, I map. I map you and your brother, you and the clients, you and the other sales people, you and your mother, you and your father which we haven't addressed. And when you begin to add it up like that, it becomes a complex, you know, molecule. [laughs].

**Speaker 3:** Mm-hmm [affirmative].

**Esther Perel:** Of relationships and, um, and I think you handle a lot of it quite beautifully period. And I'm saying this to him, but I'm also saying this to you.

**Speaker 4:** That's great. [laughs].

**Esther Perel:** Yeah, [laughs]. It's, you know, probably in the midst of this, you have fights and you have screams and you have... But all of this is right there, as well. And family business [00:36:00] is the most difficult one to straddle, because you straddle both.

'Cause if you lay somebody off, you never see them again. [laughs]. But if, if you lay off your son, he remains your son. You know, y-y- I may, you may have had a terrible week. You may still meet on the, on, on, on the weekend [laughs].

**Speaker 3:** Yep, yeah.

**Esther Perel:** And the ability to maneuver that, is one of the essential qualities of family business.

**Speaker 3:** What is the role of the father in a mother/son...?

**Esther Perel:** Great question. Start together first.

**Speaker 3:** I-I-I want to know how you see it. I know how I see it, but I would like know, how do you see your father in, in that picture. W-w-we never talk about the father here.

**Speaker 4:** Hm.

**Esther Perel:** The father which is also your husband.

**Speaker 3:** Yes.

**Esther Perel:** [laughs].

**Speaker 3:** My husband, his father. [laughs]. Because he's also part of the-

**Speaker 4:** For sure.

**Speaker 3:** Of the business. He'd doing all the financial, uh, operation. He's the C, CFO?

**Speaker 4:** He's [00:37:00] doing the accounting and the, the backend.

**Speaker 3:** Yes. Not at the office. From, fr-

**Speaker 4:** The, the, the n- the non, the non-visible part.

**Esther Perel:** But you never say, "I work with my father and my mother."

**Speaker 3:** Say?

**Esther Perel:** Here, even here. You've never said, "I work with my parents."

**Speaker 4:** I said it's a family business.

**Speaker 3:** [laughs].

**Esther Perel:** Don't play with me. [laughs].

**Speaker 4:** [laughs].

**Esther Perel:** The whole conversation has been about working with Mom, but in fact, you work with both your parents.

**Speaker 4:** Mm-hmm [affirmative].

**Esther Perel:** If that is that is true, it is not presented like that.

**Speaker 4:** It's true, for sure. Although, the company holds his name, he's not the face of the company. And for me, that's not the same. For me, it's my name and, ultimately, hopefully, one day it will be the face as well. That's a question I have for you. Do you ever feel regret that it's not your name holding the company?

**Speaker 3:** [00:38:00] Sometimes, yes. It's a good question. It's a very good question. [laughs]. It's fundamental. It's his name, and I'm using his name, already 30 years.

**Speaker 4:** But you cannot neglect it.

**Speaker 3:** And I have a big problem with that.

**Speaker 4:** But you cannot neglect the contribution.

**Speaker 3:** Of course not.

**Speaker 4:** Of course not.

**Speaker 3:** Look, when you were young, uh, a baby, and, and, and y- and your brother also, he did everything, that I could, uh, study, and, and, and, and study the business and start the business. And that he was babysitting and keeping and [inaudible 00:38:43]. He never complained. I have to hold gratitude to, towards him for for that.

But it's true that after all these years, it's not my name. But for you it's different. It's your name.

**Speaker 4:** [00:39:00] But is it so important? It's not important.

**Speaker 3:** I never thought about it, but lately, it seems important for me. After all these achievement, I should all these achievement.

**Speaker 4:** 'Cause it's an issue of legacy.

**Esther Perel:** No.

**Speaker 4:** But I am telling you-

**Esther Perel:** It's an issue of patriarchy.

**Speaker 3:** I have to tell you that socially, lately, I used few times, my own name. Nobody knows that, but I gave my own name.

**Speaker 4:** Mm-hmm [affirmative]. [laughs].

**Esther Perel:** But that's what I'm saying is that when-

**Speaker 3:** I felt so good. I felt good.

**Esther Perel:** Right.

**Speaker 3:** It was like a discovery.

**Speaker 4:** [laughs].

**Esther Perel:** Meaning... It, this is an interesting moment for you 'cause uh, you made a very beautiful distinction when you talked about your brother between respect and understanding. This is a moment when you need to bring your curiosity to her, and try to be more understanding. What is at stake? Do you think your girlfriend, if she ever married you, would keep her name?

**Speaker 4:** [crosstalk 00:39:58]

**Esther Perel:** Or she would take your [00:40:00] name.

**Speaker 4:** I don't care.

**Esther Perel:** Right, but she has a choice.

**Speaker 4:** Mm-hmm [affirmative].

**Esther Perel:** Okay. Your mom is from a generation that didn't have that choice.

**Speaker 4:** Mm-hmm [affirmative].

**Esther Perel:** And so the name and the identity that comes with the name, and the difference between, "There is my face, but it's not my identity. Or there is my face, but it's not my name." That is a real generational story and primarily of women. That's what I meant by patriarchal. By b- and on all social structure. It's a given that you take the name of the father. Why?

**Speaker 4:** [laughs]. I understand.

**Esther Perel:** Right? So that's the conversation. Do you think that you began to use your maiden name after your father died?

**Speaker 3:** Yes. Absolutely. Absolutely. Very [00:41:00] interesting. .

**Esther Perel:** She had written in the intakes forms that her father had recently passed away, and it occurred to me, that it was his death that now allowed her to claim her name as hers. And not just as the name of her father, and that this notion of, "Which is my name? The wife of... The daughter of..." rather than, "The woman I am." Had become much more central for her in these past few years.

**Speaker 3:** Where I live, everybody knows me by the name of my husband, and my own name is [Barrette 00:41:40]. Finish that. It's important for him to understand that from me.

**Esther Perel:** Tell him.

**Speaker 3:** It's important that you know that.

**Speaker 4:** Okay. So it's important for you also to tell my father and to tell your husband, that he... You have sacrificed this piece of yourself [00:42:00] that you've, that you recognize today that is so important. He needs to know that. And you need to know and understand all his sacrifices and everything that he did because there is

an equality there. Even though it's not a monetary equality, or an income equality, it's a personal equality.

**Speaker 3:** What was his sacrifices?

**Speaker 4:** I think he-

**Speaker 3:** The fact that his wife was earning more than him?

**Speaker 4:** I think-

**Speaker 3:** That he had, he'd been always the underdog.

**Speaker 4:** It's not a question of underdog. I think it's, it's attaching a level of importance to things. You attach a lot of importance to the business, to the time, to the monetary, the financially. And he attached a lot of importance-

**Speaker 3:** Mm-hmm [affirmative].

**Speaker 4:** To the role that was so socially accepted [00:43:00] t-to be for the wife and not the husband, for people in your generation. And he has done it without compromise, without discussion, for as much as I know, and you have to be able to realize it that it's, that these two things today's, in today's world, are equal. And that's an important thing to know.

**Speaker 3:** Well, do you... You, you do realize that you don't have parents like your other friends?

**Speaker 4:** For sure.

**Speaker 3:** That by us, the roles are completely...

**Esther Perel:** how did you understand what he just said?

**Speaker 4:** I think she understood by saying that the roles are different, by accepting and acknowledging it.

**Esther Perel:** Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Um-

**Speaker 3:** He's cooking every day and he's dealing with the things at home, but me too.

**Speaker 4:** And he took a lot of [00:44:00] joy from it.

**Speaker 3:** Yeah, he feels good at it.

**Speaker 4:** Okay, and I think you balance each other much more than you think, or much more than you realize.

**Speaker 3:** Y-you never felt uneasy with that?

**Speaker 4:** When I-

**Speaker 3:** Because it's very important that, very important. The way... The, the relation that we have now for work is based on the relation that you have at home with the parents, and, and h-how you see that.

**Esther Perel:** Part of what you're highlighting is, is that from he comes from, he thinks that your arrangement with your husband is a rather egalitarian arrangement. Where two people contributed in a way that allowed the other person to do what they did best.

**Speaker 3:** It's very-

**Esther Perel:** That's a different definition of egalitarian-

**Speaker 3:** Yes, absolutely.

**Esther Perel:** And so, you know-

**Speaker 4:** You have never seen it in this way.

**Speaker 3:** No.

**Speaker 4:** Because you were looking at it from a monetary perspective.

**Speaker 3:** No. [00:45:00] No, not a monetary pers- No, but you, you could have said, uh, "I'm ashamed of my father because for years he's not working. He's, he stays at home, the whole time doing nothing," and so on, but you did not say that. That's good.

**Speaker 4:** No, because he could have been very jealous. He could've been very, um [foreign language 00:45:28].

**Speaker 3:** No, he is not jealous. He is not jealous because-

**Esther Perel:** Competitive, envious.

**Speaker 4:** En-en-en-envious.

**Speaker 3:** He is not, he is not jealous because he is not ambitious.

**Speaker 4:** No, you cannot say that because maybe he can be ambition in a different sense. But what Dad did is he gave you the space and the freedom to do it by accepting all the other roles that were perceived as not for the man to do. Th-there come from both of your [00:46:00] sides great pride and love for giving each other the freedom to do what you do best.

**Speaker 3:** Mm-hmm [affirmative].

**Esther Perel:** That's a whole different view on your marriage than the one you have, right?

**Speaker 3:** Phew. [laughs].

**Esther Perel:** And on the gender dynamics and the power structures.

**Speaker 3:** Wow, wow.

**Speaker 4:** [laughs].

**Esther Perel:** This is the moment where things began to sink in for her because her own son has just given her an entirely different rendering on her marriage. And she would never accept the primary breadwinner being the man saying, "My wife at home does nothing." And so what she highlights here is the way that she to has fallen into the trap of the old gender structured patriarchal model.

For years, on some level, [00:47:00] she lived with the idea A, that she had done it all alone, when in fact, her husband had been a primary contributor as an active CFO in the company. But that was never mentioned. For years she thought, "I'm the man of the house," rather than, "My man is making it possible for me to be the woman I want to be."

And for years, she thought that her sons would be embarrassed by having a stay-at-home dad who had no ambition, which the son reinterpreted as, "The ambition of my father was to let you shine."

I'm gonna simply put three dots at the end of this sentence because it's not a concluded conversation, but it's where we are.

**Speaker 4:** Thank you very much.

**Esther Perel:** Okay?

**Speaker 3:** Thank you.

**Esther Perel:** But you guys can continue this conversation even as you leave here, this piece about that.

**Speaker 3:** We will.

**Speaker 4:** We shall.

**Speaker 3:** [00:48:00] [laughs].

**Speaker 4:** [laughs].

**Esther Perel:** I think that's a revelation for you, Mom. Thank you.

**Speaker 3:** Thank you. Thank you, [Esther 00:48:11].

**Speaker 1:** Esther Perel is a best selling 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 [EstherPerel.com/HowsWork](https://EstherPerel.com/HowsWork).

How's Work is produced by Magnificent Noise for Gimlet and Esther Perel Productions.

Our production staff includes Eric Nuzum, Eva Wolchover, Destry Sibley, Alex Lewis, Kristin Mueller and our coordinating producer is Lindsay Ratowsky.

Our recording engineer is Noriko Okabe and Damon Whittamore is our mix engineer.

The theme song was written by Doug Slawin

And the Executive Producers of How's Work are Esther Perel and Jesse Baker.

We would also like to thank:

Nazanine Rafsanjani

Matt Lieber

Courtney Hamilton

Kelley Rose

Nick Oxenhorn

Dr. Guy Winch

Kathryn Minshew and her team at The Muse

Paul Schneider

Thomas Curry

Shani Aviram

AND Jack Saul