

How's Work? with Esther Perel

Season 1: Ep 5 - You're Inching Me Out

Speaker 1: [00:00:00] [00:00:00] What you are 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.

Speaker 2: [00:00:16] I think the sort of hilarious irony, really, is that for two people who run a communications company, we are both, like, drastically terrible at communicating. [laughs]

Esther Perel: [00:00:28] They had been together for 13 years as business partners, as close friends that had met in college, that stumbled upon this new idea that turned into a very successful business that is on a number of continents and bi-coastal, and the business is actually doing really well, and the relationship is sinking.

Speaker 2: [00:00:49] This, the kind of, the single most stressful thing is in my working life, if not life, um, is, uh, the challenges with our relationship.

MONTAGE:

Speaker 4: [00:01:03] [00:01:00] I just, I feel continually undermined.

Speaker 5: [00:01:06] The job has always been that place where I've been needed and I feel important.

Speaker 6: [00:01:13] A lot of the people that work for me are like an extension of my family.

Speaker 7: [00:01:17] There's no doubt that your emotional and relational dowry comes with you to work.

Speaker 8: [00:01:23] Imagine going to work every day in a very busy place and no one will make eye contact with you.

Speaker 4: [00:01:28] I mean, it feels like a breakup.

Esther Perel: [00:01:31] It doesn't feel, it is. [laughs] So, how's work?

END OF MONTAGE

Esther Perel:

Four years they've been sitting with this, and so the ask was big. It was A, about just opening up the conversation, B, about what actually needed to be talked about, [00:02:00] and C, what was a potential resolution that they could both engage in.

But the conversation was so hard for them that I understood why it took them four years, and it wasn't just hard for them. It was hard for me as well because they kept

unconsciously saying, "We need to talk about this," but then did everything possible to not talk about this.

Speaker 2: [00:02:24] There's sort of two aspects to it for me. One is the relationship, um, and then the other is the sort of, the, the business and what we both, our roles and what we both bring to the business. Um, yeah, I'd like to sort of be able to f- get, get to a point where we can, um, have a kind of way of being able to-

Esther Perel: [00:02:50] Which one keeps you awake at night?

Speaker 2: [00:02:52] I mean, a couple of months ago, it was, it was kind of quite bad.

Esther Perel: [00:02:58] But which one? The [00:03:00] business or the relationship?

Speaker 2: [00:03:02] Hmm. Well business is fine, really. [laughs] Um, so I'd say it's probably the relationship.

Esther Perel: [00:03:14] That's one thing you agree on is that, both of you are preoccupied by the fissures of your relationship.

Speaker 2: [00:03:24] Yeah, I mean I, I'd say, like, there's sort of, when I look at what we've achieved together and look at where we've come from, it seems so sad that we can't see eye to eye, and I think, y- you know, the times where we've been most aligned, I've been most happy in the business and I felt most sort of confident in myself as s- as someone operating the business.

And just generally in life, because, you know, business does flow into so many other aspects of the way that you feel about yourself and think about yourself. Um, and [00:04:00] I read, so yesterday, this was just by chance, I read that C- C- Carl Jung said, "Loneliness is not an absence of people, it's an absence of genuine understanding."

Esther Perel: [00:04:08] Mm-hmm [affirmative]

Speaker 2: [00:04:09] And I was just like, or, or, or feeling genuinely understood. And I think if could, sort of put my finger on, like, a key fissure between the two of us, it's like, I don't, I haven't always felt supported because there's this, because we, because there is a fissure, because there was a challenge there in our relationship, and it, which had been there for years.

Esther Perel: [00:04:33] And it is? Name it.

Speaker 2: [00:04:37] I ... This is getting quite big quite quickly, but, um-

Esther Perel: [00:04:44] [laughs]. You're doing good.

Speaker 2: [00:04:45] The challenge I think is that-

Esther Perel: [00:04:46] A- and is it okay that I-

Speaker 2: [00:04:48] of course yeah, yeah.

Esther Perel: [00:04:49] Be GPS?

Speaker 2: [00:04:50] You can GPS. Yeah. Yeah. It's probably just for the best, um, you know, throughout that entire period of building the company, you know, when we won lots of awards and [00:05:00] things, you know, I was always really keen to make sure that we shared the stage together. And, you know, I feel like that you weren't quite as willing to share the stage with me.

And like, and, and that led to, it's some of the decision making that I, that, you know, so when you were like, look, you know, you have to let all these people go or you have to do this or that. It was, I- it wasn't necessarily coming from, you know, even today, like, you know, looking at the marketing and, you know, I, I feel like you're quite an anti-marketing.

But part of the reason I think you're anti-marketing frankly is cause I think you think you see it as something that I'm doing. And so, if we can kind of like, if we could, you know, if, if we can show that marketing fails as a thing for us to do, then that was somehow diminish me. You know, rather than, that was definitely the [00:06:00] thing that we used to do. Does that make sense?

Esther Perel: [00:06:02] What do you hear?

Speaker 4: [00:06:03] Yeah. Yeah, um ...

Esther Perel: [00:06:05] Just repeat it.

Speaker 4: [00:06:06] Okay.

Esther Perel: [00:06:07] So then we get a sense, cause he said a lot.

Speaker 4: [00:06:10] Yeah. So what I hear is that there's a, there's a kind of e-emotional response to a lot of the decisions that we've had to take as a business. Um, for me, I kind of think ... [laughs].

Esther Perel: [00:06:35] No, but before you-

Speaker 4: [00:06:37] Sorry.

Esther Perel: [00:06:37] ... rebuttal, what did you hear him say? He said something extremely important.

Speaker 4: [00:06:46] That it was about doing it together and sharing the stage? No? [laughs].

Esther Perel: [00:06:50] Yes, but that's not what, that's ... Look, we tend to be able to repeat [00:07:00] things quite easily when it's stuff we have no problem listening to. What's extraordinary is how hard it is. And generally, we can probably handle 10

seconds, which is three sentences. But before you answer, you have got to just say, "This is what I'm hearing."

And then instead of shaking your head, you can say you heard a piece of it or part, that's part of it, but there's more. So that we first establish, I, I will tell you what I heard, but it's also to be checked.

Speaker 4: [00:07:33] Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Esther Perel: [00:07:33] It's not because ... At this point we have reached a place where there is a confusion between you're disagreeing with my ide- with an idea versus you're disagreeing with me, and it becomes essentially sized. It's not about marketing, it's not about this or that.

Speaker 4: [00:07:50] Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Esther Perel: [00:07:50] It ends up being about me and I feel that on some level, I'm undermined. And then I have to prove myself and I'm being tested. And if [00:08:00] it's something that I want by definition you want wanted but not because of the idea, but because it's coming from me. And that's how the waters have gotten muddled. Is that ...

Speaker 2: [00:08:11] Yeah.

Esther Perel: [00:08:12] Okay. It's okay to say, "I don't, you know, I'm not sure I really understand what you're saying," but if you don't listen it's because you're busy with a rebuttal.

Speaker 4: [00:08:24] Yeah.

Esther Perel: [00:08:27] So you got to slow it down, and anchor yourself first and foremost into the listening. That's the essence of the communication, is actually not the talking. It's the listening. He gave you the opening line, right? There is a loneliness in not being understood. That's yo- that in itself is a loneliness. And you are ... Do you still see each other outside of work? Do you still have a [00:09:00] friendship.

Speaker 2: [00:09:02] Sometimes?

Speaker 4: [00:09:04] Okay. Yeah.

Esther Perel: [00:09:04] Do you still talk about anything besides the shop?

Speaker 2: [00:09:07] Yeah.

Speaker 4: [00:09:07] Yeah.

Esther Perel: [00:09:08] Okay. Do you still go just to hang and be with each other for the company of each other?

Speaker 2: [00:09:13] Well, we've lived in different places for five years.

Esther Perel: [00:09:15] Yes. Do you still text each other stuff that is not about work?

Speaker 4: [00:09:20] No.

Esther Perel: [00:09:20] As the way that you bring each other into each other's lives?

Speaker 4: [00:09:23] Not really no.

Speaker 2: [00:09:23] Not really.

Esther Perel: [00:09:23] Okay. Is that a loss? Do you care about it? Are you so fixated on the shop and the business that the friendship is no longer on the menu?

Speaker 4: [00:09:39] No. I mean I'd quite like it the, the ... I'd sort of would quite like to not have the business. [laughs], um, in the way and just be able to be friends, you know? Outside of that.

Speaker 2: [00:09:50] The thing that's quite marked is like, we're lucky enough to have built a company of people who we get on really well with. Um-

Esther Perel: [00:09:58] No, no, I understood. The people in [00:10:00] the company are rather happy. It's just the two co-founders that are not particularly happy with each other.

Speaker 2: [00:10:04] Yeah, [laughs].

Speaker 4: [00:10:04] Yeah, yeah.

Esther Perel: [00:10:05] With each other.

Speaker 4: [00:10:06] Yeah.

Esther Perel: [00:10:07] And at this point they can't discuss an idea because an idea becomes the representation of a person.

Speaker 4: [00:10:12] Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Esther Perel: [00:10:13] And when it becomes essentialized this way, you no longer, if you dis- you no longer know if you're discussing, "I don't like the idea or I don't like you."

Speaker 2: [00:10:20] Right. And that's where potentially, that's where I get very frustrated, because-

Esther Perel: [00:10:25] So does he.

Speaker 2: [00:10:26] Yeah. [laughs].

Esther Perel: [00:10:27] So first answer him.

Speaker 2: [00:10:29] [laughs].

Esther Perel: [00:10:30] I mean, answer him doesn't mean argue with it. It's just, repeat now that I said it, just repeat it again. What do you think he was talking about? What did you hear?

Speaker 4: [00:10:42] That when I object to an idea, he sees that, you see that as, um, somehow a rejection of you or, uh, or, or, a way of sort of, me somehow proving a, [00:11:00] a point.

Esther Perel: [00:11:01] For the first hour of this session, they've told me what they wanna address and they've shown me how they will do anything possible never to talk about what they came to talk about. They avoid conflict. They avoid pain to avoid the inevitable. They avoid having to face each other, and say those things. To say, "I don't wanna continue with you. And am actually actively trying to push you out."

This is not an uncommon story among co-founders in which when often may find that there is one person whose primary paradigm continues to be the relationship and the friendship, and the other one who's more mercenary and whose primary paradigm becomes business first. So, after an hour, my frustration has been mounting and I feel for them.

Because I realize [00:12:00] that they're desperate to engage in a conversation and they have no idea how to do it, and they'll do anything not to do it because it is about to show the sad sites and the not nice sites that each of them carries.

Speaker 2: [00:12:21] When we first set the company up, we talked all the time. I mean, like-

Esther Perel: [00:12:26] Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Speaker 2: [00:12:26] ... just daily, several times.

Esther Perel: [00:12:30] Yes.

Speaker 2: [00:12:30] 'Cause we were always, I was always like, "Oh, we can do this, we can do that and we can ..." You know, and I think as the business develops, you know, we just talk less and then the less you talk, the less you sort of get that genuine level of communication.

Esther Perel: [00:12:44] Yeah. It's like a relationship.

Speaker 2: [00:12:45] Yeah.

Speaker 4: [00:12:46] Yeah, it is.

Esther Perel: [00:12:47] Um, right in the beginning you don't stop.

Speaker 2: [00:12:50] I th- I think it was just, I think kind of trying to unpack it a bit as well, like, that whole period in London, um, in terms of [00:13:00] letting people go, that's where I feel like, le- let down by you in that, like it stopped becoming a partnership there. Because I was doing everything I could to try and support you and to help make these difficult decisions, to the point where I actually came back and did some of it.

Um, but you, that was a kind of unwillingness to listen to, t- to those very practical, um, suggestions and solutions. Um, and that led to immense frustration, um, on my side, which I know had an impact, you know. F- from on the personal level. And that, yeah, that's kind of where it, it really is.

Speaker 4: [00:13:47] I mean, that was extremely damaging. I think we just both have very different narratives about like what happened from when we moved to the US on. I think we came here. It was, [00:14:00] you know, it makes it look like, you, it was something that you really drove and, you know, we moved over here and we basically gutted the UK business to make New York into the biggest opportunity that we could.

Esther Perel: [00:14:16] And you said just, you just said something that I, I wanna pick up on for a sec if you allow me. We have different narratives. Hmm. Give me just a sense, what kind of relationship cultures you come from and you grew up in. When it comes to talking about difficult subjects, being direct with people that are close to you, managing conflict.

Expressing certain feelings or not, or other feelings, but not those. What kind of relationship [00:15:00] cultures did you grow up in? What's your, I call this the relational diary.

Speaker 2: [00:15:05] Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Esther Perel: [00:15:06] The stuff that we bring with us to work and does not stay at the door.

Speaker 4: [00:15:15] I mean, for me, we didn't, we didn't talk about feelings a lot at home. Well, I mean, very sort of loving, uh, environment and, you know, very happy with my upbringing and, but there wasn't ... My dad's English, and didn't talk about emotions very much. Um, my mom said my mum, German, very direct. Um, so I sort of g- got some of that, that directness I think from her.

Esther Perel: [00:15:44] How did people handle disagreement, conflict?

Speaker 4: [00:15:50] Yeah. No, we, w- we were not sort of big like talkie emotional family. Um, I'm not good at vocalizing my feelings, I know that. I've [00:16:00] been told. [laughs]. Um, and I think that then I have very, I think high expectations of myself and therefore other people, and can not verbalize that kind of stuff. So, I think there are, I recognize there are times where I just expect people to get things and

expect them to, you know, yeah. Just have high expectations and I think that then when that doesn't happen, I then get annoyed. Um-

Esther Perel: [00:16:30] And how do you show annoyance?

Speaker 4: [00:16:31] Passive, aggressive. [laughs]. Of like-

Esther Perel: [00:16:34] What's your [crosstalk 00:16:34]?

Speaker 4: [00:16:34] I'll either withdraw, or just kind of go very quiet. Yeah. I normally just do that and just keep it, keep it inside. [laughs].

Speaker 2: [00:16:43] Yeah. Good old British [crosstalk 00:16:45]. [laughs].

Speaker 4: [00:16:46] [laughs].

Esther Perel: [00:16:47] Yeah, but it is an urge to passive, aggressive.

Speaker 4: [00:16:49] Right.

Esther Perel: [00:16:49] So what's, what's your particular craft?

Speaker 4: [00:16:54] Um, I think the problem-

Esther Perel: [00:16:57] Can I ask you too, you know the guy [laughs].

Speaker 4: [00:16:58] Yeah. Yeah. [00:17:00] [laughs].

Esther Perel: [00:17:00] You've known him many years.

Speaker 4: [00:17:02] Yeah.

Esther Perel: [00:17:03] Then you may be better off, with each other than yourself.

Speaker 4: [00:17:05] Yeah, yeah. I'm sure.

Speaker 2: [00:17:06] Yeah, probably. Um, I'm very similar vibe, um, for, for me too. Um, either rolling your eyes or I find that you lick your teeth to me quite a lot, and I find that quite ...

Speaker 4: [00:17:20] [laughs].

Speaker 2: [00:17:20] Which is a very sort of an- animalistic, um, sort of f- fight mechanism. Um-

Speaker 4: [00:17:27] Not necessarily.

Speaker 2: [00:17:27] ... I don't know if you notice that, but you do it to me all the time.

Speaker 4: [00:17:30] Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Speaker 2: [00:17:32] You know, the, I think the, like sort of, the sort of hilarious irony really is that, for two people who run a communications company, we're both like drastically terrible at co- communicating. Um, which is probably why we're sitting here. Um-

Esther Perel: [00:17:43] Well, hold the reverse. The fact that you're here, I always take as, there's a l- there's a longing underneath.

Speaker 2: [00:17:55] Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Esther Perel: [00:17:55] There's a wish for something better.

Speaker 2: [00:17:57] Yeah.

Esther Perel: [00:17:57] You may not know how to do it, [00:18:00] but you at least have a desire to wanna do it.

Speaker 2: [00:18:02] Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Esther Perel: [00:18:02] And that, that speaks volumes. So, um, I don't think that you- the fact that you're here is because you're worse than others, to enter the country.

Speaker 2: [00:18:11] Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Esther Perel: [00:18:12] But I do wanna know how does conflict get managed? How does appreciation gets expressed? How does a, um, disagreement come out? How does sadness get, 'cause, I mean there's, uh, a real wide vocabulary. So, what's, what's the vocabulary you come with?

Speaker 2: [00:18:31] Um, both lit up and don't deal with it, and then go to the pub. Um, probably why I'm still really cut about my dad dying when I was 10. Not that, that has anything to do with this really, but like, inability to deal with challenges [laughs], is, uh, or, or, or emotional challenges, sorry, is, is an issue. I don't even deal particularly well with [00:19:00] communicating on happiness.

Esther Perel: [00:19:03] And that's where you are.

Speaker 2: [00:19:04] Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Esther Perel: [00:19:05] You are rather unhappy with your relationship, with your co-founder and your friend. And he, you are rather unhappy as well. So, that is actually the thing that you're in the midst of at this moment.

Speaker 2: [00:19:20] Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Esther Perel: [00:19:20] Not the direction of the company. That is actually unfolding quite well. Um, and part of what you're doing about your own happiness is, you're fortifying the troops. You're building a case for leaving, but of course with the fantasy

that he would do the leaving. So you don't even have to take responsibility for that. That's passive aggressive.

Speaker 4: [00:19:48] [laughs]. Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

Esther Perel: [00:19:49] Right? And he feels it. And he even says it. You know, "You're, you're inching me [00:20:00] out." So far so good?

Speaker 2: [00:20:05] Yeah.

Esther Perel: [00:20:06] All right. Continue.

Speaker 2: [00:20:09] I just, I feel continually undermined. Um, we had a thing on Friday where we have a deck that we send out.

Esther Perel: [00:20:16] No. I want you to try and do that thing that you just said is so hard.

Speaker 2: [00:20:22] Yeah. I-

Esther Perel: [00:20:24] I'll be with you. I'll help you.

Speaker 2: [00:20:26] Thank you. I just feel continually marginalized. Um, a company that I've like loved, and given my all and given countless late nights, and weekends, and hours and hours, weeks of lost sleep. I just feel like my joy and desire to do it is just [00:21:00] crushed, like over and over.

And every time we're on a call, and, I mean, it doesn't even ne- necessarily need to be, go from one, like quite often you just roll your eyes at the things I say or, you know, like finding that the [inaudible 00:21:14] like, with, my like ... My name is jilted.

Esther Perel: [00:21:16] All right. This is the moment when you wanna check if he's listening.

Speaker 2: [00:21:19] With my [crosstalk 00:21:20].

Speaker 4: [00:21:20] [laughs].

Esther Perel: [00:21:20] [laughs].

Speaker 2: [00:21:20] Like, you know, the re-

Esther Perel: [00:21:21] 'Cause you're going-

Speaker 2: [00:21:21] ... the reason I got so upset about that on Friday, it was 'cause like that was just, it was just the clearest possible manifestation of the way I feel. So, that was, that was just a, it was a, it was a, a slide of the, the company and it had everyone in the company on it, except I just, I literally just didn't feature.

So, it was like a sort of, it was a hierarchy of the company with one person missing and the one person missing was me. And that just, you know, no.

Esther Perel: [00:21:54] That hurt.

Speaker 2: [00:21:55] That hurt. But it, it hurt because I'd f- f- had that [00:22:00] feeling for years. You know, that first year when we entered loads of, we, we had these big awards.

Esther Perel: [00:22:06] But you see, you're thinking and you're oozing feeling.

Speaker 2: [00:22:10] Okay.

Esther Perel: [00:22:12] You tell him that hurt.

Speaker 2: [00:22:14] Yeah.

Esther Perel: [00:22:14] And now-

Speaker 2: [00:22:15] Just shut up.

Esther Perel: [00:22:16] You s-

Speaker 2: [00:22:16] Yeah.

Esther Perel: [00:22:16] You sit with it.

Speaker 2: [00:22:18] Yeah.

Esther Perel: [00:22:19] The problem is that you talk to flatten whatever you feel-

Speaker 2: [00:22:23] Yeah.

Esther Perel: [00:22:23] ... and you go numb. And when you go numb-

Speaker 2: [00:22:27] He goes numb.

Esther Perel: [00:22:29] Yes.

Speaker 2: [00:22:29] Yeah. Fair. That is fair. I guess that, you know-

Esther Perel: [00:22:32] That's it. Now, got back to him.

Speaker 2: [00:22:34] Yeah.

Esther Perel: [00:22:34] Sit and let him react.

Speaker 2: [00:22:36] Yeah.

Esther Perel: [00:22:37] I get it. It's an awful thing. You build this thing, they put a slide up, you're not even in it.

Speaker 2: [00:22:43] Yeah.

Esther Perel: [00:22:44] That's a clear feeling.

Speaker 2: [00:22:45] Yeah.

Esther Perel: [00:22:46] It sucks to be edited out. You feel excluded and hurt. Period.

Speaker 2: [00:22:53] Yeah. Shut up. Let me shut up. [00:23:00] No you shut up. [laughs].

Esther Perel: [00:23:02] I know. I know. It's not shut up. It's, you don't allow yourself to feel it.

Speaker 2: [00:23:06] Yeah.

Esther Perel: [00:23:07] A- and I, it hurts. It feels awful, but by continuing to talk-

Speaker 2: [00:23:13] Yeah, yeah.

Esther Perel: [00:23:13] ... you don't allow yourself to actually think about it.

Speaker 2: [00:23:15] Well, you dilute what you're saying.

Esther Perel: [00:23:16] That's right.

Speaker 2: [00:23:17] Yeah. Yeah.

Esther Perel: [00:23:25] I realized in listening to the session that I actually ended up doing with him what he was doing with his partner. I was trying to help him to actually just li- sit for a moment with, uh, load of emotion that was coming up as he was describing how he had been rendered invincible. But instead of saying, "Just sit with it for a moment, where in your body are you feeling this?" And then just watch the [00:24:00] wave come over him and just say, "Stay with this. Let it come out."

I ended up saying to him, you're not letting yourself feel, rather than helping him to actually feel it, and let the other person see the consequences of his actions. So I missed it.

Speaker 2: [00:24:22] That's, that's the more ...

Esther Perel: [00:24:25] So, the only thing, you return to him and you say, "Do you get it? Do you understand?" We're not solving the business problem at this point.

Speaker 2: [00:24:33] Yeah.

Esther Perel: [00:24:33] So we solve, we're just in this conversation.

Speaker 2: [00:24:36] Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Esther Perel: [00:24:37] Do you understand what I'm saying?

Speaker 2: [00:24:38] Do you understand what I'm saying?

Speaker 4: [00:24:42] Yeah. Yeah. What, like how would you like it to be?

Speaker 2: [00:24:52] That's a very good question. Um, I, I guess I'd like to just put a lot of animosity [00:25:00] behind us. You know, like there's a lot of water on the bridge, I understand that. I want us, I want to feel like you've got my back. [laughs].

Speaker 4: [00:25:20] Yeah. Uh, which I, I to- to- yeah, I totally understand. Um, and for me is about kind of, I guess finding a way back to, you know, the, the first few years in the company and, and how that worked. But part of that is, is around the roles, I, I think. [laughs].

Speaker 2: [00:25:43] Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Speaker 4: [00:25:43] And that's whe- that's where I kind of keep, keep going back to.

Esther Perel: [00:25:47] I listened to him say, "I want you to have my back. I wanna feel that you still care about me. I wanna feel like we're still in this [00:26:00] together." And the other one answers from the place of, "Structurally, I think we need to redefine the roles here in the company."

But emotionally, he kind of he's gone. And this discrepancy, something that I really have witnessed so many times in romantic relationships, when one person is still fighting for the relationship, and the other person basically just came to drop this one off, and said, "See you later. I'm go- I'm on my way out. And it is, basically, the- you can't work on a relationship if one person is gone. You need two people.

Speaker 4: [00:26:44] But, I g- yeah, I get it. Like from a sort of emotionally supportive specter, I definitely can do more.

Speaker 2: [00:26:51] Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Speaker 4: [00:26:52] Um, yeah.

Esther Perel: [00:26:55] Do you think there is validity in what he describes, when he says I feel [00:27:00] undermined, you don't have my back. You translate this as, "He wants me to agree with him."

Speaker 4: [00:27:07] Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Esther Perel: [00:27:08] And so your next thought is, "How can I have his back and not agree with him? It's the only he will feel supported. And if I say, yes, to what he says and I don't agree with it?"

Speaker 4: [00:27:24] Yeah.

Esther Perel: [00:27:27] All right. Speak up.

Speaker 4: [00:27:36] Yeah, I mean, yeah, 'cause I think that, that kind of is, you know, I think for, from a work perspective that, the- I, I do have doubts, you know. [laughs]. I do ... That's, that's kind of where it comes from. I just kind of do sort of

worry about the, the role and what, what you're gonna be [00:28:00] doing and where that's best placed and that, that's where I think, to a certain extent, I don't have your back, [laughs], you know.

Speaker 2: [00:28:05] Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Speaker 4: [00:28:06] Um, from a business perspective. Um, let me see from a, yeah, I want you to be happy. [laughs]. Um, and, I'm, yeah, kind of happy to ... Yeah, I t- I see what you mean. I, I, I sort of say, "Yes. I'm happy to help you get that, but I am kind of saying on my terms, so I do recognize [laughs] that, that's-

Speaker 2: [00:28:30] Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Speaker 4: [00:28:30] ... that's not the right way to do it really. Um, but what, so in terms of kind of supporting but not agreeing, what does that look like? [laughs].

Esther Perel: [00:28:42] I think the first thing you may wanna say to him is, "I don't know how to do it with you."

Speaker 4: [00:28:45] Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Esther Perel: [00:28:45] You know, part of this talk is that, at this point, if you don't agree with him, he can't hear what you say either.

Speaker 4: [00:28:58] Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Esther Perel: [00:28:58] Because he instantly [00:29:00] feels rejected or undermined.

Speaker 4: [00:29:02] Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Esther Perel: [00:29:04] So he's into his wound, he's into being hurt. He's not able to actually hear that maybe there's a different point of view. Everything's muddled.

Speaker 4: [00:29:14] Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Esther Perel: [00:29:15] A thought is a feeling and a feeling is hidden. By the way, if you ever say, "I feel that," what follows is never a feeling. What follows is a thought. The injunction, that, moves us into a thought. And generally it's a thought about what the other person is doing. "I feel hurt," is a feeling. "I feel that you're undermining me," is a statement about him.

Speaker 2: [00:29:48] Yeah. It's just clumsy language.

Esther Perel: [00:29:51] Of new vocabulary that you wanna learn. Somebody in the company is gonna have to do it anyway, because these are normal feelings in the company.

Speaker 4: [00:29:57] Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Esther Perel: [00:29:59] Being hurt, feeling [00:30:00] rejected, feeling excluded, feeling not included. All of these things, you know? Yes. In a polarized system, every person basically ends up defending themselves. And there's a lack of accountability that just says, "What you are describing about me, I didn't do." That said, there is more.

"When you did that. I didn't react in the same way or I totally see that, I, I almost tanked the ship." In this situation, everyone is only referencing half of the story. And it's the other person who then highlights the part that each one is not acknowledging.

That's what happens in a polarized system is that, everyone is actually saying the part that they wished the other one was saying but is not. [00:31:00] Meanwhile, I don't know anything about the slide, but that's hostile. It's aggressive. Is somebody owning that?

Speaker 4: [00:31:12] I mean it wasn't me that put that slides together, but-

Esther Perel: [00:31:18] Yeah.

Speaker 4: [00:31:18] ... I guess I could have ... Well, you, you did bring it up about six months ago and I did create a new slide with a little of us on that and I have a version of it, which I've been sending out to clients, which does have you on it.

Speaker 2: [00:31:29] So that's, so that was-

Speaker 4: [00:31:30] It cut and dry. [laughs].

Speaker 2: [00:31:31] It was just the clearest possible manifestation of something which I've raised in the past. You know, it wa- it's not, it's also not like it was a mistake that happened and it was rectified and, you know, it was fine and dandy. It was a mistake that happened. I raised it and sort of said, "Uh, there was another person in the company. We agreed to fix it."

And then six months later that, it's not been fixed. You know, I'm not saying it's like that is like di- [00:32:00] directly your fault at all. I, but it's just, it's, it's a manifestation of something that's far more that I feel on a basic level, on every single call that we do as a management team. And every single document that gets sent out every single email, you know, sli- slightly overstating it.

But like I just, I- it's just, it's a background feeling that is always there.

Speaker 4: [00:32:23] Wha- what, what, where do you think that comes from?

Speaker 2: [00:32:28] I think it comes from-

Esther Perel: [00:32:30] Good. That was really good.

Speaker 2: [00:32:34] I think it comes from a real desire that this was, it's just your company and that I wasn't part of it.

Speaker 4: [00:32:43] I mean, that's very interesting, [laughs], but kind of that's, and I've never had that feeling. Uh, and I've, I've been in a position where I felt completely like I have no role in, you know, sa- sales, the wind, you know, [00:33:00] in the early years, a lot. You know, you were the guy that had the filmmaking ability. What was I doing? I was just sort of hanging around. [laughs].

Speaker 2: [00:33:07] Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Speaker 4: [00:33:07] Yeah.

Speaker 2: [00:33:08] But I supported you, but I supported you then. Now, the shoe is on the other foot. It's not, even that I'm not getting that support back, I feel like, actively you're using the fact that I, I'm in not quite such a defined role to marginalize me.

Speaker 4: [00:33:31] Yeah. I mean, I understand. [laughs]. Like why you would feel that. My, my kind of response is it's, it's come from, come from a sort of business reason. Like there's sort of ...

Speaker 2: [00:33:45] But I-

Speaker 4: [00:33:45] Yeah.

Speaker 2: [00:33:46] ... but back then I could have gone, "You know what, I don't see the value that you're bringing." You know, you're, like, there's such a discrepancy in the value that we're bringing to the company. Not only was I making the film, I was also new business [00:34:00] director, right? So, I was making all the calls. I, like, you know, to all the agencies, and then group, like blew the company up. Right?

I could at any point then have gone, "What exactly is he doing?" And I didn't, I stood by you. And I, I always made sure that we shared the podium and when we had the challenges in the UK, and you were over here, at board level, across, you know, you used the fact that we had low sales in the UK to completely commandeer the co-control of the board to ostracize me.

And, and, you know, we know like company's going through sales cycles where like sometimes you're up, sometimes you're down. We had a squeeze- sales squeeze last year in New York, which we came through, you know. We had challenges with the office refit. I stood by you. [00:35:00] Like I could've used any of those things as leverage, but I didn't.

Speaker 4: [00:35:03] I get it. I understand the sort of, uh, and that was difficult and it felt very hard at the time. But the, the way the, the UK business was structured at the time was-

Esther Perel: [00:35:18] That's not what he's talking about.

Speaker 4: [00:35:19] I know, I know.

Esther Perel: [00:35:20] So don't-

Speaker 4: [00:35:20] I know, but that, okay-

Esther Perel: [00:35:22] So don't reflect.

Speaker 4: [00:35:22] ... from me, from my point of view, there was a, there was a, a very strong business case to the point why that business nearly folded. And, if I hadn't come in and made those decisions at that, at, at those, at that time, I- probably would have done. And, and it wasn't about some sort of personal power struggle. It was about trying to save the UK business. [laughs]. Um-

Speaker 2: [00:35:46] Yeah. I mean I, you know, over the period from when you left to now, we've left, we let 27 people go in the UK to turn our business around. Right? We had already let a number of people go before that. [00:36:00] We, you know, you came over and basically just said, "Right, we have to do it like right now." Right?

Speaker 4: [00:36:05] I'd waited, I, you know, I'd seen it coming from it anyway. [laughs].

Speaker 2: [00:36:10] But we, but we've had a lot of-

Esther Perel: [00:36:10] If you're going this direction, you will do an interesting comparative studies of the narratives.

Speaker 2: [00:36:16] Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Speaker 4: [00:36:16] Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Esther Perel: [00:36:17] And that's irrelevant. Because you're not busy trying to really understand each other's narratives. When one person keeps repeating the same thing over and over again, it's easy to get frustrated. It's either, can, can you finally that talk about something else? But the fact is that, we repeat because we are still waiting for the other person to actually acknowledge that which we are saying.

So we're holding up the flag. Not just because we are stubborn and, and, and a one note person, but because we are signaling to the other person, "I need to know that you see what I [00:37:00] see before I can move on to the next thing." He's talking about a very particular thing, which is, "Regardless of the cycles of the business, I've always put us first. And I experience you putting the business first basically as a betrayal."

Speaker 4: [00:37:19] Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Esther Perel: [00:37:21] And you're saying, "I value our relationship, but not at the expense of the whole business. And I needed to do certain things, which you still haven't recognized 'cause you're busy with your wounds."

Speaker 4: [00:37:33] I think that's fair. Yeah. [laughs].

Esther Perel: [00:37:37] Yeah?

Speaker 4: [00:37:38] Yeah.

Esther Perel: [00:37:38] All right, let's move there then. Otherwise, you will leave and you'll continue what you're doing. What he needs to know is, "Have you given up on us? Is the business really become more important?" Then we will discuss, it's either he gets a certain role or you get both out, or do you have a partnership agreement or none?

Speaker 4: [00:37:59] No.

Esther Perel: [00:37:59] Nothing.

Speaker 4: [00:38:00] [00:38:00] Probably we should get that one. [laughs].

Speaker 2: [00:38:02] [laughs].

Esther Perel: [00:38:02] And how old were you when you started this whole thing?

Speaker 2: [00:38:04] [crosstalk 00:38:05].

Esther Perel: [00:38:05] Right. So you were the friends, sort of, okay. You know, he's still into that, "You know, you're my friend. You're my buddy, you're my partner. Um, and we do this together, and we waiver and we, we have all the ups and downs together." And you're into the, you know, and the business comes first, and you're in my way basically."

Speaker 4: [00:38:26] Yeah. Yeah. I think that's a fair assessment. Yeah.

Esther Perel: [00:38:33] Yeah. "You're in my way," and he knows it. You wanna make the decisions. You wanna be the CEO. You want to, you know, you're, you're actually no longer talking in partnership terms. And he's in a completely different storyboard.

Speaker 4: [00:38:47] Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah. I mean, I think that is, that is true. And I do that. That is the way I see it. I do, I see it as a business. I've see my responsibility towards the board, [00:39:00] the shareholders, the employees, the clients. I, I don't think the company kind of defines, you know, everything about me as I see it.

As a, as a ... I- it's become this amazing thing, but I, I don't, I don't think it's gonna be the only thing I'll ever do. Um-

Speaker 2: [00:39:17] I hear you. I don't agree with the classi- classification of this difference that I don't care about the company and, and-

Esther Perel: [00:39:27] Of course you don't.

Speaker 2: [00:39:27] ... and I'm not interested in the success of the co- like that ... Oh sorry, that, I put the relationship first. The reason I think the relationship's

important is because without- without the relationship, the company tears itself to pieces. And that's w- and that's why I'm willing to overlook things which, on the face of it seem extremely damaging to the company.

Yeah. You know, I mean, it's not some sort of like, "Oh, you know, this is our amazing, exciting adventure and, you know, we have to stick together and you know, damn the consequences as long as we're together." I- [00:40:00] it's the, the value to the company that we're able to offer, is drastically enhanced when you combine our two skillsets.

Esther Perel: [00:40:19] He no longer thinks that.

Speaker 2: [00:40:21] No.

Esther Perel: [00:40:21] I know you think that, but he no longer thinks that. That's where you actually are parting.

Speaker 4: [00:40:26] Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Speaker 2: [00:40:26] Yeah. And that-

Esther Perel: [00:40:28] And he hasn't thought that for a while, and because of that, you are spinning your wheels.

Speaker 4: [00:40:35] Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Esther Perel: [00:40:37] I am saying it for you because you are not being direct, and, you, you know if you leave here-

Speaker 2: [00:40:44] Yeah, try not to be. Yeah.

Esther Perel: [00:40:45] But you have to be.

Speaker 2: [00:40:46] Yeah, yeah. [laughs].

Esther Perel: [00:40:47] At this point you have to be, out of sheer respect for him.

Speaker 2: [00:40:50] Yeah, no, you're right.

Esther Perel: [00:40:51] Because otherwise you will leave more convinced with what you already came in-

Speaker 2: [00:40:55] Yeah.

Esther Perel: [00:40:56] ... and you're gonna continue do more of what you did in a more blatant way, and it's [00:41:00] hostile.

Speaker 2: [00:41:00] Yeah.

Esther Perel: [00:41:02] Maybe he should continue the company since for you, you know, if you sell cars or if you sell movies, it's not fundamentally different.

Speaker 2: [00:41:09] Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Esther Perel: [00:41:10] You like the selling, you like the structure, like the business piece. And so, you know, who knows whose company it will be or maybe he does take a certain role and or he takes a new division that is not about corporate, or whatever you choose to do. But you first and foremost, it's a terribly painful thing to do it like this, but it's the respectful thing to do.

Speaker 2: [00:41:33] Yeah.

Esther Perel: [00:41:36] And it's why you came.

Speaker 2: [00:41:38] It is. [laughs].

Esther Perel: [00:41:43] Let him do it.

Speaker 2: [00:41:48] Just say that. [laughs].

Esther Perel: [00:41:49] Whatever you're gonna say. I don't know what, but ...

Speaker 4: [00:41:55] Yeah, I mean I think we have had the, we have had the conversation, but it would be useful [00:42:00] to, for both of us to really think about what we want to do and, yeah, and, and what that looks like.

Speaker 2: [00:42:08] Um, I agree. I think if, if, if I may. The reason you've lost so much confidence in me is that, you really struggle almost the point of not seeing the benefits and the things that I've done for the company. You know, w- w- we've got this absolutely thriving culture in the UK, right? That was because, well, in part, I'm, I'm amply supported by the rest of the team.

I may turn the culture around in that business, the number one priority. And we've done [00:43:00] that and it is absolutely thriving, and it's thriving to the point where neither of the founders need to be there. Now, you, you have real difficulty attributing that to anything that I did, but like who else did it. [laughs].

Speaker 4: [00:43:21] Yeah, I do. I mean, yeah, just the sort of value conversation is often on quite intangible things.

Speaker 2: [00:43:28] Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Speaker 4: [00:43:29] Um, and I just, I think, you know, with my sort of business head on that I've, the idea I do find that difficult to, to, to sort of put a, a value on.

Speaker 2: [00:43:39] Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Speaker 4: [00:43:39] Because it's, it's, you know, it's, it's often the stuff that's kind of out there a little bit and yeah ...

Speaker 2: [00:43:46] I guess, it's, you know, the tangib- the tangible aspects of it is, the sales and the profit that we're making in the UK, like that is extremely tangible. I mean, the other thing is, you know, our Brooklyn refit, which you oversaw, [00:44:00]

when ended up costing the last count \$350,000, which, you know, we originally signed off \$80,000 to do that.

Now, that was entirely on your watch. Right?

Speaker 4: [00:44:13] Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Speaker 2: [00:44:15] You know, if we're being completely harsh and, you know, and the business does really come first, there could have been quite different outcome from that.

Speaker 4: [00:44:25] Sure. You know, I'm happy to, like, again, I don't wanna sort of get into the specifics and the context around that, 'cause it's not really about that, but I'm happy to put my case forward and take it to the board. Or, you know, if we can't agree between ourselves and, and ... I know, just, and I'm happy with my response to it. I think. That's the, that's what I mean as in ...

Esther Perel: [00:44:46] But your response is this. I'm not gonna argue with what he says about London. The fact is, I hold him responsible for London.

Speaker 4: [00:44:56] Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Esther Perel: [00:44:57] When he doesn't go well on his side, he's [00:45:00] responsible. When it doesn't go well on my side, there are a lot of other circumstances. Mine is circumstantial, his is personal.

Speaker 4: [00:45:08] It's classic. Yeah.

Esther Perel: [00:45:11] You wanna leave or you wanna part, why do you need to destroy him first as a way to justify, you wish to go. I mean, you're en- entitled to go for whatever reason that you choose. You're entitled to go. Then you'll decide how you wanna divide and part in all of that, but you're entitled to do, to want that. And you don't want him to leave, so you're groping that, that stuff.

Speaker 4: [00:45:42] I guess ...

Esther Perel: [00:45:43] Groping is not the right word. [laughs].

Speaker 4: [00:45:44] [laughs]. Yeah, yeah, sure, sure, sure.

Esther Perel: [00:45:48] Oh, yeah. [laughs].

Speaker 4: [00:45:48] Yeah.

Esther Perel: [00:45:48] [crosstalk 00:45:49] from other relationships.

Speaker 4: [00:45:51] You're grasping. [laughs].

Speaker 2: [00:45:52] [laughs]. Grasping.

Esther Perel: [00:45:52] Grasping. That's actually the right. Go ahead Ted.

Speaker 4: [00:45:59] Yeah, look, [00:46:00] yeah, I recognize that, um, that I can be very difficult in that, in that sense. Um, that's gotta be really hard. Um-

Esther Perel: [00:46:15] You locked, because you have a certain desire for whatever reason, and everything gets measured vis-a-vis that. I mean, if I have a wish for you is that, you would leave with one new thought, but it's not happening. What's happening is a reinforcement of every thought you already have. It brings up culture. Once again, he brings up culture. We've already talked about culture, the humanist culture.

You know, he doesn't say culture, you have to say, of course you had something to do with it, because there probably is something he had to do with it. Maybe not as much as you think, but you're not gonna give him an inch.

Speaker 4: [00:46:57] Right. Yeah, that's fair.

Esther Perel: [00:47:00] [00:47:00] 'Cause you pissed. I don't know why you pissed, but you're pissed. You're in an anti and he knows it. So, he's trying to justify himself. He's trying to prove to you that he's capable of something. And the more he's trying to prove it, the more you think he's pathetic. But you don't realize that you're putting him down the whole time, 'cause you give him nothing.

You know, you're entitled to say, um, "I don't wanna continue together." That's a fair wish.

Speaker 4: [00:47:30] Yeah.

Esther Perel: [00:47:31] But what you're doing is, I- is aggressive. It's hostile.

Speaker 4: [00:47:36] Yeah. Yeah. Um-

Esther Perel: [00:47:39] You know, I had something to do with it. Then you say, "Well, I'm not gonna get into it because, you know, I have a very different understanding of what really actually happened." And you know, there is no value to this and this is, what the hell is this? Because I'm sure that tomorrow you're gonna make a speech at your company about culture, and how important it is. 'Cause everybody does [00:48:00] these days.

Speaker 4: [00:48:00] [laughs].

Speaker 2: [00:48:00] [laughs].

Esther Perel: [00:48:00] So you might consider doing that too.

Speaker 4: [00:48:02] Yeah.

Esther Perel: [00:48:03] But when he brings it up, you think it's woo-woo.

Speaker 4: [00:48:05] Yeah.

Esther Perel: [00:48:05] That's what I mean, woo-woo.

Speaker 4: [00:48:08] No. I don't recognize that.

Esther Perel: [00:48:09] The hardcore, you're the, you know, you're the hard skills, you're the hardcore, you're the number, and but when it's your numbers, then it's circumstantial. And then you say, "I'm happy to bring the board." You know, to do what? Arbitration? Which story is the board gonna believe? Should not have, you know, when you say you lost trust in me or you, it's, it's what's tracking to me more is to watch how you lost trust in you.

Speaker 2: [00:48:38] Yeah.

Esther Perel: [00:48:38] And it's painful to watch.

Speaker 2: [00:48:40] Yeah.

Esther Perel: [00:48:41] But I can only imagine that it's painful to, to experience it.

Speaker 4: [00:48:48] Yeah. You're absolutely correct. You identified, just get in this kind of like mindset of like this is, this is the business, this is how things should be run. This is how we, you know, resolve [00:49:00] problems.

Esther Perel: [00:49:01] But you have a confirmation bias.

Speaker 4: [00:49:02] Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Esther Perel: [00:49:04] Everything you hear or everything he says gets interpreted vis-a-vis-

Speaker 4: [00:49:09] Yeah.

Esther Perel: [00:49:10] ... your main idea.

Speaker 4: [00:49:12] Yeah.

Esther Perel: [00:49:14] It's like you never change perspective. Or like it gets more and more rigid.

Speaker 4: [00:49:19] Yeah, no, yeah. For sure.

Esther Perel: [00:49:21] Okay. You're stuck.

Speaker 4: [00:49:23] Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah. Yeah. [laughs].

Esther Perel: [00:49:26] With that you're stuck.

Speaker 4: [00:49:27] Yeah.

Esther Perel: [00:49:30] At the end of the session there was no master game plan of how they were going to proceed henceforward. But so much had been said that they had been avoiding for four years. From the acknowledgement publicly about the

difference between one holding the business and one holding the relationship, to, either- neither one of them being able to [00:50:00] actually acknowledge anything that the other one is saying about them.

And therefore being stuck in highly differentiated and entrenched narratives, to blaming the other for the specific mistakes, and blaming circumstances for their own mistakes. And so, while I said, "I wished you had left with something," and I'm not sure we're living with anything new, I'm not so sure that they did leave with anything new.

Speaker 1: [00:50:36] 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 estherperel.com/howswork. *How's Work* is produced by Magnificent Noise for Gimlet and Esther Perel Productions.

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