

## How's Work? with Esther Perel

### Season 1: Ep. 8 - The Boss, The Client, and The Hairdresser

**Esther:** 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.

**Hairdresser 2:** I gotta be honest. I chose this job because there was really nothing for me to do and I just thought, if I can go to the school, it's nine months long. I like to look pretty. I'll be able to wear whatever I want, but I don't want to get close with all these random people. It stresses me out.

**Esther:** Well, hairdressers may come armed with a pair of scissors or a blow dryer. Their real talent lies in how they manage their relationship with the clients. What they do is way beyond cuts and color. In fact, the business they're really in is the business of people. I read a line by a celebrity. Stanley's named Nick. It said something like this, as she snips perilously close to the face as a new shape and style reveals itself, and as one begins to feel more beautiful and uncommonly close, friendship emerges often for a lifetime. And how this relationship materializes is something of a curiosity. Like a bar stool or a psychiatrist's couch. The hairdresser's chair prompts people to pour out their hearts.

I just, I feel continually undermined. The child has always been that place where I've been needed in. I've still important

**Hairdresser 1:** a lot of the people that work for me are like an extension of my family.

**Esther:** There's no doubt that your emotional and relational diary comes with you

**Hairdresser 1:** to work. Okay. Imagine going to work

**Esther:** every day in a very busy place, and no one will make eye contact with you.

**Hairdresser 1:** I mean, it feels like a breakup.

**Esther:** It doesn't feel

so, how's work? How many years are you in the business?

**Hairdresser 1:** Oh gosh, 21

**Esther:** and you

**Hairdresser 2:** 14

**Esther:** okay, so we're not talking about beginners here, right?

No experienced women

**Hairdresser 2:** most of my career. I'm just trying to figure out a way to like get away from it.

**Hairdresser 1:** But she's always trying to do a different career. She's like, not really a hairdresser. That's what she always said.

**Hairdresser 2:** I just want stability and consistency in my life and um, you know, I mean, that's the job. There's a lot of things I want to do in life, but really on paper, that's what I can do. To make money, you know? Um, so now, yeah, I have, uh, I have my first full time job and six years.

**Esther:** Okay. And how is it going so slow?

**Hairdresser 2:** I mean, it's going fine, but I've had a lot of fear of people,

**Esther:** which people,

**Hairdresser 1:** my

**Hairdresser 2:** bosses and coworkers, if I'm not like, one of the things with our industry is it, that's different than a lot of jobs is. It's sales basically. And if you're not busy, there's no like office to go in and shut the door and you're just like out in a room with people. So for me, like when I haven't been busy, the financial insecurity is triggered. And then also like thinking I'm not good enough. So I've

**Esther:** just that many minutes of not busy though.

**Hairdresser 2:** Sometimes it can be hours at a time,

**Esther:** but how many minutes before you trigger it?

**Hairdresser 2:** It's more like when I have to sit around for anything more than an hour, I, I start to panic.

**Esther:** When you panic, what happens?

**Hairdresser 2:** I start thinking everyone's against me and they don't think that my work is good enough and that I'm actually not busy because they don't want to give me clients.

**Hairdresser 1:** Then I

**Hairdresser 2:** go and ruminate down everything wrong, have done in my career to be in the

**Esther:** situation.

**Hairdresser 2:** And then I mean, because I'm in recovery 12 step, I now I go out and I like call someone from the program and try to reset because once I start having all those thoughts about why I'm not busy and what's going to happen in my life and everything's going to fall to pieces, I'll, if I'm not like. Using the tools of recovery and

like cognitive behavioral tools, I will start trying to control the situation and it has never worked in my favor. It's manipulation as well. Lots of manipulation

**Esther:** as in trying to endear yourself

**Hairdresser 2:** that and trying to get on the managers. Um.

**Esther:** Favorite list.

**Hairdresser 2:** Favorite list. Yeah. Um, and try to like get them to give me more people or even to throw other people under the bus so I'll get more people.

**Esther:** So when I, when, if I hear you, when you get into panic. In the past, you tried to get other people to get you out of the panic. Yeah. Primarily by endearing yourself and telling them how busirable you feel and please help me and make me feel better at any cost. And today you're able to tackle your own negative self talk, reach out, but not as save me, but as help me help myself. Yeah.

**Hairdresser 2:** Yeah. Basically, I mean, I'm,

**Hairdresser 1:** I'm

**Hairdresser 2:** feeling good about it that I've used those tools, but I wish I didn't have to deal with the feelings of all this. It's like very painful for me

**Esther:** and daily sometimes.

**Hairdresser 2:** Last week it was like every day, like starting around, I think it was like Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday, and then the Friday, it was so bad. I felt like I was going to have a panic attack. Because

**Esther:** ultimately she wouldn't have the people you reach out to.

**Hairdresser 1:** Yeah.

**Hairdresser 2:** She's one of my biggest,

**Hairdresser 1:** um,

**Hairdresser 2:** been one of the most supportive people in my life, you know, ever. And she knows like what I'm talking about. So there's that,

**Hairdresser 1:** you know.

**Esther:** As I listened to her talk about how insecure she feels, how if she's not instantly busy, it becomes a marker of her self worth about her anxiety and her panic about her sense that she's being judged and evaluated on a constant basis and how she evaluates herself on a constant basis from there to asking about her family is just a millimeter away. What's the echo chamber between your family history and your

fears at work? Sometimes I think that our relationship with our siblings is also a predecessor to our relationship with our coworkers.

**Hairdresser 2:** Well, yeah, cause like my brother got all the attention compared to me. Um, my parents, he just had more in common with them. So yeah, I think what I realized at my job about a weekend is that no matter where I go, I'm always trying to make sure

**Hairdresser 1:** that I am

**Hairdresser 2:** going to get taken care of. And I think that someone else is going to get more like security than me because my brother did. It's a new awareness, like they would just ignore me while I played with my toys, but then they would be like doing tee ball and all that stuff with him, and they always would be like, why can't you just be more like your brother? He knows when to shut his mouth. I mean, my mom told me. Ever since you were born, you were a problem. You came out screaming and crying and you drove me crazy and your brother was an angel.

**Esther:** What an amazing, welcoming ceremony.

**Hairdresser 2:** So I've been hearing that like my whole life.

**Esther:** I mean, I'm being facetious, but this is, you're seeing it with half a smile, but.

**Hairdresser 2:** I'm just so used to it. So I think at work, like if I see someone else get another appointment

**Esther:** than me,

**Hairdresser 2:** I'm like, of course nobody fucking cares about me and they're only going to care about this person.

**Esther:** Sometimes we get our most powerful resources from our family as well. Even from. Painful experiences in our families. She's immediately honest and she's able to connect the dots and she sees that she has been competing with her brother all along, and now she's competing with her coworkers, and that is an eerie resemblance between the relationship we have sometimes with our siblings and with our coworkers. Anywhere she goes, she immediately makes sure that she's being noticed, but the strategies that we develop in our childhood. In order to adapt it to survive, sometimes become worn out. And so what I'm also noticing is that she's constantly living as if she's in survival mode, even when there is really no need for it. And it is probably one of the most important tasks when we become adults is to realize which one of our adaptation skills is still important and useful and which ones have actually become very counterproductive. And so I want to bring both of them into this conversation now. What else. Some of the resources that they have, they wouldn't be successful otherwise. There's something from their experience as a child that they use in the way that they connect with their clients. What would you see as some of the significant resources that you draw? I'm going to make it more specific to

significant resources that you bring to work and that, you know, find their roots. And your family history?

**Hairdresser 1:** Just that the kind of the tenacity, like the stick to it, witness. I, I think both my, you know, it's, it's funny, I don't often think of the things they've done.

**Esther:** You never think of it in a positive term. You see, because you think of the legacy in the way that it hurts you, it, but it's more complex than the . It's a fract, you know, and the strengths that you have come often from the same place as the troubles that you have.

**Hairdresser 1:** Yeah. You know what, while you guys were talking, I thought, you know, my father

as

**Esther:** he did so beautifully and you thought about a lot of things at the same time, so,

**Hairdresser 1:** yeah. Thank you. Um, I think my. You know, grow as a child. My father didn't pay a lot of attention to me because he was working so much, and then we'd come home. He loved to go into the basement and he was a grateful dead head. He loves his music. That's like where he went. So his presence wasn't that there in my life, whereas my mother was like kind of all over me in a lot of ways. But I remember when I just started in our industry and I was 21 and I got this. Celebrity hair salon job as an assistant. And I remember coming home with like a pile of tips, like in the envelopes and like dumping them on a kitchen table and like he lit up like it was like he was paying attention to me. Something about me actually ignited his attention, which I was not used to. And you would

**Esther:** experience of. It's was,

**Hairdresser 1:** I mean, I just wanted more of that. Which I think has, you know, contributed to the drive I have, but my drive has been also like a detriment at times.

**Esther:** Does it create, do you feel that you are continuously in a competitive environment or that there is also solidarity?

**Hairdresser 1:** I think the place I'm at now. Is the best of the places I've been. And it's interesting because it's, it's almost like the top level of talent that I've worked with. I think a lot of that has to do with me because a lot of it is in my own mind. Like a lot of it is me. I'm the one setting the competition. You know, when you come into work, everybody's looking at everybody's like, schedules. Just to see how many clients you're having. It's just like a, it's just a thing that you do. And if I have a lot of clients, my worth is up here, and if I don't have a lot of clients that day, I go into the toilet.

**Esther:** And so what can you just do to make to alleviate that when you see it's the best place I've been at

**Hairdresser 1:** what I mean, I think the owner of the place I work sets the tone too, so she's. Super successful, you know, a faint, very celebrated, uh, hair color is, but she's humble. And so the younger generation, they're kind of models her like after her. So there just isn't a whole lot of ego. Whereas when I came into the business in the 90s I mean, it was so full of ego and . Everybody's, you know, it was very cut throat. So I think a lot of it has to do with the, the leader, like I think that sets the tone. And then the other really positive thing is that, um, people ask for help at this place, which I've never seen in any other place. Like if I had a question about hair color, you would just never like, whereas here it's more of a team effort. And so you have like. You know, I mean, I know for me, I want to know what the kids are doing because that's, that's what keeps it fresh and alive.

**Esther:** Does that change your interstate or is your interstate active on its own on its own respective of the environment in which you're in?

**Hairdresser 1:** Um, I think, I think now my interstate. Has improved enough to where, um, I'm matching my environment. I feel like a lot of the time the places I worked were a reflection of my interstate. So, um, some of the worst times in my life, it was like I would inevitably be working for somebody who would abuse me to the extent that I was abusive or critical of myself. And, um, and then I worked. And other. Oh, yeah. Um, well, I guess I would say again, like when, when I was in like the throws of my addiction and you know, eating disorder, like very self-destructive, my first job was assisting this colorist who would just like, shame and humiliate me and criticize me, and you know, nothing was good enough and you'll never be a colorist. And. You know, women will never be as successful. It was just like every, you know, every harsh and mean thing that you could say, you know, body shame, shame my outfits. Like, like everything. Like he would just tear me to pieces, but looking back, that was really a match to what was going on with me. Like that's. Definitely. It was my own inner dialogue. He would say all the things I already believe to be true about myself. It was just, you know, reflected in his treatment

**Esther:** of Ben was she talks, right? Like she's lesser rating. Yeah.

**Hairdresser 2:** Well, I, I'm just so sick of like that like attraction. Like I just, cause right now I'm working so hard on like. Really having high self worth. And I think

**Esther:** that,

**Hairdresser 2:** yeah, and I think it's like the best it's been, but I'm just like, so I get like really afraid with the law of attraction stuff that

**Esther:** if I think like something,

**Hairdresser 2:** you know, negative, that it's going to like happen on the outside, you know? But I guess like, I don't want like, you know. Bad stuff to happen because I'm feeling that on the inside. Does that make sense?

**Hairdresser 1:** Yeah,

**Hairdresser 2:** but it didn't make a lot last week. I think that's

**Hairdresser 1:** crazy.

**Esther:** Well, you're practicing, you're practicing that if you have a week would have less income. That doesn't necessarily translate instantly into you're a lesser person

**Hairdresser 2:** because that's what it is for me a lot. It's like. If I've got money like coming in,

**Esther:** stop you one second because I just noticed something here. You were talking and you were reacting to it. She was saying, so I just wanted you to voice it. Then you began talking about you again and you used today

**Hairdresser 1:** it's a word

**Esther:** to having someone take over and say, you think you have it bad? Let me tell you, and you just retreat it.

**Hairdresser 1:** Yeah. I didn't, I didn't notice that. Now you do. I mean I get a, it's hard cause I have like a mentor type of relationship with her,

**Esther:** but I'm going to something different because she, she literally took it back and took it over to her and you received it.

chameleons to you?

**Hairdresser 1:** I mean, I would, I would say so actually in the workplace, I could see where that type of thing happens and it makes me think of like the, this bigger, this, this hindrance that in my career I've had with like being seen or being visible in spite of having. A lot of like talent and skill at what I do, where I grew up, when I got attention and I did when I was like a teenager and people started to notice me and I, you know, I actually was like, was physically attacked for that, for like the things that were positive about me, even though it's a little different than what we're talking about, but, but it's just something where I will. Shut it down, I'll dim down.

**Esther:** And what about home priests sets you up for this? Receding you recede. So you do two things at the same time, right? On the one hand, your receipt, and then on the other hand you watch to see who gets more .

**Hairdresser 1:** That's true. That's definitely true. Who at home. I think probably like my father, I would re like received more because I was afraid of him, his disapproval, because I got so little from him to begin with, so I think any more disapproval from him or any sense of disappointing him, I I think I would. You know, I would, that would dim me down.

**Esther:** She thinks that it changes the way you work with a female boss or a male bones.

**Hairdresser 1:** Yeah, I mean, that's definitely an interesting question. Um, this is actually part of the theme and why this is all very interesting to me, like with authority figures, how I do turn them into parents. Um, so yeah, I mean, with men, sometimes I feel like. It's like a sexualized piece where I turned myself into an object. And then I feel like with sometimes male bosses, I feel like I have to kind of use that angle. Even though I don't do anything, I, I just feel like I put that foot forward a little. Um,

**Esther:** explain to me, um, can mean a lot of

**Hairdresser 1:** things being coy or. Even acting childlike sometimes, like if I need to get my need met, I can be like, like a little girl. And then they think I'm cute and then they, you know, and it's not, um, yeah, it's kind of a newer

**Esther:** tops is a cute little girl and uses the Dems and in distress

**Hairdresser 2:** 100%.

**Hairdresser 1:** Yeah.

**Hairdresser 2:** I always have to be like needing

**Esther:** help very early into this conversation. It becomes clear to me that is a two seasoned professional hairstylist. Women who while they talk about their fears, their insecurities, and their challenges with their sense of self worth, they are also talking about their competitiveness, their singular mindedness, and the way that they each try the age old. Seduction tactics that women have engaged with forever when seeking power, recognition, affirmation, and attention. So these strategies are primarily with men bosses. The

**Hairdresser 2:** needing the help. I only do that with guys

**Esther:** and the Coys cute.

**Hairdresser 1:** Yeah.

**Esther:** Girl. Daddy helped me.

**Hairdresser 1:** Yeah. Or just like, you know, just using look like appearance to get approval or, um,

**Esther:** attention engine and we'd women bosses. What's the strategy? Avoid. I've

**Hairdresser 1:** either had like

**Hairdresser 2:** a void.

**Hairdresser 1:** Defiant teenager. I've had that one at a couple of jobs because ultimately I'm afraid of authority figures. You know, I feel like threatened, even when there is no threat. I sense a threat. Um, uh, like rejection, abandonment or, um, meant like humiliation or just being shamed. Cause I think with my, at least particularly with my mother, and I actually know you can relate to this, like having

somebody who really gives you a lot of like adoration and, Oh, you're so amazing and you're this and you're that. And then like it switches and then it's like you're a piece of shit and you're fucking, you know. Failure. And how come you're not as good as this one and how come this one gets a hundred and you didn't get up and you got a 95 like so. And I feel like I've had employers like that, you know, you know over, not, not anymore because I think I've done enough interior work on myself that I just don't, I don't, that's not my experience anymore. But for years, that was my experience with like. Boss is saying even very similar things that my own mother would say,

**Esther:** and di growing up was about finding different buses or putting limits.

**Hairdresser 1:** Hmm. Oh, I always found a new boss.

**Esther:** If you learned to put limits,

**Hairdresser 1:** um, I'm learning. It's, yeah, that's a great question. I, it's, yeah. It's been really hard because I'll. I've instead more like, how do I exit the situation? Or I, or I just get so, um,

outraged about the situation, similar to how I felt with my mother that, yeah, I just

**Esther:** what the, what

**Hairdresser 1:** the voice of the outrage. Um. Fuck you for not valuing me for not seeing me, for not supporting me and now, yeah. You know, now you have to deal with the, the consequences of that like of my leaving,

**Esther:** but we declined. How do you do it? Cause I assume sometimes you hits client. We haven't talked about it.

**Hairdresser 1:** It's totally different with a client.

**Esther:** Who do you become with the client?

**Hairdresser 1:** The

**Esther:** basically you're telling me there is me with the, burst me with the pool workers and meet with the client.

**Hairdresser 1:** Yeah. And it's all very different. And the, with the client, I'm like the over giver, the, I mean, people pleaser beyond like, and I'm in a job that it kind of is about pleasing people to an extent. But, um. Over nurturing, like over just over giving. Um, what is a lot of fear of like abandonment or rejection and humiliation again,

**Esther:** so you give what you resent, the fact that you've given so much power to them, you had jelly to give him. Oh, you feel like of giving just as a deterrence strategy?

**Hairdresser 1:** I think if

**Esther:** feels so, I don't have to feel afraid that,

**Hairdresser 1:** yeah, I think that's what it is. Yeah. It's like just, it's definitely very fear based that I'll lose them. You know?

**Esther:** Even though it's notorious that people are loyal to their stylist board and many, many other businesses.

**Hairdresser 1:** Yeah. Yeah. No, and I have, I have so many clients for like

**Esther:** lifetime.

**Hairdresser 1:** Yeah. A lifetime. But I can't see that. Like, I'll, I'll focus on. The one at a 10 that was unhappy that day. And I'll obsess and I'll ruminate and I'm like, there was an experience I had seven years ago where I had made a move. I moved this, I moved salons and, and I had like five of my clients reacted really strongly like, I hate it here. What do you. Why did you come here like such a, you know, so like strong. And these were like, the clients were like my mom's age who were like my, who were like, they were like moms to me, you know? Or I made them that way. Like I just never expected that switch. And I went into such. Like a panic, like that was so disproportionate to the situation.

**Esther:** What is the trauma legacy of this?

**Hairdresser 1:** Uh huh. I mean, I just think with my, mostly with my mother, like emotionally and psychologically, you know, she was not, she was very, uh, unstable that way. And like she, it would be very loving one moment and then another would just be totally like cutting me down and. Hysteria and panic. She was very like, you know, undisciplined emotionally. So seeing somebody in that state just brings up such a sense of fear, but also a responsibility, um, that it's my fault, but that it's also my job to fix it. And I definitely have brought that into my work with clients. Where like their emotional upsets suddenly becomes my responsibility and it's too big for me and I never like, it's like walking on eggshells like, am I good right now or am I not good right now?

**Esther:** And there's an Omnipod really sure that what I do is going to change their mood.

**Hairdresser 1:** Right.

**Esther:** Even though I have to. But their mood has just switched.

**Hairdresser 1:** Yes.

**Esther:** And flipped, irrespective of what I do.

**Hairdresser 1:** Yes. You know, we're, all, our coworkers are like, who cares? That bitch is crazy. Who cares? And I'm like. No sleep for a weekend. Total obsession.

**Esther:** And have you learned the tools? Have you learned some tools to regulate, you say yes to, to literally to deal first of all with the body because your body's holding.

**Hairdresser 1:** Yeah. Um, so many, yeah. Like a lot of breathing. I,

**Esther:** and you can do it in the moment.

**Hairdresser 1:** I can now do it in a moment. It's relatively new that I can regulate myself. Um, you know, some art, I still have room to grow there, but, um, I, I don't go, I don't go that low anymore. So, you know,

**Esther:** you do sleep during the weekend.

**Hairdresser 1:** Now I sleep. I do not lose sleep over a client for the most, yeah, for the most part there. And actually there was a client who, it wasn't really because it's something I did, but. I referred her to get a haircut cause I do color and I referred her to get a haircut and she wasn't happy with the cut and she like freaked out, like put her hands on me. She's like, I thought you said it was going to be here, meaning like color. But she like touched me and it like really, I froze, which is like the first response. And then I had like. I had like a couple of bad days, but then I bounce back. Whereas I think something like that in the past, also because she did it in front of people, that scenario of being publicly humiliated would have, you know, but I, there was a something more solid in me where I realized that like, Oh, this has nothing to do with me. Like I didn't, I just didn't take any of it on. Yeah. So that was definitely a

**Esther:** success. That's when you know,

**Hairdresser 1:** yeah, things are changing. They're changing. Yeah. See your breathing, meditating, yoga. Just, I tried to do a bunch of things like that to, you know,

**Esther:** there are periods did more than that. Here. You simply also said, this is not home. Another child would know this is a client who is not happy with her cut. and I am not responsible. . I can care, but I am not responsible. Right. I mean, you, you stayed in the here and now it's more that when you're triggered, you're not just remembering, you're reliving,

**Hairdresser 1:** right. Yeah. Yeah. No, I was definitely, once you're in my body and this,

**Esther:** you are not, when you froze, you were we living.

**Hairdresser 1:** Yeah.

**Esther:** But once you were able to. Bridge itself out. The it, you were in the human. Now you are now, right. The Rhodes,

**Hairdresser 1:** right.

**Esther:** How old is she?

**Hairdresser 1:** Uh, who are the, the girl, the girl,

**Esther:** the girl that freezes.

**Hairdresser 1:** I think like, yeah, I always think of her around like between 10 and 12, because that's when I first started displaying like OCD, behave like control, you know, just behaviors to control. My. Sense of chaos.

**Esther:** a child that grows up with a parent who goes back and forth between loving and aggressive and violent between hugging and slapping is a child who, as she describes, becomes sometimes. Intensely responsible for thinking that they created the interstate of the other parent, or that it's their responsibility to change their mood and they experienced a sense of dread about it and a deeper sense of responsibility for it. She experiences that with her clients as we discuss. The need to establish a boundary to put a limit. The limit is not insane to the other person. Don't talk to me this way. The limit is also to understand where the other one stops in, where she starts so that she can be kind or respectful or firm or decisive without feeling that the life of the other is her own basically, or the inner life of the other is her own. And she's doing that by learning all kinds of strategies for self-regulation, through breathing, through yoga to meditation. But these strategies give her the space that is needed to Dennis stablish the boundary. That is really the determining factor, the boundary that says, this is where I stop and this is where you start. And therefore, if you did that were upset about your haircut, that doesn't make me stay awake for the whole week.

And most of your clients, women.

**Hairdresser 1:** Yes.

**Esther:** And do you ever see a kind of an irony that you went into a place, finish the sentence?

**Hairdresser 1:** Well, yeah. Oh gosh. With so many, it's a practice that

**Esther:** is the continuation of your childhood.

**Hairdresser 1:** Yeah,

**Esther:** right. Pleasing. When the pleasing

**Hairdresser 1:** or sometimes emotionally, you know, not, yeah, just erratic I guess.

**Esther:** But you don't just please them. They also let you get close to them. cause you one of the few professions that people can still touch someone.

**Hairdresser 1:** Oh yeah.

**Esther:** Hmm. And not have to fear instant

**Hairdresser 1:** repercussions. Right.

**Esther:** So you get to have a closeness, a physical closeness. You get to touch, you get to put your hand in their hair, which is one of the most early experiences any baby ever has. Universally, you get to wash their hair, which is one of our most primary experiences. So it's, it's very intimate. It's very physical. It's very proximate. So you get to come close to the women. You're not just busy pleasing them. You also get to have a closeness you never had. Right.

**Hairdresser 1:** Yeah. And that's the part I do love. That's the

**Hairdresser 2:** part I hate

**Esther:** too much

**Hairdresser 2:** responsibility.

**Esther:** Meaning, I don't know, like

**Hairdresser 2:** when you were saying all that stuff to her, I just,

I don't like touching these people really, and dealing with all their bullshit. I, if they're nice, then it's like a lot better,

**Hairdresser 1:** you know?

**Hairdresser 2:** And they mostly are, but I just, I gotta be honest. Like I. I chose this job because I was like really out of control and I was so young and I just, there was really nothing for me to do. And I just thought, if I can go to the school, it's nine months long. I like to look pretty. I'll be able to wear whatever I want. It was, you know? But. Yeah. Like it's so stressful for me dealing with these people. Just hearing you talk about that, I was like, Oh my God, I don't want to go to work after this. Like, you know, I'm so serious. Like,

**Hairdresser 1:** um,

**Hairdresser 2:** and then the guys, since I cut hair, like I deal with the men, you know, I like having relationships with people, but I don't like, like multiple hours of my day. I'm like on the judgment block. At something like this. I'm just taking orders from people all day.

**Esther:** I don't want

**Hairdresser 2:** this piece like this like movie right here, like it's so I get like angry. Even thinking about it, like I used to want to be famous career, all that stuff, and now

it's like, I just want to like meet the right guy and get a cute dog and maybe move out of the city.

**Esther:** You

**Hairdresser 2:** know, but I guess like, I don't trust that it will happen or something.

**Hairdresser 1:** Like, can I say something? I mean, I, yeah, like I think

**Esther:** more than something

**Hairdresser 1:** like, because I know you well, I know it's like a defense and, and that I see that that's the stories. Well, I don't really, I hate these clients anyway, and I don't really want to do this anyway. You know, as a way to like avoid

**Esther:** can someone not like something without it, meaning you're not good enough.

**Hairdresser 1:** I'm just

**Hairdresser 2:** afraid of getting like fire.

No.

**Esther:** You're afraid of being homeless or just fight. You're afraid of being destitute. You're afraid of remaining nothing. It's a complete dissent. It's not just, I got a client and they didn't like the cut. They didn't like the cut and I'm not good enough and I'm not good enough and I'm going to be fired and I'm going to be fired and I'm going to be penny. Listen, I'm going to be penny. Listen, I'm going to be homeless. Yeah. And their only defense against it is to say, I like these people because if I don't like him, then I diminish the power that they have over their ability to destroy me. And in an interesting way, it's like you're not in relationship with them. It's everything that they can do to you. It's not a mutual relationship. You actually really think about them. You only think about what they do to your sense of cells, how they can elevate you across you and how you resent the power that they have over you, which of course you hand them in all in their head or in your head, but there is very little, there's no other person when you talk about them, they're not real people. They're all standards for your family. You know,

**Hairdresser 2:** make it stop. Please

**Esther:** understand what I'm saying. They're not real people. I have no sense of these people as human beings who they are, what they had this morning, why they came to get a haircut because they just lost somebody or because they just got fired or because they just realized that their partner had been cheating on them or because whatever. There's no sense that these other people have an inner life. The only one with an inner life is you. They like standings of trigger points. They like acupuncture, but in the negative sense, but how,

**Hairdresser 2:** how did you, I'm so afraid of something bad happening to me like

**Esther:** I am. What I'm suggesting to you is that you will, you may be less afraid if you actually made these people more. Three dimensional if you began to see them as people with an inner life, with the psychology, with the complexity, with circumstances, with the story. Otherwise, they are just triggers for your story.

if you humanize them, they would shrink to size. They wouldn't all be this ominous demonic powers. Imagine you go today and when somebody sits down and they're new, you approached them with curiosity. I come to you, I've never met. I have no idea where you are. It doesn't matter. And I just say somebody recommended because that's probably how I got to you. I'm no less scared than you are, but when you meet me, you think only you are scared. You don't have a clue that I may be worried or that I'm nervous, or that I once had a bad experience or that I have so much hope because I don't feel good about me that you would make me feel better about me because you're going to beautify me. I mean I to come with the whole story to you.

And you say we are new to each other. What's it like for you when you meet a new hairdresser or stylist? You ask that question to the person. That's the curiosity question. What have been some of the cuts you've really liked.

Do you want to guide me? Do you want me to, you know, do you have any idea of what you want? You know, in a way, the two to two minute conversation between what do you want? Do you know? Can you express what you want? Can you articulate it? It is one of the most beautiful rituals of consents. in two minutes, we are establishing an entire contract between strangers at that moment. Mmm.

**Hairdresser 2:** Where it really goes wrong for me is like I just I think that people like aren't going to like

**Esther:** it and I'm suggesting something to listen to me carefully because you're talking about you and I am trying to move the needle over to them to really be curious about them. Not to project on them. They don't exist in real terms. These people, they just exist as figments of your frightening imagination. Hmm. I want you to be actually curious about the person sitting and giving herself over to your magical hands. And I want you to think about that person, not about what she's going to do to you, if she's going to affirm you or destroy you, but about who she or he is at the level that is necessary.

it's curiosity that we ground you in reality. can you imagine this. Yes. Take a deep breath.

**Hairdresser 2:** I feel taken though much anxiety from thinking about all this. I have like a headache

**Esther:** than stay with the breath for a moment. Yeah. Just stay with the breath. I don't talk. Okay. I don't talk. I just said a lot that to take it.

And sometimes the minute you put your hands in their hair, they start talking. They confide in you. You know, I always think it's either this couch, the bar stool, or the hairstylists chair. That's where the stories get told. But

**Hairdresser 2:** what about the people that just like aren't nice?

**Hairdresser 1:** Like can we

**Hairdresser 2:** cause there there's a lot of them and they sit down and the first thing they'd say is, how long is this going to take? Cause I need to leave in like 25 minutes and it's already something that would. Be ridiculous to think that it would take that long because it would be longer 45 and then as soon as you start working, they tell you they don't like that. And then they say, where did you work before this?

**Hairdresser 1:** And

**Hairdresser 2:** they literally want to make you feel bad. It's not every day necessarily, but you know,

**Hairdresser 1:** it's, it's helped me to see that. When there is a difficult client, it's not a unique experience, personal to me that it happens to everybody. So I, I, including like my boss, who again is like, uh, you know, world renowned, you know, person in the industry and to see that she has unhappy clients too. And this one has a redo two and this one has the, you know, and it doesn't break them and it just takes it. Off of me is like, Oh, this thing that's happening to me because I suck because I'm not good enough. And all this pressure and beautiful, you know? That has helped me navigate a difficult client because inevitably everybody has one and then you just abuse. Yeah,

**Hairdresser 2:** it's useful. And I mean, I know logically and from experience, the more calm you are and just like easygoing, then you kind of can like diffuse it. You know? If you're defensive, it just makes it worse.

**Esther:** Interestingly, do, we talked about clients and you went directly to the, what about the main ones? . They're not the majority. No, but that's the one. But they're the ones who want to hone in on. I'm just, I'm happy to help you with them, by the way. But it's a, it's like part of what will change your experience of the world is that you resist going to those as the first ones, and as the only ones that matter, like the one in 10 that you just spoke about before.

**Hairdresser 1:** Right.

**Esther:** You know. Can you imagine that the one that sits in the chair and says, I only have 20 minutes, um, isn't only being mean, but may have, maybe in the midst of a big problem themselves. And curiosity would say, you're having a tough day.

**Hairdresser 1:** True. It's so true. That's when I was able to make that switch off of myself and onto them. It totally alleviated a lot of that pressure. Like, Oh, you know, Oh, where are you going? You have to be what time you have to be out. Like when

they're all like, I gotta get outta here. Oh, what do you have going on? Just light in it. I just try to lighten it, realizing that they're anxious. How can I alleviate their anxiety this way? It's about them and not me.

**Esther:** That's good. Wait, you said, Hey said,

**Hairdresser 1:** yeah, it helps definitely.

**Esther:** as a bestselling author, speaker, and host of the podcast, where should we begin to learn more about . World to sign up for her newsletter or to apply to the on the podcast, go to dot com slash how's work, how's work is produced by magnificent noise for Gimlet and per L productions. Our production staff includes Eric Newsom, evil wold, Trover, destri Sibley, Alex Louis, Kristen Mueller, and our coordinating producer. Is Lindsay Retasky. Our recording engineer is Noriko Okabe and Damon Whitmore is our mix engineer. The theme song was written by Doug Slaven and the executive producers of housework are Esther corral and Jesse Baker. We would also like to thank Nazneen Rafsanjani, Matt Lieber, Darien LA beach, Courtney Hamilton, Kelly Rose, Nick oxen horn, Dr.

Guy winch, Paul Schneider. Thomas Curry, Shawnee opera, um, and Jack Saul.