

ADAM: So Esther I was hoping you would bring a couch.

ESTHER: So that you could lay down?

ADAM: Yeah. Are we not doing therapy tonight?

ESTHER: Where should we begin?

ADAM: I feel like you should probably tell me, but we're not doing therapy.

ESTHER: We may do therapeutic maneuvers.

ADAM: Okay, good. Cause I feel like, I feel like I could use some. I'm excited to have this conversation because every time I've heard you talk about romantic relationships, I find myself substituting in work relationships and thinking that a lot of the wisdom applies. /

I am going to [00:00:30] start by asking you a question, which is, when you thought about transitioning from kind of the romantic world to the work world, uh, what did you see as the big similarities and differences in how you look at relationships.

ESTHER: So it's interesting. I don't experience myself as transitioning. I as a therapist, have worked for years with people who have work issues and certainly with family businesses. So it's just that the podcast has transitioned. however, I look at relational systems and [00:01:00] relationships exist within a context, a cultural, political, socioeconomic context.

Relationships have expectations. All relationships do. All relationships have boundaries. All relationships, if they are strong, have a foundational truth around trust. All relationships demand responsibility, and accountability, communication, creativity. So what changes is the context where I explore the dynamics.

And here I moved to work. I [00:01:30] looked at what are these invisible forces that people bring with them to work and that shape relationships around conflict, communication, connection. And it's the context that changes. Not the thinking about relationships.

you're

ADAM: saying we don't become fundamentally different human beings when we go to work.

ESTHER: Oh, you still believe that?

ADAM: I don't! I just want to confirm that you agree with me.

ESTHER: Of course. I think this is a very interesting thing. This notion that you bring, you know that there is [00:02:00] two views, right? There's the view that says you don't bring your life to work. And I say, what else do you come with? You know, we all have a resume that is the official resume, and we all have our relational dowry that is the unofficial resume, and it all comes with you. You know, and it shapes how you, what expectations you have, how you collaborate, how you ask for help, how you compete, you name it. But then, you know, um, keep going.

ADAM: Were you going to stay more?

ESTHER: I can say it afterwards.

ADAM: All right. So one of the things I've [00:02:30] been thinking a lot about is power dynamics in relationships.

And I remember reading a really fascinating analysis of power. I think it was by Emerson, who argued that relationships were more stable if there was a slight power imbalance. Because if you knew which person had a little bit more authority or more influence, then the structure was stable. It was consistent.

It was predictable. Whereas if people had equal power, they were constantly jockeying for position and it wasn't clear where anyone should stand. And it seems like that [00:03:00] dynamic is more common in romantic relationships than it is in professional relationships because at work we have hierarchies, right? We know who the boss is.

We often know, if not, who has power in a team, who has more status or who has more accomplishments as really curious to hear how you'd think about this.

ESTHER: So we can have an interesting chat about power. But, um.

ADAM: Are you going to have to save that for later too? Or--

ESTHER: No, that I can. Uh, but I, I, it's so interesting. What you're [00:03:30] highlighting is the kind of the tension that comes, you know, from this dynamic tension that comes from the difference in the discrepancy.

I look at power a little bit differently. I would put it like this, there is no relationship that doesn't have a power dimension. It's intrinsic to relationships. It's not good or bad, it's just part of the fabric of relationships. Because in relationships people have expectations and when you have expectations, it comes with a degree of dependency, reliance, [00:04:00] and that dependency confers to the people on whom you depend.

Power by definition, and that power gets neutralized by making, it becomes something that is benevolent, which we then call trust. So that it will become power too, rather than power over. But everybody understands that power isn't just the vertical axis that comes with authority. Anybody who's ever had a two year old knows that.

I mean this idea that power is just a matter of authority and hierarchy. That's one. [00:04:30] But you can have power that comes from the bottom up. You can have power. That is the power that constantly kind of deflects the energy. The power that takes the authority away from the people in authority. That is also power. It is actually multifaceted and intrinsic to relationship.

And the question that you wanted to ask is, is this power helping the system thrive. Do what it needs to do, the relationship, whatever the relationship is, or is this power that [00:05:00] becomes oppressive, abused, and which means a breach of trust.

ADAM: So there's something--.

ESTHER: Do you agree with the notion that trust is intrinsic? Trust itself? It's like it's intrinsic to relationships.

ADAM: Of course. I would definitely not argue with that. There's something that's a little odd though, about defining power in terms of dependence. So that there is a strong sociological tradition of, of saying, look, the power in a relationship is how much do I depend on you? Or how much do you depend on me?

In an [00:05:30] organization though that would suggest that the CEO is the least powerful person because the CEO is completely dependent on everyone else to do their jobs or else the organization fails. And yet that's not how we traditionally look at power. I think

We

ESTHER: look traditionally wrong.

ADAM: We might be, but are you saying the CEO is the most powerless person?

ESTHER: No, I don't think it's this or that. I think the CEO has both and.

ADAM: You always have these paradoxes and they drive me crazy cause I want answers, but we're going to- -wait, wait, wait. But

ESTHER: you want to simplify and I want to [00:06:00] hold complexity, but it's a different, that's the difference between a clinical psychologist and an organizational psychologist.

ADAM: I thought that was the difference between Americans and Europeans, but.

ESTHER: As well! As well.

ADAM: You're, you're right. And I wanna I want to become less of a simplifier. So let me, let me try to complicate and say, when I think about power from a psychological perspective, I think about it also in terms of influence. Which is about control over resources. So one of the reasons that a CEO is powerful is the CEO has control over [00:06:30] resources that lots of people at lower levels of the organization value and want. And so yeah, I would say the CEO is dependent in some ways, but that the resource control net outweighs the dependencies. And so the CEO is still powerful. When you think about these--.

ESTHER: But when the people don't perform, if the people decide to go on strike, if the people under produce don't. If the people decide to undermine the grand project, doesn't that give them power?

ADAM: It can. Sure. The CEO though also can take power back by [00:07:00] saying, I'm going to fire those people or I'm going to stop paying those people. I'm going to replace those people. Right. And so these dynamics get very complicated. Where, where do you draw the line on who has more power in total? Or do you not care? Are you willing to take the multiple layers.

ESTHER: No. I think that I always look at who has power in this matter?

ADAM: Okay, good. So who do you think has more power in our relationship here?

ESTHER: Right now?

ADAM: Or just in general? I don't know. I'm curious.

ESTHER: At this moment between the two of us. It alternates.

ADAM: How so?

[00:07:30] **ESTHER:** You know? It's like we had this conversation. You think ping-pong. I think billiards. Right? So ping-pong is this dyadic thing where you try to surprise and to, to make, you know. Billiard is about, you know, this ball has to go in the hole and which is the one that I need to keep for that one to go. And that means that you have to be able to think multi-perspective rather than.

I think when I think about power. I look at the interdependence of parts [00:08:00] and on some things I say power for what? And is it power to or power over? And is it power that actually, you know. I'll give you one of the, I'm switching mid-sentence, but--

ADAM: You're also dodging my question.

ESTHER: No, because listen to this. It's a, it was a moment like you all have, you have moments like that too. That's like a paradigmatic shift, right? I'm in training. This is many years back, but it stayed with me like, like the vista opened up. And I was working with [00:08:30] families with depression. And at one point my teacher says, the depressed has all the power. And I thought, this is a moment where you stop because I'm thinking you're anadonic.

You feel powerless. You feel hopeless, you feel helpless. You, you have no energy. You have no sense of meaning, no purpose. It's a how can that person have the power? And then they said, because that person through their impotence is actually activating the competence of [00:09:00] everybody else who is trying to lift them, to whom they end up saying no to everything they suggest to them.

And in the end, the competent people feel as defeated and deflated as the depressed one. That is power. That was a moment for me where I began to think, this is way more complicated than what it looks like. What you see isn't necessarily what it is. And so that's how I look at power. I look at the way that, you know, an eyebrow.

You know. If one of us was talking and the other one just kind of had that moment that [00:09:30] says dismissed. We just this, that's power

that makes you instantly feel like, you know, irrelevant you, you know, you pushed aside.

ADAM: I suddenly feel very conscious of my eyebrows. Don't, don't look at me.

ESTHER: No, I think, I think

ADAM: that's--.You

ESTHER: understand what I'm saying? It's in the small things like this. What the power of somebody is the power to make you feel that you matter. We are creatures of meaning. It's the power to make you feel like you're irrelevant. And I think that who has the power is often that. You [00:10:00] know, and that can be performed by the one who pretends to care less.

ADAM: Hmm. So I want to come back to the question that I asked.

ESTHER: That you have more to lose than me. That those kind of games, I mean, power games are fascinating. Fascinating.

ADAM: I think so too. So I'm asking you this question about our power dynamic in part because I think it's a lens into understanding how you think about power. So when you say power shifts back and forth in this conversation, how do you see it shifting?

[00:10:30] **ESTHER:** So I, I think I am trying to gripe, group, gripe, group? To reach for, I'm trying to reach for. You know, places where I think, do you agree with me? Do you see what I'm saying? Can you build on what I'm saying? And then sometimes I think that you have an approach of, 'I agree with this, I disagree with that.'

You know, and to me it's like, Oh, is it a debate or is it the conversation? And, but I know you are enough now to know I want to conversation. but [00:11:00] because I, I think when it goes into agree, disagree, I start to. You know, if you disagree five times, then I'm going to want to prove myself to you. And then I feel that you have, you know, I want to approval.

I prove myself to someone too, from whom I want you to approve it. And that means that you have power, right? It's not bad. It just is so. So I think that's the thing that I am still testing at this moment is are we going to have debate or conversation? Are we building on each other?

ADAM: I don't know, which do you think is [00:11:30] better?

ESTHER: Which do you think is better people?

ADAM: I'm trying to empower you to shape the conversation, the direction you want to go. No, I, think that part of the reason that I sometimes default to debate is I think we sometimes learn new things when our assumptions are tested and questioned. And so the idea that you can say something and that I can disagree with it and decide that I was wrong, is to me a signal of learning.

Right. on the other hand, I think that one of the things I love about having a conversation with you every time we do it. Is I come away with, with [00:12:00] new lenses for understanding things. They're not necessarily, correcting misconceptions or, you know, changing a belief I had, but they're giving me a new ways of thinking about the topics that I care about. And I love that. So my hope is we're going to do that tonight. I think we have a have a little bit

ESTHER: talk with you is you force me to go for rigor because I am case-based rather than evidence-based.

My research is different. I can go and look at the psychological research on a lot of things, but that's not the reality in which I exist. So when you see the research says, [00:12:30] then I think I should go do some research.

ADAM: And did

You.

ESTHER: Yes. I went yesterday and I read a chunk of research on trust.

ADAM: and I listened to one of your therapy sessions. So we've each become a little bit more like the other, so what, what did you learn about trust?

ESTHER: This was really interesting because, I mean, I can say a lot of things as how I think about trust, but when I went to look at research, what it fundamentally said is that there is an [00:13:00] absolute definitional void. It is one of those concepts that is swimming in vagueness. /

There is a view that reinforces the notion that trust is a psychological state in which you express the willingness to be vulnerable. You know, based on positive expectations with others. Then there is a view that

looks at trust as process rather than state, and it looks at trusting processes like intentions, expectations, behaviors, thoughts, et cetera.

But in the end. [00:13:30] You know, there is no agreement. / The most complex psychological experiences, subjective experiences, actually are very hard to define.

So that said, you know, I continue to look at other things that people who said things that I found really interesting, and when I can't come up with research, I go to philosophers and poets who have a different way of trying to grapple with the unexplainable. So Adam Phillips, this wonderful English psychoanalysis starts to [00:14:00] talk about how trust is a risk masquerading as a promise. Thought that was very beautiful. Then he said, trust is a word that we often put too much trust in

ADAM: that that sentence is self-defeating. But

ESTHER: Then Rachel Botsman, talked about how trust is an active or confident engagement with the unknown. By definition, trust is a leap of faith. Therefore, if you think transparency leads to trust.

Probably not always sometimes, but at other times, transparency leads to [00:14:30] surveillance. Surveillance is the opposite of trust. Trust is when you live with. What you don't know. If you always have to know, you're not trusting.

ADAM: This was such a surprise to me when, when Rachel captured this, I thought I had always thought of transparency as a driver of trust. Right? So if you want somebody to have positive expectations about your behavior, if you want them to be comfortable being vulnerable with you, then you shouldn't hide anything from them.

And then Rachel said, wait a minute, if you trust me, you don't need to know what I'm hiding And Oh that that is a big frame [00:15:00] shift.

ESTHER: I looked at it developmentally, I tried to apply it, you know, and I thought of it actually.

Where does this concept come from? And I don't know where she rooted it, but for me it was, you know, around eight months, the kid takes a little object and they drop it. And for the first time they realize that this object continues to exist even when they don't see it.

And then there is that game where they pick it up They throw it Then pick it up.

They throw it and they develop this thing called object constancy. [00:15:30] Object constancy then leads to people constancy and it's peekaboo. Peekaboo means that even when I don't see you, you're still there and even though you're not seeing me, I'm still there and it becomes the foundation against the fear of abandonment.

It is the foundation of trust. You will exist inside of me when you're not there, and I exist inside of you when I am not there, and therefore I don't need to check on you because I can trust you. I know you will come back, et cetera, et cetera. And I think the developmental roots of that [00:16:00] idea that she presents a very strong.

ADAM: Well, I, as a quick aside, I know now next time someone asks me about you, I'm going to say a Esther Perel can even make a game of peekaboo psychologically interesting, which, which is not an easy task.

ESTHER: It is the universal game that every kid plays. Actually, I'd say though, it's really across the globe, that notion, but it really anchors you.

I mean, that to me is the beginning of trust.

ADAM: Well. So when I think about taking this into the workplace, then one of the things that jumps to mind is I got a [00:16:30] really interesting query from a reporter a couple of weeks ago who said, what do you think about organizations that have practices of requiring open calendars?

And I immediately thought of this, this particular. I guess revelation for me where I would would've said in the past. Yeah, of course everyone should have their calendars open. No one should need to hide what they're doing. And to me, that's, that's a symbol of low trust, potentially, right? That if, if I need to know that I can access what everyone else is doing at every moment, then I'm not very confident that they're going to do what they've committed to doing.

[00:17:00] **ESTHER:** It's called authoritarianism

ADAM: it might be.

ESTHER: And that's what happens in regimes where people spied on everybody, you know, it's transparency, it's surveillance. It's really not

just that I have nothing to hide kind of thing. It's you're entitled to privacy. The point is exactly that. While you're not there, I know you're doing your job. While I am gone. I know you're not rolling me under the bus. You have my back. We are in this together. We share meanings, expectations, and we predict that we are there for each other.

[00:17:30] That's the foundational truth of trust, and I don't see that coming up because I know your agenda.

ADAM: There's also a power component of

ESTHER: Do you agree?

ADAM: You, wait, you're now trying to get us into agree, disagree.

ESTHER: No.

ADAM: I'm trying to complicate things and learn here, Esther. Come on.

ESTHER: No, but I mean, do you think that transparency. ~~That if~~ that, this idea that I have nothing to hide, you know. When somebody says to me, I have nothing to hide, does that, that doesn't elicit trust inside of me. Actually, I am sorry. Actually, I say, why are you saying this to me? [00:18:00] If you're saying this, you must have something.

ADAM: Yeah, it sounds a little bit like projection bias gone wrong. I, I agree with that. For the record. I also think there's a power dynamic here that's, that's really intriguing, which is when, when I'm making my calendar transparent, I'm trying to, to assert that my schedule has been determined. Right? You can take a look at it. And you can go and claim time on it if you want on my terms. and that feels like a little bit of a power move. What do you think?

ESTHER: From you?

ADAM: Yeah, yeah. That I'm basically saying, look, you know, [00:18:30] my, I'm more important than you are. so here, here's my calendar. Pick what, what's convenient for you. But what's convenient for you is already predetermined by what's convenient for me. Which is why I hate whenever someone sends me a calendar link and says, sign up on it.

ESTHER: Because?

ADAM: Because I feel like, particularly if the person is asking me for time or asking for my help or advice, I feel like they should probably

accommodate my schedule and my convenience as opposed to, I'm going to impose on you and it's time that is most inconvenient for you

ESTHER: Can you help [00:19:00] me on this moment?

ADAM: Yes. Ideally today or tomorrow. Yeah. So I was, I was thinking about something, go ahead. Yeah, please.

ESTHER: Because if we're going to define trust, I think what's really important is to talk about how we build trust, what we do with breaches of trust, and can we rebuild trust once it's broken?

Because I do think that, At a time when people lived in more in more traditional structures in societies, [00:19:30] and you kind of. There's always been breaches of trust. That's, it's not like this is a new story, but when things are clearer and you have clear expectations and you know the hierarchy and you know, what is the role of the father, the mother, the children, the bosses, you know, the big brother versus the younger brother, the one who entered the family business before the other, etc.

You could create a set of expectations that be where what you're going to trust for what . In [00:20:00] this moment where things are much more fluid and diffuse and we need to define all of that trust has become a major centerpiece. You know, there's a lot of restlessness in the realm of relationships at this moment at work as well. And as a lot of what to do when people experience breaches of trust. As happened definitely after the me too thing.

And. It shakes the whole foundation because all your expectations are now up for grabs. Was I [00:20:30] write about you? Did I completely misunderstand who I thought I was for you? Did I completely read wrong what this partnership was actually about? And, and you, you, you have nothing to hold on to because the relationship.

So now comes the question, how do we build it? How do we rebuild it, and what is the impact of the breach of trust, which today becomes almost a loss of identity. I thought I knew what I am here and who we are together here, and I said that about romantic [00:21:00] relationships, but I have experienced it with the partners in the business. No less.

Yeah. So

ADAM: let's start on the repair side in some way. In some cases it's harder, but I think the, the dynamics are sometimes a little bit simpler. So my reader research on trust repair says that, number one, an apology seems to be less important than an expression of responsibility. you know, saying, I'm sorry, showing that I feel remorse. is nice emotionally.

It doesn't convince you necessarily that I accept the harm that I've done to you and also that I'm going to [00:21:30] change my behavior moving forward. And so I always look for someone to say, look, you know, whether I, whether I, I feel that what I did was wrong, I recognize that I hurt you. I take responsibility for that.

And now I'm also gonna take responsibility for adjusting in the following ways to make sure it doesn't happen again. and that to me feels like the foundation of trust repair. What do you think is missing from that equation?

ESTHER: I think the first part is very much the way I like to think of it as well. It's the acknowledgement of the wrongdoing of the [00:22:00] hurt, even if you think you were legitimate and justified in what you do.

I actually think that breaches of trust are part of relationships. Relationships is connection, disconnection, reconnection. It's harmony, disharmony, repair. It's not, it's not a problem. It's in the nature of relationships that you're going to do breaches. Betrayal is a different story, and I think that betrayal lives in the shadow of trust all the time, but so the first thing is the acknowledgement, and it involves an element of remorse or guilt [00:22:30] sometimes for what you've done to the other person, not necessarily for your own action.

The second one, what you call about responsibility in the rebuilding, I call it the vigilante. It's like you show the benevolence. That the relationship matters to you because a breach of trust. I'm obsessed to the other person, not just that they've lost power, but they've lost value. You don't matter.

Therefore, I put my interest ahead of yours. I do the thing that suits me. It basically is the message of devaluation of the other person. So that Beneful and thing that you [00:23:00] talk about is crucial. I would say the thing I like to add is the need to create new experiences. You know. what happens when people have been shaken is that they don't go back to the state of naiivite that they had before.

That leap of faith in which they existed. They do enter what [unintelligible] often calls the secondary naivete. You trust with your eyes open and you wait. You just don't. Do like this anymore and think everything is fine because, and, and that [00:23:30] demands new experiences, generative experiences that will create new layers of cells that are going to sit on the ones that really need to die and evacuate.

ADAM: How is that different from trust, but verify.

ESTHER: Just the same. No trust to trust with your eyes open means that you, but, but the, but it's not trust and suspect and be suspicious the whole time. You know, if you are in this cortisol level, high cortisol levels of constant checking, checking, check, you're not trusting, you know, I can have all your codes, [00:24:00] all your, it's the same in relationship. When people say, give me all your passwords, give me who trusts on that. You do surveillance, but the surveillance doesn't breed trust.

ADAM: I like to get my passwords in case I forget them, but maybe a different dynamic

ESTHER: To whom is the question.

ADAM: To my wife mostly. yeah, I think, I think that that tracks for me. I'm, I'm, I'm curious then about the, the, the more basic question of building trust and how do you think about that. Rachel also changing my thinking about this. She, she said to me one day [00:24:30] that you can't build trust. You have to earn trust. And I was, I was annoyed by that actually because it took the power to build trust out of my hands, right? That this is not something I can gain. It's regardless of what I do, you have the choice then to either grant me trust or deny it, and that made me feel like I lack control over building the kind of relationships that I want to build. And so I wonder if you could help me get out of that trap.

ESTHER: This is a perfect example because you, [00:25:00] because you can't make me trust you, You think you have no power. When in fact you have all the power to do the things that you can do, which hopefully will make me trust.

ADAM: But now I have probabilistic power instead of certain power, which has less power

ESTHER: Who has certain power? I mean, where'd you get that idea?

ADAM: Too many comic books growing up.

ESTHER: Yes, but that is developmental. It's good for latency boys at age nine I [00:25:30] mean, these things can. Can be taken away. I mean, every powerful guy he has has had experiences where they thought they had it all and then you know, it can instantly disappear. I think that the opposite. I mean, you can do a lot of things to earn my trust, but I think the earning is the problem.

The piece that I am more not so clear about is, is trust the feeling? It's trusted dimension in a relationship. Is trust something that you can elicit? Is trust something [00:26:00] that you confer? You know, I think it's all a combination of a number of these things and that's where it's not so clear. Is it the thought? Is it something that gets tested? For example, a big debate in the trust research is, you know, do you need to trust and feel safe in order to be able to take risks. That's one body of research, or is it the or is it the fact that you take risks that grants you a greater sense of trust, but you first have to go into the unknown to then establish the trust.

ADAM: I can answer that one. [00:26:30] Yes.

ESTHER: The second one?

ADAM: No, no, no. It's both. It's It's a cycle.

ESTHER: I agree. I think--.

ADAM: Here you are agreeing again.

ESTHER: Because you're going complex.

ADAM: So wait. If I say something complicating, you're more

No, likely

ESTHER: when you do both-and it's not that it's complicated, it's that it's both-and because I frankly don't think that one can prove that it is this versus that.

I think you know that. It is a feedback loop. The more safe you feel, the more the more risk you take, but [00:27:00] also the more risk you take and the more trusting you can be.

ADAM: Sure. But as, as an experimentalist, I can ask, okay, which is the more important starting condition, and if you have a chicken and the egg choice, do you want to, do you want to start with trust leading

the risk-taking or is the effect stronger in reverse? Right? I can design those experiments and try to adjudicate it.

Would it convince you,

ESTHER: Yeah. But I think developmentally in those moments, right. Because I think that, one of the best places to go look at how these things get layered is to look at child development. So [00:27:30] child development, the kid sits on your lap and if all goes well, they are secure.

They are nested, they are safe, they trust. And it is from that place that they jump into the world and they go and they go to explore and to discover and take risks and do their thing. Then they turn around and they ascertain if you're still there and if the base is safe, they do turn around and they go further and they are experiencing security and risk at the same time.

And that is the developmental dance? I think so. I don't know [00:28:00] which one. Maybe with some, you know, I have two boys. And actually it's an interesting example of this I remember I have one. First he would go, then he would fall. Then he would figure out what to do in order not to fall. The other one would sit, study, everybody else falling, and then when he understood what not to do, then he would go and I just thought, this is for life.

One is the risk taker. One is the risk manager

and both element In both they'll create experiences of trust and risk.

ADAM: Yeah. [00:28:30] No, I think that's interesting. I guess what I'm stuck on is you. You didn't like my expectation that I could have the power to build trust, but I think what,

ESTHER: I think

ADAM: it's it's

ESTHER: beautiful.

ADAM: Well, you definitely didn't describe it that way when you made fun of me for liking comic books.

ESTHER: No, but it's a wish too, to think that you can, that you can create the response of the other person. What you can do is what you can do. It's your part and then, yes. This [00:29:00] moment where you

wait to see if what you put in is going to create the thing you get back. That is the vulnerability moment.

ADAM: Yeah. And I don't, I don't like you can't control so you don't like I don't like it at all and I don't like it in part because--.

ESTHER: I think it's beautiful.

ADAM: I think it's sickening. I like to avoid it as much as possible. But I say that because I think most of us have a dominant trait. Which is the trait where we're either the most extreme or the trait that's most central to defining us. And I've noticed over the last few years when both kind of, I guess reflecting and reading personality research that my dominant trait is conscientiousness.

Um, I am a goal oriented person and that means I will bend and stretch all my other traits in service of achieving my goals / [00:29:30] I hate the fact that unlike, you know, writing the best book I can write or preparing as hard as I can to give a talk that's gonna resonate with people when it comes to achieving a goal of building a great relationship with someone. I don't have the same level of control over, over attaining that goal than I do the more individual goals that I direct myself to. And it makes me want to deprioritize relationships because I don't know if I'll succeed.

ESTHER: I get it. I totally--.

ADAM: I have never had that thought before. But is this what [00:30:00] happens in your therapy sessions?

ESTHER: Yes.

ADAM: So now what? What do, what do I do?

ESTHER: If you were in a session with me for a moment, I would say it for the moment you do nothing. You just had a new thought. Sit with it. / So when you realize that, that that in a way you go for the things that you can pretty much have more agency about from the beginning to the end. I sit with that [00:30:30] and even me, I have nothing to say. I just take it in. I say, wow, that's a moment.

ADAM: Okay, how long do I have to sit?

ESTHER: You know what it is. You sit, you suddenly say, and then I watch to see. And generally what happens is that this, the moment that people swallow. You know, it's the quiver here. It's a moment. It is that

vulnerability moment, but it is a moment of insight and change. And then from there, whatever happens, you know what either already disappears and it just was a thought. Either it becomes the ground of a new [00:31:00] enterprise in personal or, or otherwise.

ADAM: Okay. So

ESTHER: You know, then of course, you can go home and you can say to your wife or to your partner, you know, I had the thought, I had the conversation with this woman there with her accent, and you know.
/

And you know, as I was thinking, and I realized that. Then she would say, it took you so long or something. You know? And / look, either one values this, you know, it [00:31:30] doesn't have a monetary value necessarily. It has an existential value. I happen to think that those things matter.

I also think, you know / like why is the relationship conversation so important at this point? You know, and I think you can have a great job. You can have purpose, you can have a good salary and you can have free food, but nothing will compensate for a poisonous relationship in the workplace with whom you go to bed every night fretting about somebody who is sleeping perfectly fine.

[00:32:00] And that eats people up and that I have done for decades in my practice. It's just that I had people come to my office rather than me go to their office.

ADAM: Well, the the worst case is when the person is sleeping fine because they know you're fretting, which is.

ESTHER: That's sadistic.

ADAM: But one of the things I'm thinking about as I sit with this thought is since I first started studying psychology in college, whenever I take values assessments, I come out with that with two core values at the top.

one is helping other people, and the other [00:32:30] is achieving excellence. And I, I was surprised at first that relationships came lower because clearly helping others is such a relational dynamic. And I'm suddenly realizing that helping has been my solution to this problem is to say, okay, if my stance on relationships is I want to be helpful, then I can still know whether my goal has been achieved or not.

Whereas if the goal is just to build the relationship or to earn trust, it's, it's never clear whether I've made progress and I don't know whether I'm using my time. Well, so what, what would you suggest doing with that?

ESTHER: When, [00:33:00] you--.

ADAM: I'm trying to get a solution here. I really am.

ESTHER: No, but look, helping is a lot of things, right? Helping, helping makes you feel rich. I mean rich internally. Helping is the most powerful antidepressant doing for others. Helping, you know, generosity brings joy. Helping is indeed other people need me. I will never be alone. They come to me and protected. Helping is a state in which I don't have to be dependent on others cause I make others be [00:33:30] dependent on me. Helping has a lot of aspects to it, which one it is for?

You see, this is where it becomes different. I don't look for systematization. Which I think what organizational psychology has to do because you need to aggregate groups of people. I am on the other side of that where I'm more looking at what is the individual resonance of this thing?

You know, what is, what is helping for you? What you feel when you give only you can tell me. If it is a defense against something else, only, you can tell me. If on some level it protects you from other states that you experienced as more vulnerable, only you can tell me. It's like the answer that you're trying to find from me is in you.

ADAM: Well that, that is definitely not helpful. So we need [00:35:30] to work, we need to work on your giving, but no, no, I think, no, I think, I think that's right. And I, I respect and accept the fact that you're forcing me to do that. I would still prefer if you told me the answer, but, I, I understand the impulse not to.

ESTHER: No, but it's not just as in pushing it back on you, do you seriously think that I know the meaning of giving for you. No. So it would be presumptuous for me to just throw out a bunch of stuff. I have ideas, but we would be discussing them together and thing.

And then I would ask you, what do you think [00:36:00] about that? Does that resonate for you? Is that, you know. and I, I think that's a different conversation. The, the solution. I mean, that / There's nothing

to solve here unless you tell me I want to change it, but that's not what you're telling me. Then there is nothing to solve.

ADAM: Okay. Then my work is done. Good. / So this, this goes to a dynamic that I wanted to talk about. You wrote a really interesting article recently on being a people pleaser / So Esther, is it, is it fair to say that I am more agreeable, more of a people pleaser than you?

[00:36:30] **ESTHER:** Yes. Yes, yes. Yes.

ADAM: Why do you say that?

ESTHER: Cause I don't think of myself as a people pleaser.

ADAM: Okay. I don't, I don't think of you as one either, which is why I was so pleasantly.

ESTHER: That we have to define what we, what goes in the word people pleaser, right? / I mean, this people pleaser is a history of life. It's not something you become one day. It's the way you learned to maintain your attachments. /

People pleaser is when you have learned that unless you fulfill the conditions, [00:37:00] the people who need to take care of you won't be doing it in the way that they should. People pleaser is a fear, you know of, not what happens when you please. But what happens, you know, how attuned you have become at what displeasure can mean for others. And therefore it's an avoidance of conflict.

And therefore I can say yes to you and to you and to you. Everybody I've said yes to. And then everybody at the end resents me because I have not been able to fulfill the yes's to all the people you know. And. And [00:37:30] in the end, I know what everybody else thinks, feels and wants, and I have no clue what goes on inside of me. Because I'm organized by this threat and dread.

ADAM: It like you know me very well. / Yeah. I mean, when I, when I think about when, when I would describe myself as a people pleaser. / I think of a few things. One is, is prioritizing other people's feelings, above your own priorities and needs consistently. Yeah. Not, not in a, in one situation, but habitually. I think about, [00:38:00] uh,

ESTHER: In order to avoid--.

ADAM: Conflict, which is the, the next thing, right?

ESTHER: And

ADAM: the

ESTHER: conflict stems from--.

ADAM: I--. This a, is this a test?

ESTHER: No, no. It's really. What am I avoiding. I'm avoiding the wrath of others.

ADAM: Yeah. No, that's exactly right. I don't want to, yeah. As, as the kid who was always afraid of being called to the principal's office. That's a, that's a very much the, the dread. I think the, the non-confrontational stance also though, is not just, uh, a fear of incurring the wrath of others. It's also a fear of [00:38:30] damaging the relationship. And, thinking about, okay, if I can just make this person happy in the moment, then maybe the relationship won't be broken as a result now.

ESTHER: But that means that you are the one who carries the anxiety over the loss of the relationship. As if you're the only one who cares about that relationship. And that's not, you know, that is also back to the power thing. You know? It's like, why is one person living the threat of loss here? And where is the other one, you know?

ADAM: Yeah. [00:39:00] So I guess on that, I feel like as a recovering people pleaser, I've, I've tried to overcome some of these tendencies. Some of that came from, uh, being trained as a negotiator and then teaching negotiation. Some of that came from learning to do conflict mediation. A lot of it has come from, just ending up with an accumulating number of requests where I just can't say no to all of them anymore.

ESTHER: And what about that it came with the notion that I can say no, and you can be frustrated with that. And those two [00:39:30] shall co-exist.

ADAM: Yeah.

ESTHER: It's that thing that people find impossible to hold. It's, how do I say no, and you know, but what if the other person doesn't like it? They're entitled not to like it. And those two will live together. That doesn't mean the relationship will dissolve because of it. That's the fear

that people live. It's irrational fear, you know? ~~And that's why I say it's a young fear.~~

They've, because the way it gets rationalized is people say it's just not important enough for me. It's not worth the conversation. It's not worth getting into it. It's all these rationalizations that kind of say it [00:40:00] doesn't really matter. But meanwhile, at every step of the game you're foregoing you because you literally experienced that the relationship only continues if the other people are pleased with you.

ADAM: Yeah. Which is a pretty sad state of affairs, if that's what it takes to maintain a relationship.

ESTHER: How did you learn to tolerate conflict, tension,

ADAM: I, I think it started probably in, in relationships where I felt like there was a secure base. That I didn't have to [00:40:30] question whether, you know, if I, if I hurt the person's feelings or I said something that might be a little bit challenging, that it wouldn't damage the relationship because the relationship was either so strong, or they were secure enough in their own ego that they weren't going to have, you know, they weren't gonna be insulted by it. I think I probably over-corrected on that at some point though, and decided that anytime I have a relationship with someone, of course they will know that when I'm challenging them, it's because I want to help them. And I've discovered of late that there are moments when I have not made that clear and I've [00:41:00] regretted that. I think though that.

ESTHER: What could you

ADAM: I've

ESTHER: said differently? Or done differently.

ADAM: Oh, I mean, I think it's a simple thing to, to start out. It's, you know, it's fundamentally about just establishing that tough love is the way you help. So what I would have done, I think about a situation I had recently with a student, I was advising.

one of the first things I could have done is to say, look, when I was in grad school, one of the best things that a mentor did for me was tear apart the first 37 pages of the paper I had spent my whole year on. And then tell me there's a gem on page 38. And that tough [00:41:30] love changed the trajectory of my career, and I made a commitment at that point to pay it forward.

And so when I tell you what I'm about to tell you, I do it out of, you know what I hope is some version of long term kindness. That I care about your future success enough that I'm willing to, you know, potentially hurt your feelings in the present. And I've, I think I've just taken for granted that people know that's true.

ESTHER: You know, I was raised like that. This was pretty much, much more of a cultural norm.

ADAM: This explains a lot.

ESTHER: Growing up. I mean, [00:42:00] it's like we were not praised as much / and you had to learn the distinction between 'this is not good' versus 'you are not good.' And it was a, it was not an easy thing to learn.

ADAM: That that is the fundamental distinction in psychology between guilt and shame.

ESTHER: Yes. Correct, correct, but it is very much the educational model of the large majority of the world. Actually.

ADAM: So I've noticed that one of the, maybe the manifestations of this upbringing for you [00:42:30] is you are not at all shy about asking other people for help. I think you're much bolder about it than I typically am. And I was curious about whether this is related to that dynamic. Are you, are you unafraid of, of the rejection?

ESTHER: I would see it like this. A, it is absolutely true. I ask for help a lot. I offer help a lot. and. I have no fear when I ask for help. I think if you can, you can. If you can't, I completely understand it. and I, [00:43:00] my husband Jack will often say, it's like I am, it's amazing sometimes what I dare to ask, but I figure that the people will say to me when it's--.

ADAM: How dare you?

ESTHER: No, nobody says it like that, but--.

ADAM: No. That's cause we're all more agreeable than you. Yeah.

ESTHER: Or people are so shocked that somebody would dare to ask such a thing--.

ADAM: They're speechless.

ESTHER: But, but I, I think that the foundation of that is two different things and it's actually quite serious. The first thing is, [00:43:30] I fundamentally understand that they depend on others. I also fundamentally know that my family's background, shaped me very much about that.

So I mean, the short nut of it is that my two parents are the sole survivors of five years in concentration camps. They lost their entire family, and boy did they never think that they survived on their own. So this notion of self-made never existed for us. You are never self-made.

You are made by the luck and the [00:44:00] presence of everything else in the moment. I think that's where my notion of the both-and and the multiplicity of things is so woven into the way I look at things and I live with that. I completely believe in a communal structure and I depend on a lot of people for a lot of things. For me, for my kids, for my team, for, you know, I, I. I'm constantly networking before the word ever existed.

And so is my life. I knew share economy before the term was invented. And I think that's where the asking for help [00:44:30] comes from. But the same is true in reverse. You can ask me for stuff. I don't blink. It's like, of course, if I can, I will. It's help. I love to feel important. I love to feel like I can give something, you know, and, and facilitate something. It gives me tremendous joy.

ADAM: I think what's so interesting about how courageous you are in asking is that empower, it empowers the people you know to ask because, yeah, cause I know, I know that you will never be offended by a request. Because you think that part of a relationship is people should be able to ask anything they want of each other and [00:45:00] they should also have the freedom to refuse if they think it's not appropriate or not possible. Which is, which is very helpful for those of us who struggle to ask for help.

ESTHER: That is true. That is true. I think. / You know, there's a question I love to ask in the workspace that I used to ask in a very different way when they used to do cross cultural work, but it has become suddenly really relevant. Were you raised for autonomy or were you raised for loyalty?

Think for a moment, people were you raised with the [00:45:30] primary messages around relationships that said you have yourself to rely on. In the end, it's all about you. Nobody's ever going to help you as well as

you can help yourself. Ontologically in a way you are alone in this world, you know? And how do you think that influences the way that you organize your relationships around you, your concepts of give and take. Your concept of asking for help of who you can have, what you can ask from whom and et cetera. Expectations. And the loyalty thing is, you know, the messages [00:46:00] really say you're never alone. There's, you all a lot of things to a lot of people. And a lot of people are there for you. When in my thinking, when I have a problem, the first thing I think is who can help me?

I don't think, what can I do? I think who can help me. Because there's people who know more than me about this thing and will help me think it through and I, in American parlance, can be seen as someone who pulls. Cause I asked-- it's not just one or two, you know, I take it in, then I sit with it and then I make it my own. [00:46:30] But I am completely shaped through these conversations rather than sitting with myself, thinking it through, trying it out. And it's a completely different model.

ADAM: So I feel very clear that I've learned something from this discussion because when you asked the question, okay, were you raised to, to be autonomous or to be loyal? My first impulse was to say, well, why does it have to be either or. Can it be both-and? And then I thought, okay, I've internalized your worldview. But, but in all seriousness, why does it have to be either [00:47:00] or? Can I be raised to be both?

ESTHER: I don't think it's either or, but I think that when you ask, let me, let's see. How many of you would say that you were raised-- that doesn't mean you stayed this way, and it doesn't mean that you didn't have to because there was nobody there for you, right? It's not always just a nice message, A story. How many of you would say the focus was on autonomy on self-reliance? And how many of you would say the focus was on loyalty and how many of the people here who highlighted [00:47:30] loyalty and not American born?

ADAM: A lot.

ESTHER: See that at the you, you live in the Mecca of individualism here. Yeah. Um, and so that notion is, I think what draws a lot of people to come here as well is that for once I can actually prove myself, do my own thing, it's not an, that is not an either or. I think there's beauty and, and, and, and, and value in each of these models, but everyone has a clear sense of what [00:48:00] they were told

growing up. I really do think it's a real foundational set of messages that shape our relational legacy.

ADAM: There are a couple other quick things I wanted to raise. one is, from Susan Dominus. so we share something very unusual.

ESTHER: Yes we have to explain that. / I mean, basically Susan New York Times and she wrote a profile about me and she wrote a profile about Adam.

ADAM: And when we met and realized this, my first thought was, we need to write a profile of Susan based on what we learned about her from her [00:48:30] profiling us, which is maybe too meta, but, she was hoping to be here tonight. she could not make it / but she sent in a question, for us to discuss, which I thought was really interesting, which was, what do we think about passionate work? is, is that something we should strive for? Can you ever have too much of it? Do you want to go first?

ESTHER: I think it's a fascinating question actually, because passion for a long time throughout history when it came to work was pretty much the privilege of the artisans and the artists. [00:49:00] People did not talk about passion when they worked the land and certainly not when they went to the factory.

So it really speaks to the aspirational, meaning that work has received. Never have we expected more from work. We want from work today, what we used to get from religion and community: belonging, purpose, meaning, community. You know, that's a whole new set of expectations. And that's why we suddenly have the permission to talk about work that [00:49:30] transports you, right?

But the concept was that it, it transcends you. It elevates you. It takes you above the ordinary into something bigger. And the things that people used to attribute to religious experiences, and now we want that immersive, you know, all encompassing thing in, in what we do. / I don't think of as it good or not good? I just think it's super interesting and it's actually a wonderful new permission that people, that more people can have access to that kind of [00:50:00] intensity in their work.

What comes with that is that the other side of passion is massive heartbreak. Disillusion, disruption, degradation. I mean, you know, passion has its side effects. and I think that today you have that too. When people, you know, people, people don't just leave because the factory closes. That happens. But this is not the primary thing. People

leave for management reasons, relationship reasons, they were not promoted enough, [00:50:30] seen enough acknowledged.

And so it becomes identity questions. You know, I think work today is, this is fit is organized around an identity economy. So that's where I see the passion thing that, that, that drive. Now, where do you see the most? My guess is. Let's say, what do you do when a person comes to present a thing to you and what they're going to change the world? I mean, how many people come to present to you an enterprise and a startup that's about to change the world? You know.

[00:51:00] **ADAM:** That's an Immediate red flag for me, by the way.

ESTHER: Me too.

ADAM: Narcissism defined.

ESTHER: But why don't you think of it as passion? I mean, you could, it's an interesting thing I saw over right. Red flag, but the part of me thinks maybe, am I judgmental here? Why don't I let these people think, you know? But big part of it is because, did you look at what the neighbor is doing? Do you figure that there's five others that are doing something similar? Would you ever think about joining them? Or everybody needs their own little placket, you know?

ADAM: I mean [00:51:30] that, that's a passion. To me that's just grandiosity, right? You couldn't be satisfied just maybe changing a country and you know, helping a billion people as opposed to over 7 billion. Right. That that just seems like a ridiculous scale to aspire

ESTHER: But where's the limit? Doesn't grandiosity is a part of passion because when you experience passion, you experience yourself as irrepressible. Right? That is part of the experience of passion. It's a force that cannot be resisted. So why do we say this is grandiose versus this is [00:52:00] people who have deep passion for something. I agree with you, but I do think that there is a bias in it too.

ADAM: Yeah, there might be. I think it depends for me, in part on the valor and distinction between a, what's called a harmonious versus obsessive passion. Ah, so harmonious passion is, you know, 'I love it. I chose it. I'm excited to pursue this work.' And I think for, if that's the experience of passion you have, often the work in and of itself is its own reward.

If it's not, then the impact that you have on each individual person is meaningful. And then the hope is to scale it over [00:52:30] time, right? You don't have to change the world on day one. If the passion is more obsessive, it feels more like something you have to do as opposed to something you want to do. And then I start to worry that we're in a situation where, where you feel like, well, you know, if, if I don't change the world that my life has had no meaning, and I think that's a sad state of affairs.

ESTHER: If you ever wanted to do something different than what you do?

ADAM: Always. That's why I don't have a real job. I just study other people's jobs. I live vicariously through them.

ESTHER: Interesting. You know? Would you say, would you say that you [00:53:00] passionate about your work?

ADAM: Yeah, of course. Absolutely.

ESTHER: how do you define that?

ADAM: You can't tell?

ESTHER: I think you are deeply engaged with your work, you're curious. There's intensity, there's insatiability. There is a constant look for what else is out there that I don't know yet. I see all of that, but that's what I see. When you think, I'm passionate about work, what, how do you articulate that?

ADAM: I think about it in a few ways. One is, I think about, well, not every part of my work. There are parts of my [00:53:30] job that I'm not passionate about. I've tried to design those out of it over time, but some of them are kind of stuck. when I think about the parts I'm passionate about, I think about, waking up in the morning, looking forward to starting work. going to bed at night, thinking about all the cool ideas that I get to explore.

and all of the amazing, talented, inspiring students that I get to learn from and maybe try to help a little bit. and that for me is energizing. And, I guess, it's, I mean, it's exciting in the, in, in the way that, I think falling in love is exciting. I feel--.

[00:54:00] **ESTHER:** How come the age where we want passion the most at work is the age where we stay have about an average of two years? I mean, isn't it interesting that the moment where we have the

highest set of expectations about this thing is also the time where we are roaming and nomadic?

ADAM: Yeah. I think that's a huge problem.

ESTHER: How do you understand it when you have the students, you know, I see students that they tell me, 'I love it. I'm going to take another three months and I'm going to start looking for the next thing.' I see them. [00:54:30] If you love it, why you want to leave? I can't put one in one together. The leaving and the loving. Don't you want to stay when you love something? In my logic.

ADAM: Yeah. No, I think, I, I'll tell you how I deal with this, which is one, I try to read the research and forecast what's going to happen to them. So, I think the, the work that young, Hema Whitson his colleagues have just published, has been helpful to me.

what he's found is that when people think about passion as pleasure or joy, they're much less likely to succeed in pursuing whatever they thought their path, their passion was. Then if they think about it as [00:55:00] meaning and purpose. and I think that's because emotions are much more fleeting. and you know, a sense of, of mattering, is much more sustainable. /

ESTHER: This is very important what you just said. / This is, I think, passion that is defined as joy and excitement. And what it does for me is very different than passion that is defined by the nature, the richness of the thing in which you're plunging, you know, that is giving you meaning because it is in itself meaningful.

ADAM: Yeah. Yeah. I think that for me, that resonates. And so I guess what I would I say to [00:55:30] students is when they say, I want to find a job I'm passionate about, or I want to love my work, that to me is something you can look forward to 10, 20 years down the road after you've figured out where you find meaning, and what kind of contribution you can make.

but. I don't, I don't feel like there's a, there's an easy answer to your question, which is, which is a really interesting one. Why, why would you leave something you love? this is another paradox point though, that you, yourself has made, right? Which is you can love a person and still say, this relationship is [00:56:00] not right for me. And why not believe the same is true about a job?

ESTHER: Hmm. So we have said it is in marriage today, people will say, it's not that I divorced because I'm miserable and unhappy. It's I divorce cause I could be happier. And I think something similar is happening at work. This elusive quest for more, for better, for FOMO and all of that makes us nice.

It's think what else is out there that I haven't yet done that versus the good enough. Versus the, this is [00:56:30] rich in and of itself. Stay here, deepen it, you know, build something from it. /

um, you know, it's just for me, the moment where I read this was in wall street journal article that said, the quitters are the winners. And I thought, Oh boy, one headline tells you what's going on. You know, what does it mean? And then of course it explains, you get a better salary, you get promoted more. But the whole point was about, you know, leaving versus staying. / This is, this is, I find, I don't, you're the one who studies these things, right? I don't [00:57:00] know how to interpret that. No. No. /

ADAM: I, the only thing that jumped in mind on this is I think Oliver Berkman covered the best antidote I've seen. he wrote this great little article that said, look, every time you feel FOMO, you should erase it and instead turn it into Jomo. which in his words is the joy of missing out.

And I thought this was such a clever concept to say, you know, anytime you're afraid you're going to miss out on a great job opportunity or even a social event, right? You're only thinking about everything that could have been better. Well, why [00:57:30] not be thrilled about all the horrible jobs. You didn't take all the toxic cultures you avoided all of the difficult bosses you didn't get stuck working for.

And that, that joy of missing out for me is something that probably sticks in my head on a daily basis. **With that, I am feeling a little FOMO that we're not going to hear from the audience. So let's open it up.**

// QUESTION: [01:05:30] Thanks, guys, I think we all thought that the Autonomy versus loyalty was really eye opening and powerful concept. Curious your comments on how you see that play out in the workplace.

ESTHER: Great. I am a cross cultural psychologist by trade. / My work was on how families and individuals deal with large cultural changes. / [01:10:30] And this notion of collective versus individualistic. / So. What

it really influences a lot is this. Do you know that person that does more than others because they can do it better than anybody else, but then quietly resents it, but then doesn't want anybody to do it because nobody will do it the way they do it.

That is raised for autonomy to the nth degree.

[01:12:30] The, you know that person in your personal lives. You know that person at work. You know, and then you have the person who, you know who, so you map this on a, on a whole line here, you know, between the degree of, you know, I'm going to hide the fact that I don't know something. So when people these days talk about trust for vulnerability, one of the first thing they talk about is asking for help, right?

The disclosure of the leader and the people who can say, I don't know, I want to try and ask for help, but this asking for help in some [01:13:00] people and in some cultures means. I don't know and I'm going to find out who can help me. Like I said, who can help me? I don't experience it as a weakness whatsoever. I have no shame about it, but I know that for other people it's an admittance of what's wrong with me and the moment it's what's wrong with me, I can't do it.

Then you're asking for help is a completely different thing and you put these people to work together. This is true in the classroom and this is true at work. They are going to have messages and met the [01:13:30] messages. That's just a nutshell.

ADAM: All right. / So autonomy versus loyalty, but I think about is / you don't have to give people autonomy about the ends if you give them autonomy about the means. Uh, this is something, one of my mentors, Richard Hackman, found throughout his career that if leaders were very clear about a mission, a purpose, a goal to work toward, um, they could give people a ton of autonomy then about when to do it, where to do [01:16:00] it, how to do it, with whom to do it.

Um, and that would work out really well. And I think if you take that view. Then giving people that kind of autonomy is an expression of loyalty, right? You're, you're saying, I believe in you. I trust you. Uh, I'm gonna let you know what our objectives are and why I think those are worthwhile. And then you've got this.

So, next question.

// QUESTION: You touched on this very briefly earlier, the difference between breach and betrayal. I think we all know what this looks like in relationships but how do you distinguish between the two in the workplace? How do those look different in the workplace?

// ADAM: When I think about this at work, I think about, uh, what's called the [01:16:30] psychological contract. So all of you who have jobs, you have formal contracts with your employers. There's also though with what's called the psychological contract, which is an unwritten set of expectations and obligations that you have with your employer.

And there, there are basically three types that we've studied. So there's a, there's an economic contract, which is basically, look, I'll do my job and you pay me to support myself and my family. Uh, there's a relational contract, which is much more about, okay, uh, I will invest in this organization as a community or a [01:17:00] family.

Uh, and I'll bring a little bit of extra dedication and commitment to the people in the place. And in return, what I expect is to be treated like a member of the family. And then, uh, the final type of contract is more of a cause. Where you say, look, I will give you extraordinary levels of effort and dedication and grit.

And in return, what I want to do is I want to make a difference, hopefully not change the world. Um. / I think that [01:18:00] contracts get, get breached when somebody has a set of expectations that are not met. Uh, often by the employer or by their boss. I think that a betrayal is when people go further and they, they void or violate the contract and say, not only am I unwilling to follow through on this set of commitments or expectations that was never there to begin with.

We were never a family. Uh, you were never working on a meaningful cause. I never owed you a paycheck. And I think that might be the difference. I have no idea what to do with that. But that was my thought.

[01:18:30] **ESTHER:** I mean this, it's an element of gaslighting. Basically, you know, you're crazy. You're crazy for even thinking this in the first place. Yes.

// QUESTION: How do you know whether to leave or stay in the work context?

ADAM: Hypothetically. [laughter]

QUESTION: Hypothetically. What is a good reason to stay and what, even if you stay, what is a good way to think about something more in a relationship to work that is productive and meaningful and healthy without jumping around in a disorganized way?

// **ADAM:** I mean, I here you're not going to be surprised. There's a framework on this. Uh, so Hirschman wrote about exit, voice and loyalty. There's an addition now of neglect. Uh, so when you're dissatisfied with a job or a person, or an organization or a country, right?

You have, I think as far as I know, four choices. You can leave. That's an exit. Uh, you can speak up and [01:29:30] try to change it. That's voice. Uh, you can neglect, uh, where you do the absolute minimum not to get fired. Uh, that's office space. And then, uh, and then the, the final option is loyalty, which is basically to say, look, I'm committed enough to this person or system that, you know, I'm just going to grit my teeth and bear it.

And I think that there's a progression that we all need to go through when we're considering leaving, which is to say, have I, have I been loyal long enough that I've given the person or the place a chance to change. Uh, and then, uh, [01:30:00] once I've done that, have I tried to change it and have I made my best effort at doing that?

And if not, it's probably time to go.

ESTHER: So the interesting thing about your framework is that they all put the I at the center.

What is the circumstances of this, you know, do you have, do you decide, are there, you know, are you sending money over to the old country and there's a whole family that lives on your work that's going to change if you, you know what it's like, where is the locus of control in your, in those four things, which I think are very [01:30:30] beautiful.

You are the locus of control in many people's lives. That is not the reality. There are lots of other things that are affecting your decision. Maybe at this moment, you know, I would leave if it was up to me, I would leave, but given the circumstances of my life, this is not the right moment. And I think it's juggling that ambiguity that is the most difficult

thing on an occasion, you know, many of us will say this, I left too soon and this I could have left sooner.

This is the [01:31:00] story of our lives in relationships, in work situations, in places where we lived, in houses that we, you know, that were leaking. I mean, it's like we are constantly in the story of our lives is a story of where we wished we had stayed longer and where we wished we had left sooner. And I don't think that there is a specific, you know, I can see, I have rarely heard people leave a job and regret it.

/ But I do look at our time, my dear.

// There's one other quick thing I wanted to bring up before we wrap. We, we got a bunch of questions via social media. And there was this question I love from Michelle Miller, which is what do we think about work spouses? And I have to tell you what I, I've, I've heard people use this term increasingly over the last [00:58:00] few years.

And at first I'm like, wait. Are you hedging in case your marriage isn't going well? You have another spouse. Like what? What is this about? So given that you study relationships and you work on relationships, what, what in the world is a work spouse? And do you think we should have one? And there's a preview? I think the answer is a very clear no, but I want to hear your take.

ESTHER: The same way that when people say, our company's a family, I'm like, seriously? You know, a family is a family, and I can tell you family companies are different from this. This [00:58:30] is not the same. /

I understand that people want to borrow terminology from other areas so that they can create analogies, but it's trivial. There's something rather vulgar and boring about the spouse will consent. So it's an, it's a non-interesting way of looking at it. What it says is this. The person with whom you spend all the time.

With whom you make all these decisions with whom you share so many important things. The only thing that is interesting about the work spouse concept is that it betrays one reality or it translates one [00:59:00] reality is that way too often these days, we bring the best of ourselves to work and the leftovers home.

This is where I do think the words work-spouse becomes relevant, but for the rest, no, find a word that, you know, it's the, the, the, there's a

lack of vocabulary for this thing, you know, you're not married to them. Marriage is a whole lot more complicated than that.

ADAM: You start working with someone else. You're also not cheating on them.

ESTHER: You know, it's a I, and by the way, I [00:59:30] don't know if I, I don't, you know, I speak a few languages and I don't know the term in other languages. It doesn't translate in my head. Does anybody have a translation for this? French, Hebrew, German, Spanish, anybody? It's a, it's an interesting thing. It's like, you know, You work with that person. / But it's not your work-spouse.

ADAM: My closest colleague.

ESTHER: You don't do laundry of that person, you know?

ADAM: Well, this is a, this has been fun and enlightening as always. I want to, I want to say thanks to the audience / and thanks to Esther for [01:00:00] doing this.

ESTHER: Thank you too all.

WorkLife is hosted by me, Adam Grant. The show is produced by TED with Transmitter Media. Our team includes Colin Helms, Gretta Cohn, Dan O'Donnell, Constanza Gallardo, Grace Rubenstein, Michelle Quint, Angela Cheng and Janet Lee. This bonus episode was produced by Jessica Glazer. Our show is mixed by Rick Kwan. Original music by Hahnsdale Hsu and Allison Layton Brown.

Thanks to TED for hosting our discussion and to Esther Perel for joining. And thanks to you for listening! If you liked what you heard, we'd love it if you could rate and review the show. It helps people find us.