

HOW'S WORK S2 GYM FINAL

Voiceover: How's Work 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.

[00:00:20]**Wife:** We are celebrating our 10 year wedding anniversary in January, and we're celebrating seven years of business.

[00:00:41]**Esther Perel:** They are co-founders who opened a gym together. She's 10 years older than him. He came from Ireland and they live together in Canada.

[00:00:54]**Husband:** I feel like the way we process our thoughts is so different. She speaks her mind. That's how she works through something is with other people and the art of a dynamic conversation. Whereas, when I have a complex problem on my mind or something I need to work through, I definitely do that in more of an introverted way.

[00:01:13]**Esther Perel:** They're business partners, they're spouses, they're lovers, they're friends, and they're fighting.

[00:01:22]**Wife:** Our differences when they were inside our home, and when they were just inside the gym, even the first two years of owning the gym, we had time and space and no audience. But then when we started to have to behave and when our skillset being so opposite started to play out in front of our staff, we started to realize that it didn't work.

[00:01:45]**Esther Perel:** And it isn't clear what they're fighting about. Is it about power? Is it about recognition? Is it about respect? Is it trust?

[00:01:49]**Husband:** We did not spend enough one-on-one time together, planning and dreaming and talking about our business. The changing of roles I think it definitely has been a massive thing.

[00:02:09]**Wife:** Now I'm stuck in this place where I'm actually stepping away from the gym because I'm going to school for manual therapy. And yet, I'm also trying to rebuild trust and rebuild my image in the gym and rebuild my relationship with my husband and business partner. So, yeah.

[00:02:27]**Esther Perel:** But one thing is very clear, their fights travel from the kitchen to the workplace, into the staff meetings, directly into the dynamics with their employees.

[00:02:40]**Wife:** We were so used to just like slamming ourselves together into a room and coming to an agreement eventually that we just went into meetings like that.

[00:02:50]**Husband:** I want to stop this fiery interaction between the two of us. It doesn't serve either of us and it doesn't serve our business.

[00:03:09]**Esther Perel:** So you're basically, the married couple came to work and acted in the staff meetings in the same way that they were acting at home.

[00:03:19]**Wife:** That's right.

[00:03:20]**Esther Perel:** Not realizing that once they had an audience or people who were waiting for instructions and clarity and decisions, they didn't really want to participate in your fights.

[00:03:32]**Husband:** Yup.

[00:03:33]**Wife:** Yep.

[00:03:34]**Esther Perel:** Okay. Um, so where did you meet? Give me a tiny bit of the, of the background.

[00:03:41]**Wife:** [inaudible 00:03:41].

[00:03:42]**Husband:** I, okay-

[00:03:43]**Wife:** [laughs].

[00:03:43]**Husband:** ... I, yeah, I was over here on a work and travel visa. We met at a gym. We were both, um, personal trainers at that gym. I was young and keen to learn. Um, when I saw her bio get posted on the wall, it included, you know, a third level education and experience that the others didn't have. Um, she immediately stood out. I was very busy in that gym and, uh, running by sometime when I finally actually saw her in person. And I quickly said, "You're really smart, I want to talk to you." And I think that sparked her attention in me.

[00:04:19]**Esther Perel:** The smart piece

[00:04:21]**Wife:** Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:04:22]**Esther Perel:** Say more.

[00:04:23]**Husband:** [laughs].

[00:04:24]**Wife:** [laughs]. Um, he's the intellect in our relationship. He's extremely intelligent. The backbone of our business really relies on all of the research that he's done and everything that we've been able to put together and something that we hear time and time and time again in, in our gym is, people don't know why, but they just get the sense, like it doesn't work unless we're both involved.

[00:04:52]**Esther Perel:** Because he brings what, and she brings, what, how would they describe it?

[00:04:59]**Wife:** Uh, I think I bring love. I bring, uh, care, you know, somebody comes into our gym space and I can feel something is up. And I check in and I say, "Hey, you know, what's up? How you doing? Like what's going on?" And I find out that their grandparent had died or a parent is sick. Uh, I think that people just feel very cared for by what I bring, but when they're in their hour long session and when they're training, he's caring for them there. He's very technically sound in his explanations and he's always been a great teacher.

[00:05:33]**Esther Perel:** Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And for him who is the man in the gym, in the workplace, and who is the man who comes home to his life partner?

[00:05:53] **Wife:** Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:05:54] **Husband:** Yeah, at home, I'm definitely more, uh, introverted. And I use that time to recharge. Um, I think that I learnt that habit as a, as an athlete in my teens, um, I competed at, at a competitive level. And I think home was a recharge for me during those years. And I feel like that only has continued over to my workplace where again, I'm very passionate about this stuff. So I feel very energized. And although I love it, um, I'm not extroverted 24/7, and that takes energy from me.

[00:06:22] **Esther Perel:** Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:06:23] **Husband:** Um, and I think the outcome of that then sometimes is I come home tired and in need of, um, recharge. And I think that can definitely frustrate her because where is the partner that she married, giving energy to the relationship, um-

[00:06:43] **Wife:** You answered for me [laughs].

[00:06:45] **Husband:** ... [laughs].

[00:06:46] **Wife:** I would go so far as to say as well, that the dynamic that you grew up with when you were a youth and you were cycling at a very competitive level, you would come home and you would be taken care of by your mom. And you really didn't have to do a lot in your time of recovery. And that's not the life that I want. And, you know, I listened to another session that you had and you said something that really resonated with me.

[00:07:12] **Esther Perel:** Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:07:13] **Wife:** Because I do things that, that I really love, I cook and, and take care of our household and plan things. And, but then I start to resent doing those things because I'm doing them alone. And you said, this thing, I'm gonna just grab my notes. You said, "Because I do it so well, you do it less and less. And because you do it less and less, I do it more and more. And because of this, you become even more of the person who doesn't do that, which you don't like. And because you don't do what you don't like, I become the person that does what you don't like to do." You said something to that effect. And it was very-

[00:07:50] **Esther Perel:** Sometimes I say interesting things.

[00:07:52] **Wife:** ... You said it better than I could even write it down. To be honest, I had to re-listen to it. But-

[00:07:57] **Esther Perel:** So, how does this dance played so far between the two of you?

[00:08:02] **Wife:** ... It sort of goes back and forth between me loving and enjoying making meals. But then I dance with this idea that I, I resent it because I have to. And

[00:08:13] **Esther Perel:** if you ask for him to do so, then what happens?

[00:08:16] **Wife:** Mm-hmm [affirmative]. That was a process that took a long time, uh, to be able to ask without resentment.

[00:08:24] **Esther Perel:** Hmm.

[00:08:24] **Wife:** We're past that stage now. He participates, he does more, but it's, um-

[00:08:32] **Husband:** It comes and goes, yeah, when life gets, um, very busy. Yeah, I focus on other things and I drop that ball.

[00:08:41] **Wife:** ... Yeah, mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:08:43] **Esther Perel:** Go ahead.

[00:08:44] **Wife:** I was gonna say that, why that statement meant something to me is that, it's one part, those, the domestication of roles and it's, it's one part, um, feeling like he's not contributing, but it's also another part of, because I'm doing all these things, it gives him more free time to be able to do other things like run our business and be more present in our gym space. And so, it begets him doing more of that. And therefore me doing more domesticized chores. Sort of the second part is that our staff see that as well. And so, he's getting these questions about programming and technical questions about the gym itself. And I'm getting text messages about picking up toilet paper and cleaning products.

[00:09:28] And at, at the same time, like they're bothering to send two separate messages between the two of us. Um, and what we're discovering is that, our home dynamic is just bleeding into the gym dynamic all of the time.

[00:09:43] **Esther Perel:** I hear you. You agree on that?

[00:09:47] **Husband:** I do, yes.

[00:09:49] **Esther Perel:** What she's highlighting is the dynamic interdependence in relationships, that the behavior of one person actually contributes to building the behavior of the other person. Our tendency is to think about people in essentialist terms, as if that's just who they are, as if this is who they're gonna be with everybody that they're with. And the fact is, that we are not the same person, depending on who we are in relationship with. In her case, what she highlights is, that could create that when she ends up doing more of the domestic chores, it enables him to do more of the work, which intensifies her feeling that she's less valued, which intensified his feeling, that it's all on his shoulders.

Are you both motivated to change this or does it suit one of you and not the other?

[00:11:03] **Husband:** Yeah, I mean, it definitely suits me [laughs].

[00:11:05] **Wife:** I know it does.

[00:11:08] **Husband:** Um, I mean, when you get given the context like this, I don't think that's fair. Uh, a world I wanna live in or partake in. But if it definitely suits me to answer your question, it doesn't mean I don't wanna change that.

[00:11:25] **Esther Perel:** And what would it take?

[00:11:27]**Husband:** It takes a lot of conscious effort and to maintain it as a top of mind task.

[00:11:35]**Wife:** Yeah. You always put new challenges, new things that are happening at the gym in front of, of our lives and not to necessarily turn this into, you know, into us, improving our marriage life, but that does have play a part. There's always incoming information from the gym and it always gets bumped to the top. And then that gets pushed onto like entrepreneurial projects where, oh, this idea is great. Well, it has to happen. Yes, it has to happen yesterday so, right.

[00:12:12]**Esther Perel:** But that's so interesting 'cause you started out by saying, that you need a time to process things and to formulate your thinking. And here you're telling me that you're more in a kind of a immediate reactivity.

[00:12:27]**Wife:** That's true. You do, you like-

[00:12:32]**Esther Perel:** Wait, wait, wait, let it sink. Hold on, hold on, let it sink.

[00:12:38]**Husband:** I mean, yeah, I believe it.

[00:12:40]**Wife:** You never thought of it that way?

[00:12:42]**Husband:** No.

[00:12:42]**Wife:** That you process things for a long time. And yet, you also feel the need for the rush of repair and?

[00:12:49]**Husband:** Mm-hmm [affirmative], it's interesting.

[00:12:50]**Wife:** Mm-hmm [affirmative]. It is. You will never stop high work output until you feel that we're comfortable. And what scares me, worries me that we'll ever get there. And, I just wanna slow down. I just wanna live our lives because it's been seven years of running this thing and it's, it's, it used to bleed us dry of money. And now it's bleeding us dry of, of fun and, and spending time together.

[00:13:16]**Esther Perel:** I hear all the attention and all the energy and all the creative thinking goes towards the gym. And we are a little bit kind of drying on the vine. And in a way you can't really say he's not contributing to the relationship, 'cause from where you are, you think I'm working super hard to make us comfortable.

[00:13:41]**Husband:** Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:13:41]**Wife:** Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:13:42]**Esther Perel:** So you have a rationale to say, how can you say I'm not committed? All I do is for us. And she will say, I appreciate what you do for us, but I want some of you.

[00:13:56]**Husband:** Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:13:58]**Esther Perel:** And if in order to have a comfortable us, it means I never get to see you or have fun with you or be your partner, your wife in life, then [laughs] she can develop a new resentment, which is the resentment toward the gym.

[00:14:13] **Husband:** Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:14:14] **Esther Perel:** The lover [laughs] who gets all the goodies.

[00:14:18] **Husband:** Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:14:18] **Esther Perel:** On the other hand, you're also saying, we're bringing this dynamic to work. And our staff are not our children, and they're not supposed to be watching mom and dad argue in front of them. They need a bunch of professionals who can have a sense of boundaries. And sometimes that is a challenge for us. And on the other hand, you're also saying, because of the way that he is invested at work, it domesticates me at home, which then domesticates me also at work, because now I'm the addendum, the adjunct to the leader. And the whole thing becomes quite genderized as well, so that he gets to deal with the interesting questions and technical challenges. And I deal with the toilet paper, which is kind of the opposite of why he was drawn to you in the first place, 'cause you had the upper degrees of education, and he thought you are very smart, and he has a lot to learn from you.

[00:15:25] So there's a lot of real resources and, and assets and strengths between the two of you that are somewhat being squandered, both at home and at work.

[00:15:40] **Wife:** Yeah. Wow. I've never really said the whole story all at once for somebody who doesn't know us for them to pull it all the way back, um, you know, we would write these programs together and we no longer do that. Programs as in, uh, the training programs that we would use in the gym.

[00:15:58] **Esther Perel:** Like, what kind of exercises I need to do?

[00:16:00] **Wife:** Correct. We wrote these together for five of the last seven years. And I decided to stop two years ago because we decided that it wasn't beneficial for us to both be working on these things together. And he did it.

[00:16:17] **Esther Perel:** But it used to be, one of your creative outlets?

[00:16:21] **Wife:** Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:16:22] **Esther Perel:** It used to be one of the places where you juices flow together.

[00:16:26] **Wife:** That's very true.

[00:16:27] **Husband:** It was, but it transitioned away from that, to be honest, we stopped doing it because it, it, it wasn't working.

[00:16:35] **Wife:** Because it was causing conflict.

[00:16:37] **Husband:** Yeah.

[00:16:37] **Esther Perel:** Why, why did this very rich, fertile place where the two of you came together and really could create, become fraught with conflict?

[00:16:52] **Husband:** Um, I think it came back down to ego again, yeah.

[00:16:55] **Esther Perel:** No ego is a code word.

[00:16:58] **Wife:** [laughs].

[00:16:58] **Esther Perel:** You're gonna have to break down the E-G-O.

[00:17:01] **Wife:** [laughs].

[00:17:02] **Husband:** The E-G-O. Um-

[00:17:05] **Wife:** Say it. I, I feel like-

[00:17:07] **Esther Perel:** No, no, don't help him.

[00:17:10] **Husband:** Um-

[00:17:12] **Esther Perel:** What are we, what is the, the conflict? Power, trust, recognition, integrity? What are we arguing about that we can no longer come together on the one thing for which we could really be creative, which is to, to develop training programs together.

[00:17:34] **Husband:** Out of that list power stands out.

[00:17:34] **Esther Perel:** All right, power to, power over, power for what?

[00:17:42] **Husband:** I guess, power over the, the direction of the gym or the what's happening in the gym.

[00:17:48] **Wife:** Um, can I speak to this?

[00:17:52] **Husband:** Yeah.

[00:17:53] **Wife:** I think this starts at, I was too busy to stay on top of knowing what I needed to know from a technical standpoint. And so you started to feel like you knew it more and you did it.

[00:18:04] **Esther Perel:** What is the technical stuff? Just so I understand when you say technical, it means what?

[00:18:09] **Wife:** Understanding physiology, understanding, uh, trends in the industry. Um, and I think that what ended up happening is, you are so interested in always studying and always learning, and, and you have that time and space because I'm over here cooking dinner and getting groceries and taking care of toilet paper and whatever. And you're just learning and learning and learning and building this, this knowledge. And then we get together in a meeting where we're supposed to create and all I can think about is toilet paper and all he can think about is how I don't understand the training system anymore. And you push me out.

[00:18:50] **Esther Perel:** You're saying yes to what?

[00:18:54] **Husband:** General nodding in agreement.

[00:19:01] **Esther Perel:** What stands out in their conversation is that they have quite a shared sense of reality. They are not fundamentally at odds in understanding the source of the tension between them. And that is good, but at the same time, maybe because he has so always seen her as the relational person and himself as the technical person, she is the primary author of that shared

narrative between them. She gets to write their story and he can agree or disagree. And on occasion he gets to edit.

[00:19:52]**Husband:** As we grow the business, I think the only comment I would make there is that I don't think we can have our finger fully in every single aspect of the business.

[00:20:02]**Esther Perel:** But I do have a thought that by creating very distinct roles for both of you, you miss coming together in the place where you are most creative and generative.

[00:20:18]**Wife:** Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:20:19]**Husband:** Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:20:19]**Esther Perel:** So that you become constant administrators. You report to each other about the running of the business, but you don't have any interesting conversations about that which the business is about. So she goes to school, she studies osteopathy and learns a lot of fascinating stuff. You create your systems and you discover a lot of fascinating stuff. And neither of you communicates that to the other. So you end up spending much of your time talking about the most boring stuff.

[00:20:55]**Husband:** Yeah.

[00:20:56]**Esther Perel:** Shit. Drudge, but the juice, the meaning, the purpose, the joy, the stuff that fills you up, you don't join on that anymore. And you absolutely have to find a way to do that again. So either when she cooks for you, you sit down and you give her an hour long rundown on what you've just learned and discovered. Then you catch her up and she sits and tells you about an interesting course. But if you don't share with each other, everything that's interesting is happening outside of your relationship, not just your marriage, but also your professional relationship.

[00:21:35]**Husband:** Mm-hmm [affirmative], yeah. No, you hit the nail on the head there. And I feel like even, I would say the few times we hit that category was actually when talking to a friend. And I think, an external person has brought that out because then we're almost communicating to them, but in the presence of the other person, and I feel like-

[00:21:56]**Wife:** And I was getting to watch you be that person in front of someone else.

[00:21:59]**Esther Perel:** So that's another thing, once or twice a week, you have got to do things together.

[00:22:05]**Husband:** Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:22:05]**Esther Perel:** That is, some of it's work-related and at least once a week, if not more, you, you need to do shared activities, shared experiences.

[00:22:16]**Wife:** Yeah.

[00:22:17]**Esther Perel:** Preferably also experiences that often have a little bit of novelty in it. It's exactly what you do, when you do a training, you keep, you keep

the comfort, you keep the familiar and every time I'm assuming somewhere, you're gonna introduce something new. Why? Because it keeps people interested, involved, curious, awake, and it creates a threshold of a little bit of risk-taking and therefore excitement and energy. If you can do this for your training program, you cannot imagine that your marriage can survive without it.

[00:22:52] **Wife:** Hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:22:55] **Esther Perel:** I mean, is this a fair analogy? Do I understand your training programs?

[00:22:59] **Husband:** Absolutely, yeah.

[00:22:59] **Esther Perel:** Okay.

[00:23:00] **Wife:** [laughs] you do.

[00:23:02] **Husband:** No. You nailed that. I'd be interested to get your opinion on doing a better job of explicitly that when, when work stress is really high and demanding. Because I can do it when work stress is low. Um, but how do you, how do you keep that consistent?

[00:23:20] **Esther Perel:** How would you answer if I'm your client coming to you for training? And I have a lot of stuff going on in my very stressful life. You're going to try to convince me in some way, maybe the word convince is not accurate, to continue coming even though there's a lot of stuff going on, how would you say?

[00:23:43] **Husband:** Yes, but, so specifically I'd answer that question straight away. I have the answer.

[00:23:47] **Esther Perel:** Yup.

[00:23:48] **Husband:** Um, is that, uh, in general break the year up into, uh, quarterly segments, where for quarter of the year, you really dedicate yourself to it. You prioritize it in your schedule. The other life events come secondary to it. And that's where you make probably the most amount of progress. And then six months of the year, it's more consistent and maintainable. It's still there. And then three months of the year, take time off in order to maintain longterm enjoyment of training. You have to give yourself a bit of a break from it too. And I think, you know, if I use that analogy in our relationship, I, I don't feel like there's that three-month off period.

[00:24:28] **Esther Perel:** No, but neither have you had the six month focus?

[00:24:31] **Husband:** Not, yeah, the three months of high focus, yeah [crosstalk 00:24:34] yeah.

[00:24:35] **Esther Perel:** So I would suggest you spend your first, uh, uh, energy on the focus.

[00:24:42] **Husband:** Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:24:42] **Esther Perel:** Um, even if you miss a week, it is an attention that you want to maintain. I mean, you really have a good analogy, because you kind of

saying, I can only focus on this here when everything else there is calm. And that is not the life of many of the people that come to you either. In fact, there's sometimes we rely on the gym to help them deal with the very stressful life that they have elsewhere.

[00:25:15]**Husband:** Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:25:23]**Esther Perel:** I mean, how many times have I been with a trainer who is telling me consistency, consistency, you have got to show up. If you don't come, I can't help you reach your goals. And I'm imagining that he must be saying some of the same things to his clients, but he doesn't say to himself. To himself he says, "When I have everything fixed at work, then I may have some energy left to bring it into my relationship." Which is such a familiar text. We've all heard this one, but that's not the way it works, because it is the act of doing the very things that he wants to experience with his wife that will ultimately bring that energy. And not the other way around, the more you do it, the easier it becomes. I'm sure that's the sentence he's been saying all along to his clients as well. The same thing applies to his relationship with his wife.

How do you relate to the staff together?

[00:26:35]**Wife:** I would say that we have two staff that are very proactive. They see jobs, they do them. Personally, um, I was very close with the two of them. Uh, we have, or had, a friendship outside of the gym. And some conflict has arisen that has ended that, that friendship.

[00:26:56]**Esther Perel:** And how, how has that been? I mean, that's, that's not a light statement what you just said.

[00:27:01]**Wife:** Oh, no, it's not. It's um, it, it feels to me as though a friendship has, a bond has occurred between the two of them that has come out of supporting each other around, uh, uh, a growing distrust and a conflict between the three of us. And I think I need to sort of put myself back in a place of leadership where they can trust me. And, and I don't think that I can go back to being friends.

[00:27:34]**Esther Perel:** And why did they lose trust in you?

[00:27:37]**Wife:** Um, they say that it was because of our conflict in meetings, uh, us not being on the same page and sort of having, having some disagreements with things in front of them and maybe not leading meetings in the best way possible. I mean, at the end of the day we are, we're first-time business owners. First time employers, we're learning it kind of as we go. Um, and could we be doing a better job? Yes, 100%. So we've been tapping into some resources and trying to learn from some books and, and online courses and things like that. But when you're trying to learn it in real time, you know, people don't, they don't really care if you're learning it along the way they care that you're not doing it right in the moment. So I think that played a part in it. I think there was just a loss of connection.

[00:28:35]**Esther Perel:** I hear in the background, that there may have been some boundary issues with the employees, maybe a classic mistake of a new boss who wants to be friends with the people they work with and who doesn't necessarily know where leadership ends and friendship starts. But what is interesting is that when she describes her actions, she puts it in the first person plural we. And when

she talks about him, it is very clearly you. And so, I didn't ask in this instance, what was her "I"? But I did sense that there was a mistake that she preferred not to talk about, but that was registered by both of them.

[00:29:30] Um, so I hear a number of different things. I hear power and the other one is boundaries and the one is leadership or hierarchy or authority. And the other one is, can you be friends with your employees? So what is power? I have a feeling that that word actually applies more to you. And I have the feeling that respect is the word that applies more to her.

[00:30:04]**Husband:** Yeah, maybe, maybe power is control, or at least a feeling of, um, when it's in the domain of my strengths I, uh, I struggle with going in a direction that I disagree with. Whereas if it's in an area that's not in my strengths, I'm very willing to go in that direction.

[00:30:31]**Wife:** Can I add to that, that I think will help with your train of thought.

[00:30:34]**Husband:** Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:30:35]**Wife:** Um, you have meetings with them, uh, uh these two staff. I'm left out of those meetings because I'm in school. So I didn't contribute to the meeting. And this happened on a few occasions, where the three of you made these decisions together. But when they were brought back to me, I said, "Whoa, hang on, that's not, that's missing these pieces of information and it's not inclusive of this component." And, and then you have to go back to the girls and you have to say, "Hey, it turns out I don't, I don't have complete control. The three of us don't have complete control." And although you and me can rumble that out at home, under the context of our personal and professional relationship, that then turned into resentment from them because it felt like micromanagement from me, it felt like stalling of progress.

[00:31:20]**Husband:** Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:31:21]**Wife:** And all of a sudden the control that we both share was taken away from them.

[00:31:26]**Esther Perel:** Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And, how much did the two of you this take a few minutes to discuss this meeting before it took place?

[00:31:35]**Wife:** Not at all.

[00:31:36]**Husband:** Yeah.

[00:31:41]**Esther Perel:** He naturally gravitates to collaborate with her when he has an open-ended question, and he can accept her influence when he's not certain, but when he's in his own territory about the things which he experiences mastery about, he experiences her input as intrusive and as distracting. He's already figured it out, and he doesn't wanna open the can again. And they butt heads about his rigidity and her insistence on the details of the process. But this is a perfect moment of co-creation. He may have some slight rigidity, but she will amplify the rigidity and see only that, she will not see her side. And he will only see her distractability around the details of the process, and he will not see his side and it's both and, and they're both right.

[00:32:44] If you ask her, do I need to think about anything here? Do you see that as a loss of power?

[00:32:55]**Husband:** No.

[00:32:56]**Esther Perel:** Okay. If you don't know everything on your own and you have to consult with her, that is not a lot of power?

[00:33:09]**Husband:** No. I think it's once the decision is made and then we have to go back on the decision or change the decision, that's when there's a feeling of loss of power.

[00:33:18]**Esther Perel:** Right. And what is it about once I made my decision to have to go back on it, is what?

[00:33:29]**Husband:** It really feels like a waste of time.

[00:33:31]**Esther Perel:** But on a personal level, actually, I'm gonna use your favorite word, on an ego level?

[00:33:39]**Husband:** Yeah. I, I mean, yes, if I have given thought to something and I've made a decision and we're then getting held up on that, yeah, there's an ego element to that too.

[00:33:48]**Wife:** But what part of your ego is it? You feel like a failure, you feel like, um, like you're not understood? Like what does wasting your time, what does that do to your ego?

[00:34:12]**Husband:** Yeah, it feels like, uh, a lack of respect for the decision. Um-

[00:34:12]**Esther Perel:** She asked you a very beautiful question. What does wasting your time have to do with your ego? How does what you think is a waste of time become a slight to your sense of self?

[00:34:24]**Wife:** Hmm?

[00:34:24]**Husband:** Hmm. I guess it's a frustration because I feel like I've been given the offer already to make that decision. And then when we have to go back on it, it feels like that wasn't actually the case.

[00:34:41]**Esther Perel:** And then the other side of authority is inadequacy?

[00:34:45]**Husband:** Okay [laughs].

[00:34:47]**Esther Perel:** I'm asking you.

[00:34:48]**Husband:** Um-

[00:34:50]**Esther Perel:** Or, the other side of confidence is incompetence? The-

[00:34:57]**Husband:** ... No, I feel confident in the decision. And I think that's what leads to frustration is when it doesn't progress, it's like, no, that's a sensible decision.

[00:35:06]**Wife:** No, it would, I don't think he's ever felt incompetent this man. I really don't. He's so self-assured, he's so confident and it's both admirable and extremely frustrating, um, because it takes a long time to bring him to the other side of that. I have to backpedal him out of logic and out of his own certainty and make him realize that there's a bigger picture.

[00:35:33]**Esther Perel:** Hmm, you could call it certainty, and sometimes you can call it rigidity.

[00:35:39]**Wife:** Yeah.

[00:35:40]**Esther Perel:** You know, um, uh, maybe real confidence actually allows for things to come in without being afraid that if you let something in, you're gonna get poked and you're gonna lose your certainty. Confidence is more bending. Confidence can be flexible. And which is part of why, when you talk about power, you talk about control. Maybe people who have real power don't need control in the same way. Actually, they often can let other people have control.

[00:36:11]**Wife:** Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:36:12]**Esther Perel:** That is part of their power and of their leadership.

[00:36:16]**Husband:** Yeah. I mean, it all makes sense. It doesn't personally resonate massively, I guess, because I feel like I can, um, like the whole goal I have for the gym is that I, of course, it's not the, the case right now is that the whole thing runs and grows itself and I get to witness it [crosstalk 00:36:37].

[00:36:36]**Esther Perel:** Right, I, I hear you loud and clear. What I was trying to put, to clarify is when you argue, 'cause this word power came out when you talked about conflict.

[00:36:49]**Husband:** Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:36:50]**Esther Perel:** And it came out that what you fight for is power. And what you fight for is respect and recognition. Underneath every manifest argument or conflict, people usually are actually fighting over a few things. One of them is power. One of them is trust. And one of them is respect and recognition. But it can play itself out in a conversation about the training programs, the staff-

[00:37:28]**Wife:** Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:37:28]**Esther Perel:** ... the building, the rent, whatever you want. When you argue, regardless of the topic, you're gonna find out that what she's fighting for is your recognition or respect of her smarts. The very thing that drew you to her.

[00:37:46]**Wife:** Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:37:48]**Esther Perel:** And yours is, I've thought about this loud and clear. I took my time, and when I get to a conclusion, I know what I'm saying. And you gotta trust me.

[00:38:01]**Husband:** Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:38:02] **Esther Perel:** And you can do a review of dozens and dozens of your fights and arguments and you will probably see that this is the theme each and every time.

[00:38:12] **Husband:** Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:38:14] **Wife:** Yep. And actually, oh man, you just hit so many things here that are unraveling dynamics for me.

[00:38:25] **Esther Perel:** In looking at the underlying dynamics that are behind relationship impasses. I drew a lot on the work of researcher, Howard Markman. There are three categories that he highlights of what is it that people actually fight about if they're not fighting about the toilet paper, as she says. One is power and control. Who has the decision-making power, whose priorities matter most? The other, is trust and closeness. Do you have my back? Are we in this together? And the third, is respect and recognition. Are my ideas, my contributions valued? And I think that we can look at so many issues in the workplace and see how they neatly mapped themselves along each one of these main themes.

[00:39:27] **Wife:** The power that you have it's bleeding into the gym everywhere. Everyone is looking to him. When something is said, they look over at him and they look for a reaction. And what he doesn't realize is, he has somehow developed this bandwagon effect, where he reacts a certain way negatively to something that I say everyone in the staff room is also replying negatively to it. And so the respect and the confirmation of my ideas is eroding in the gym because they immediately don't see affirmation from him.

[00:40:00] **Esther Perel:** That's a fantastic dynamic you've just described. You just reminded me, I once was giving a lecture and I said all kinds of things that were somewhat controversial, I suppose, and then noticed that everybody was looking to the professor.

[00:40:18] **Wife:** Hmm.

[00:40:19] **Esther Perel:** And if the professor went like this with his head, everybody thought, it's okay, it's acceptable. But if the professor did not shake his head, then people were left wondering, you know, if they have the permission to think autonomously about what I'm saying, and think that there is validity to it or value to it or not. You're like the professor in your gym, everybody's turning to you to get their cues.

[00:40:48] **Wife:** Yeah.

[00:40:49] **Esther Perel:** For what? They were afraid to disappoint you. Or they actually think you know better? Or you are intimidating to them or they wanna please you or what's the dance?

[00:41:00] **Wife:** Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes.

[00:41:03] **Esther Perel:** Says she, what do you say?

[00:41:05] **Wife:** That is the feedback that I have received from my staff. He's intimidating. I'm scared of him. I don't wanna let him down. I don't wanna disappoint him.

[00:41:13] **Esther Perel:** Hot or cold?

[00:41:14] **Husband:** Hot or cold. Yeah, I think it's definitely something that I've become aware of. And I guess something I've only really acknowledged in the last year is, I, I can affect the energy inside the gym within five seconds of walking in the door. And that's not something I necessarily ever wanted um, but it is a reality. Um, it's hard as a business owner when you give all that responsibility out and I don't know why it is, but you walk in and there's 100 things that have been done well, but three stand out that are, you know, done really poorly. And for whatever reason, your eyes are just drawn to those three things first. And I think in that moment, when there's disappointments, that can all of a sudden, I feel, be very amplified in my body, beyond what I ever intend.

[00:42:06] **Esther Perel:** And now?

[00:42:08] **Husband:** And now I'm trying to get better at it. Uh, I really am putting a lot of effort into, um, being more conscious of my body language. Um, I think I only before considered the words I was saying, um, I didn't really know just how much people also weighted the initial reaction, I guess. So-

[00:42:29] **Esther Perel:** Amazing. Right, you're a, you're a trainer who doesn't pay attention to body language.

[00:42:35] **Husband:** ... [Laughs] Yup.

[00:42:37] **Esther Perel:** And you do have a life partner and a business partner who actually is a natural at that.

[00:42:47] **Husband:** Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:42:48] **Esther Perel:** So it's not just, I need to learn, that's a piece of it, of course, how much you learn to become aware of your tone, your affect, your body, et cetera. But you also, you know, you need her. Can I ask you something?

[00:43:03] **Husband:** Yeah.

[00:43:04] **Esther Perel:** Where did you learn that when 100 things are done well and three were missed, you focus on the three things?

[00:43:11] **Husband:** I don't know. Like, I mean, immediately when you ask a question like that, I think about my family dynamics, but I don't, like a parent doesn't jump out. Um-

[00:43:27] **Wife:** You don't like it when I do that to you, that's been a really-

[00:43:31] **Husband:** ... Oh no, 100%, and, uh, it's been a, a project at work of, of like, okay, close your eyes as you enter and your goal is to find three positive things. Uh, that's been a task I've given [inaudible 00:43:43].

[00:43:42] **Esther Perel:** Do you do that with yourself too?

[00:43:45] **Husband:** Practice gratitude?

[00:43:46] **Esther Perel:** No. See the three things that you haven't done, or focus on the one thing that didn't go well?

[00:43:53]**Husband:** Uh, I think I do everything that I need to do. And then my, uh, awareness is brought to the stuff I haven't done well, and that leads to a feeling of never being enough. It's like, how, how have I done like 16 hours at work today? And yet there are still five things that I haven't achieved. And that's the thing that's being shone a light on right now.

[00:44:16]**Wife:** He means that, he will work till 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning.

[00:44:19]**Esther Perel:** But what he means is that you're the one who will basically deflate him by showing him the two or three things he missed.

[00:44:28]**Husband:** Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:44:30]**Esther Perel:** So she sees the problem with you, and you see the problem when you walk into the gym.

[00:44:35]**Husband:** Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:44:37]**Esther Perel:** I mean, it's a parallel process.

[00:44:39]**Husband:** Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:44:40]**Esther Perel:** Mm-hmm [affirmative]. So you have something to teach each other.

[00:44:45]**Husband:** [laughs].

[00:44:48]**Wife:** Of course we do.

[00:44:50]**Esther Perel:** You do. He can, he can help you not just hone in on the negative of him. Like you can help him just not hone in on the negative of the, of the gym.

[00:45:02]**Wife:** It's so true. And like, I do, he, we walk in and he mentioned the three things in the gym and I actually say, yeah, but look at these other things-

[00:45:09]**Esther Perel:** Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:45:10]**Wife:** ... this person is going through that. And this person did this on their time off and-

[00:45:13]**Esther Perel:** Right. But we can be very empathetic about everybody else, but him.

[00:45:18]**Wife:** ... Yeah.

[00:45:19]**Esther Perel:** Because you're resentful of him because you feel neglected, and, and you feel like he's not necessarily putting enough attention on, on the relationship, which may not be inaccurate at all.

[00:45:31]**Wife:** And there's also a component of, "Don't forget the three things you forgot to do at home."

[00:45:36]**Esther Perel:** He says?

[00:45:36] **Wife:** No, I say that. Like, you can't be upset about these three things. You forgot about three things and, and-

[00:45:42] **Esther Perel:** I see, you're good at this.

[00:45:44] **Wife:** Yeah [laughs].

[00:45:47] **Esther Perel:** Good. Very good. You've got that skill down.

[00:45:50] **Wife:** [laughs].

[00:45:52] **Husband:** [laughs].

[00:45:52] **Esther Perel:** Let me fire at you so that you can learn to do mount an artillery of defense.

[00:45:58] **Wife:** That's right.

[00:45:58] **Esther Perel:** Okay. So you can totally reinforce the defensiveness of the other and then say to them, why are you being so defensive without realizing that part of their defensiveness is in direct response to the fact that you've just attacked them.

[00:46:14] **Wife:** Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:46:14] **Esther Perel:** Or blamed them. Right? The same thing works in reverse. You know, you don't wait for her to ask you to do things for the home. You take the same initiative that you take for work.

[00:46:29] **Husband:** Mm-hmm [affirmative]. I wanna stop that fiery interaction between the two of us. It doesn't serve either one of us and it doesn't serve our business any more. Um-

[00:46:42] **Esther Perel:** Do you know how to do it?

[00:46:44] **Husband:** ... I think theoretically, yes. Um, I feel like it's gone on now long enough that it's grooved and it's so hot when we hit it. That it's, it so easily wins the moment. I mean, I feel like I'm a very grounded person and can take energy and information and not be influenced by it. But in those moments, I certainly can, I, I...

[00:47:07] **Esther Perel:** Right, because it's not information. It's, uh, it's not information. You're purely in the realm of emotion.

[00:47:14] **Husband:** Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:47:16] **Esther Perel:** And you have to course correct. You've got to first and foremost do a pattern interrupt.

[00:47:22] **Husband:** Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:47:22] **Esther Perel:** Which means, if you get down and you rapid escalate in this negative feedback loop you, one of you has to just say, let's not do this.

[00:47:33] **Husband:** Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:47:35] **Esther Perel:** And the other one, not say, you don't get to decide when we stop.

[00:47:38] **Husband:** Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:47:39] **Esther Perel:** Oh, when it suits you. You know, you just say, thank you.

[00:47:43] **Husband:** Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:47:44] **Esther Perel:** As in, we're gonna protect the relationship. 'Cause otherwise we're going to unravel.

[00:47:47] **Husband:** I think that's hard for us 'cause we both get defensive and both of us want the last word.

[00:47:48] **Esther Perel:** Yeah. So then you say like this, if I say this now, or if I do this now, or if I don't say this now, what will this do to us?

[00:48:05] **Husband:** Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:48:07] **Esther Perel:** And you will make decisions that are good for the us.

[00:48:11] **Husband:** Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:48:12] **Esther Perel:** Because if it's good for the us, it will be good for you. If it's only good for you, there may be no relationship.

[00:48:19] **Husband:** Mm-hmm [affirmative], mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:48:22] **Esther Perel:** And then there may be no business.

[00:48:24] **Husband:** Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:48:26] **Esther Perel:** So you can totally have the last word. And the last word is to say, I won't let this happen to us. We can do better. Same when you're in your meetings, in the business. And that's when one of you needs to say, what are we doing? Just simply put your hand on each other's shoulder, lap, neck, face, whatever it is, you are a couple as well. And just, you know say what a mess.

[00:48:52] **Husband:** Yeah.

[00:48:53] **Esther Perel:** Misattunement, missed, missed.

[00:48:57] **Wife:** [laughs] That could be our word.

[00:49:00] **Esther Perel:** That's it, just acknowledge, um, you know, you missed, you don't have to have a post-mortem for every misattunement.

[00:49:09] **Husband:** Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:49:10] **Wife:** Got it [laughs].

[00:49:12] **Husband:** She has, uh, like, uh, an allergic reaction to the thought of sweeping something under a rock.

[00:49:17] **Esther Perel:** But it's not, it's an acknowledgement of, we missed-

[00:49:21]**Husband:** Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:49:22]**Esther Perel:** ... [crosstalk 00:49:22], you know, you own yours. And then you first make sure that you maintain the connection. There is no value to an analysis between two people who at that moment are completely in a breach. You don't care enough. You have to be in the caring mode to want to actually understand why the other person meant what they meant and said what they said and all of that.

[00:49:50]**Wife:** Right? Yeah, and, and what you're saying is true with work as well. You know, one of the things that we were starting to get better at was celebrating when we were achieving goals at the gym. Um, I remember even when we got our loan to open the business in the first place, we had just been going through the motions for so long, that we got our loan and we got out of the bank and we put our helmets on and we were gonna bike back home and we sorta snapped out of it. And we sorta went, "Oh my gosh, we just got our loan for our business. We should go get a beer to celebrate this." And those misses to use the word again, have come up a lot, you know, "Oh, we hit 100 members. Great, move on to 150. Great to the next one."

[00:50:37]**Esther Perel:** All right. That's a very good point. So you need two codewords. One may be the miss, he likes the code words [laughs].

[00:50:46]**Wife:** [laughs].

[00:50:47]**Esther Perel:** It's miss, and on the other side, I would put mark.

[00:50:51]**Wife:** Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:50:53]**Esther Perel:** You need markers, moments where you see the before and after-

[00:50:57]**Husband:** Hmm.

[00:50:57]**Esther Perel:** ... the transition, the developmental arc, listen as a trainer, you know, marking very well.

[00:51:06]**Husband:** Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:51:07]**Esther Perel:** You are counting differently.

[00:51:09]**Husband:** Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:51:09]**Esther Perel:** It's the eight, it's the 10, it's the 12th. It's the, it's the weight. It's the distance. You are constantly marking.

[00:51:16]**Husband:** Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:51:17]**Esther Perel:** But you're not doing it for your business and you're not doing it for your relationship.

[00:51:20]**Husband:** Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:51:21]**Esther Perel:** You are not tracking.

[00:51:23]**Wife:** And following.

[00:51:25]**Esther Perel:** Yes, beautiful. So this is not the end of the story. You gotta get to work a little bit.

[00:51:35]**Husband:** [laughs].

[00:51:40]**Esther Perel:** Often people are promoted or open their own business or are in positions of leadership because they are very good at a particular skill. But that skill is actually not necessarily to be a leader or to manage people. That skill is to develop good training programs, to be a good chiropractor. This is true in large companies. And it's true for them too. They became owners and founders, but the leadership piece is the piece that still needs daily training.

[00:52:17]**Voiceover:** Esther Perel is a therapist, best-selling author, speaker, and host of the podcasts, *Where Should We Begin* and *How's Work*. To apply with a colleague or partner to do a session for the podcast or to follow along with each episode show notes, go to howswork.estherperel.com. *How's Work* is produced by Magnificent Noise for Gimlet and Esther Perel Productions. Our production staff includes, Eric Nuzum, Eva Wolchover, Hiwote Getaneh and Kristin Mueller. Original music and additional production by Paul Schneider. And the executive producers of *How's Work* are Esther Perel and Jesse Baker. We would also like to thank Lydia Polgreen, Colin Campbell, Courtney Hamilton, Nick Oxenhorn, Sara Kramer, Jack Saul, and the entire Esther Perel Global Media team.

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