

## HW S2 EP9

**Speaker 1:** [00:00:00] 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.

**Esther Perel:** [00:00:29] Some friendships carry an unspoken ethos of loyalty. That if we are really in this together, you are not to go ahead without me. In this relationship, there is a she and there is a they.

**Speaker 3:** [00:00:46] We were friends before we were coworkers. We sort of took the job together. Like it felt kind of like we were starting out, kind of as partners.

**Speaker 4:** [00:00:56] They and I started around the same time. And so from the beginning of working together, there was kind of that negotiation of how can we be most effective and work together at work and also maintain our friendship. And that caused some tension early on.

**Esther Perel:** [00:01:10] Their friendship started with a deep sense of equality.

**Speaker 3:** [00:01:16] I would say it really fractured when she was offered a promotion. She hadn't told me that like this was even in the cards hadn't like checked with me or anything instead of feeling like, Oh, we're partners in this, like now there's a literal hierarchy.

**Speaker 4:** [00:01:34] A lot of, a lot of conversations happened around why I took the promotion and the way that I did, why I didn't have conversations with them about the promotion before I took it.

**Esther Perel:** [00:01:46] And from the moment there is a power differential between them, all of these darker feelings are stewing underneath. There is competition, there is jealousy, there is a sense of betrayal.

**Speaker 3:** [00:02:02] I think like I don't trust that she has my back. We also just like, don't know how to communicate.

**Speaker 4:** [00:02:11] I want to rebuild an actual foundation of trust when we're working well together, it's just so great. It's just very hard when something happens to trigger hard feelings or conflict again.

**Esther Perel:** [00:02:28] What is hard about this conversation is that they want to preserve their friendship. But because they sit on such profound denial of their disavowed feelings of anger, of disloyalty, they're sitting in a very muted state holding back those very feelings that could shatter their friendship. And tell me, what's the best thing that can come out of our conversation today? What's your wildest dream for a positive outcome?

**Speaker 4:** [00:03:17] You're asking both of us?

**Esther Perel:** [00:03:18] Well you can't speak at the same time, so you can pick [laughs] who starts, but it's, it's a giant question.

**Speaker 3:** [00:03:25] I'll just let you know, I use they them pronouns. Just so you know.

**Esther Perel:** [00:03:30] I do know that.

**Speaker 3:** [00:03:31] Okay.

**Esther Perel:** [00:03:32] But it's a good reminder.

**Speaker 3:** [00:03:33] Yeah.

**Esther Perel:** [00:03:34] Yes. Thank you.

**Speaker 3:** [00:03:35] Yeah.

**Speaker 4:** [00:03:35] Do you wanna go first?

**Speaker 3:** [00:03:35] Uh, do wanna go first?

**Speaker 4:** [00:03:36] I can.

**Speaker 3:** [00:03:38] Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Okay.

**Speaker 4:** [00:03:44] Um, I think in my wildest dreams, I would leave this session feeling like we can trust each other again.

**Esther Perel:** [00:04:02] How would trust look like, feel like, sound like? What sorts of things does it say?

**Speaker 4:** [00:04:12] It says, I see you. I appreciate you. I respect you and make space for you.

**Esther Perel:** [00:04:27] When trust is silent, what replaces it?

**Speaker 4:** [00:04:33] Doubt, fear, self-consciousness, shame, confusion.

**Esther Perel:** [00:04:43] And how do those speak to you?

**Speaker 4:** [00:04:45] I think distrust speaks to me and it sounds like very final or just very all or nothing. Um, because trust is foundational. It's huge. Right? So to, to not have that, to me feels very, that's like a rupture.

**Esther Perel:** [00:05:12] You can't have a relationship where there is no trust.

**Speaker 4:** [00:05:17] Yeah.

**Esther Perel:** [00:05:18] Yeah. And the entire time you are speaking, they are nodding. Just so... I know you're looking at me, they are on Zoom. Um, but they are nodding. Uh, I don't know if it's their wildest dream, but they are acknowledging. Would it be accurate to say that you were acknowledging the precision also of how carefully she chose the descriptives of trust and distrust?

**Speaker 3:** [00:05:57] Yeah. I think, yeah, like acknowledging, I mean the precision and both like, I feel those things and I'm not surprised that you feel all of those things.

**Esther Perel:** [00:06:11] What's your wildest dream for this conversation? What's the best thing that could happen?

**Speaker 3:** [00:06:16] The thing I wish the most is for us to be... f- feel like it's possible to be good friends again.

**Esther Perel:** [00:06:30] You're getting nodding too. You may want to check in with each other every once in a while.

**Speaker 3:** [00:06:34] [laughs].

**Esther Perel:** [00:06:37] So you see, [laughs] that you're on the same wave length. So for this conversation, there's just one conversation. There'll be many others that you will have together. But for us, it's, uh, it's a very simple and profound frame, trust and friendship. So give me a tiny bit of history of this friendship, this work relationship and what have been it's challenges?

**Speaker 4:** [00:07:10] Do you wanna start?

**Speaker 3:** [00:07:11] Okay. Well, I would say we've been in each other's lives for about five years.

**Speaker 4:** [00:07:18] Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Five and a half.

**Speaker 3:** [00:07:21] Five and half years. I first met you when you were doing your internship year. Um, and I really admired you and was extremely inspired by you. And I remember being like, I want to lead like that and-

**Esther Perel:** [00:07:45] That being?

**Speaker 3:** [00:07:47] ... Humble and confident at the same time. And then for me, it turned into a bit of a crush. [laughs] And then that was kind of an exciting time because it solidified something for me, which I think I've been getting signs about, which is I'm queer, whatever.

**Esther Perel:** [00:08:10] Mm-hmm [affirmative].

**Speaker 3:** [00:08:11] Um, and then it wasn't reciprocated, but it was okay. And I wasn't mad at all because you didn't do anything wrong. I was just sad. And I understood. And then I moved on from seeing you in that way.

**Speaker 4:** [00:08:28] Mm-hmm [affirmative].

**Speaker 3:** [00:08:29] But I would say like, after that, in our friendship, even before we were coworkers, we did some processing around me feeling like I wasn't important to you or like feeling ignored or like, you didn't care for the friendship. But then I know you did because told me that you did and that you just express it in different ways, and that was very helpful. And then we both took the job and yeah, I was both really nervous and I thought I knew it would be like really, really good.

**Esther Perel:** [00:09:16] But you were nervous about?

**Speaker 3:** [00:09:20] I was nervous that either that I would like, or kind of like redevelop feelings of wanting something more than like friendship. Or the feeling

that I'd had before of like, even when it was like j- purely friendly that like, I would feel like I didn't really matter. And then having to show up to work and navigate that.

**Esther Perel:** [00:09:50] And what did happen in reality?

**Speaker 3:** [00:09:54] The first month didn't go... it was kind of like that, where we got into this weird dynamic where you thought, I didn't want you to like, show me like affection and appreciation. And so you weren't doing that. And then I was like, you're doing that with others. Uh, I guess this is just like a co-working relationship. [laughs]

**Speaker 4:** [00:10:29] Mm-hmm [affirmative].

**Speaker 3:** [00:10:30] And then your mom died. And I was like, what am I doing? You're one of the people that I care most about in the entire world. And this is the worst thing. And it's time to get over myself, get my butt to the funeral and like show up, and it brought us back together.

**Speaker 4:** [00:11:05] Totally.

**Speaker 3:** [00:11:06] Yeah.

**Esther Perel:** [00:11:11] This is one of those moments where I have to decide if I'm going to listen for content or listen for affect. And when I track the affect here, I'm hearing everything that is not being said. And part of the dynamic that I perceive here is that they are so invested in wondering how important they are, how much she's paying attention to them, how special they are. And it takes her losing her mother for them to put themselves aside for a moment and actually be there for the friend. Sometimes we get so caught up asking ourselves, is my friend there for me? And we forget to ask ourselves, are we there for our friends?

**Speaker 4:** [00:12:04] Yeah, I think that happened. But it was right on the heels of this thing that felt like a trust breaking month. Right? Of just like, it felt, to me that one felt like you don't want to work with me. It felt like-

**Esther Perel:** [00:12:21] But can we ask you something?

**Speaker 4:** [00:12:23] Yeah.

**Esther Perel:** [00:12:24] Just so I have a, a few other pieces. Um, you were hired for similar roles?

**Speaker 4:** [00:12:29] Yeah.

**Esther Perel:** [00:12:29] Laterally or hierarchically?

**Speaker 4:** [00:12:35] Laterally.

**Esther Perel:** [00:12:36] So you were meant to work together.

**Speaker 4:** [00:12:39] Yeah. We were hired for very similar roles, kind of like different teams-

**Esther Perel:** [00:12:43] Okay.

**Speaker 4:** [00:12:43] ... or different projects, but the same role.

**Esther Perel:** [00:12:46] Okay. What did you each said or do or not say that led the other person to think they don't want to work with me? To say you don't want to work with me is the conclusion of a whole bunch of behaviors that lead you to that summation.

**Speaker 4:** [00:13:10] I don't know. I just have this very clear memory of just like walking in the first day into the office, you just kept working. It was like, didn't acknowledge me being there. It felt like we were in the middle of a fight, but we weren't. It, it, it felt like we got off on a foot of tension within the working relationship. But I couldn't discern why or like where it had come from.

**Esther Perel:** [00:13:47] Let me ask you, because you mentioned the death of your mother. Was it a big loss?

**Speaker 4:** [00:13:56] Yes.

**Speaker 3:** [00:13:59] Yeah.

**Esther Perel:** [00:14:00] So if we put her also in the room and there was a balloon above her head, what would the statement in the balloon be?

**Speaker 4:** [00:14:11] In this moment?

**Esther Perel:** [00:14:12] Mm-hmm [affirmative]. As she looks at you grappling with this important relationship that has been a friendship, that has been a work relationship.

**Speaker 4:** [00:14:27] I think she'd say, just say the truth. She was fairly direct person.

**Esther Perel:** [00:14:39] More than you?

**Speaker 4:** [00:14:42] Yeah. [laughs]

**Esther Perel:** [00:14:44] Yes.

**Speaker 4:** [00:14:47] [laughs] Yeah.

**Esther Perel:** [00:14:52] And what holds you back?

**Speaker 4:** [00:14:55] Fear of hurting somebody or fear of rejection. And then all of those are really deeply seated in the deepest fear, which is that I am actually a bad person.

**Esther Perel:** [00:15:14] And where is that from.

**Speaker 4:** [00:15:15] That, I do not know.

**Esther Perel:** [00:15:19] Because it's a fear. You're afraid that if you are too direct, you will hurt people, but you would like to say the truth, but you don't want to be misunderstood or to hurt them or to be rejected by them. So you end up not saying things, but that doesn't mean they don't get expressed in other ways. And that is

being said at this point, despite yourself. And so in the end, you ended up hurting when everything you were hoping to do was just the opposite.

**Speaker 4:** [00:15:58] That feels very accurate just as I'm watching you [laughs] smile. Yeah. That feels true.

**Esther Perel:** [00:16:08] I've been a bad friend for w- is often con- is the p- a part of the sentence that says, when in fact I was trying so hard not to do the very thing which I ended up doing.

**Speaker 4:** [00:16:22] Yeah. I think the reality is I don't always bring forward or name, how I'm feeling or issues, or just like the truth of the situation, because I think it will cause more problems or pain or hurt. And reality that manifests in other ways, unspoken or actions unspoken or things that are spoken, but not truth that end up causing pain or hurt or harm, in a way that I had no way want or intend because I care about you and I don't want to hurt you.

**Esther Perel:** [00:17:11] And as she says it, she's doing it. This is an enactment of the very thing that she says she otherwise does. She's actually doing right now, which is not to speak her mind. And one senses it in the tempo, in the affect. Her words say, I'm afraid to hurt you. I'm afraid to lose you. Her actions say, I'm going forward. I've been giving this opportunity. And my going forward does not mean that you are not important in my life, but she's unable to reconcile these two seeming polarities in the way that she handles her friendship with they.

**Speaker 4:** [00:17:59] How are you doing?

**Speaker 3:** [00:18:00] Um, I'm, I'm doing fine. I do want to hear what you want to say. I am holding in my head space right now, the promotion-

**Speaker 4:** [00:18:13] Mm-hmm [affirmative].

**Speaker 3:** [00:18:14] ... as like a thing-

**Esther Perel:** [00:18:15] Mm-hmm [affirmative].

**Speaker 3:** [00:18:16] ... because it's relevant.

**Esther Perel:** [00:18:22] Okay. I'm listening.

**Speaker 3:** [00:18:27] [laughs] In my head we like started this job together, even though this was my very first professional organizing job, and you had two years being in the professional organizing world. And you'd mentioned very casually that, Oh, in your most recent, like yearly check-in you got some news, like it's no big deal. We've played different roles at the organization. And I have tended to kind of really speak out about things. And my two year check-in I got told I had to be more respectful. [laughs] So I was already comparing myself. And you told me that you were being promoted to lead organizer, because you were going to be like moving into a supervisor role and that you, as a woman in this field, like promotions don't come often. And so you had to take it.

And some painful things were said to me from the higher up, such as, mean, you could never do, ever what she does in a day. And she's just growing at this unusual rate. And I just, we just had no choice, but to give her this promotion. It, it

devastated me. And I was so mad at the kind of people above me who had said these things and made these decisions. In the back of my mind, I was thinking like, just the truth is like, if the roles had been reversed and I had been offered a promotion, if I'd, I think that I would have talked to you about it and this isn't the professionally smart thing to do. But I was like, I would've talked to you about it, seeing how it made you feel. And if it would've made you feel bad, I wouldn't, I don't think I would have taken it. I totally understand why you talk to me about it. Because then that opens up the possibility for me to say no, and it's your life.

**Esther Perel:** [00:20:57] But how do you interpret? I would not have accepted the promotion if I knew it upset you.

**Speaker 3:** [00:21:04] My, our friendship is more important to me than this job.

**Esther Perel:** [00:21:13] In friendship, there sometimes is an unspoken ethos that if we are in this together, we should be marching through the stages of life together too. And this horizontal line that was supposed to determine their friendship, switched when one of them got promoted and with promotion comes power, comes hierarchy, comes dependency, all transactions between them that unsettled this whole relationship. Sometimes we live our relationships with the sense of scarcity in which we experience one person's win as the other person's loss. We all have to confront our scarcity mentality when we are in the workplace with colleagues. And especially when these colleagues are our closest friends.

**Speaker 3:** [00:22:16] You know, you said like, this is... you're a woman in this field. You just have to do this. And some of the things you also said to me is like, you didn't really think about like what the name of the title would do. And like, you, you didn't really think about the power dynamics. And that was also hard to hear because it was like, how could you not think about that?

**Esther Perel:** [00:22:39] Say more about the power dynamic.

**Speaker 3:** [00:22:42] All of a sudden, we weren't a team of equals. We were a team of like, you're the superstar and the go-to person and the way you're doing it is the best way. And then also like, yeah, you living with both a coworker and a person that I kind of supervise. Like, I don't know why I feel so numb. It might be because of like shame around the feelings I have, but I know all these things are true. So I'm like saying them, but it's kind of a weird experience.

**Esther Perel:** [00:23:39] I understand the now better what was underneath the affect. And it was that sense of shame, overdose, repudiated emotions in particular jealousy. It does taunt us at our most vulnerable, the sense of you're more worthy than me and therefore you're recognized. And that sense of humiliation and self doubt, that's what is really standing in between these two. All in all, it all comes to one particular point. And that is how important am I to you? And so what I'm imagining is that some of the drama that gets created, it's in order to establish, am I your friend? How much of a friend am I to you? Do you agree with the other people here that I wasn't as good as you? So that when you say my go to this friendship, it's to, to restore that sense of, of unity of togetherness. And when I hear you say, "My goal for today is to restore trust." I hear it more in the sense of, how do I go about doing things that are good for me without immediately having to worry that they are bad for you?

Does that resonate first of all?

**Speaker 3:** [00:25:27] It feels true to me. Yeah.

**Esther Perel:** [00:25:30] But you were just talking about the effect of promotion, coupled with her co-living with other people who are also on the team and you are stacking the deck. So keep going.

**Speaker 3:** [00:25:46] It was already kind of hard before even COVID hit to be in this tension and we like kind of stopped hanging out, and I was witnessing you becoming like closer and have just like more public inside jokes with our coworker that you live with. And then COVID hit. And I think it just made everything harder for me, 'cause I mean, it was such a vulnerable time. But like seeing you to come on the screen and I feel like you're much more of a teammate with your mate, and that's so public and you talk about it and you were, you were all working on this campaign together with other of your housemates. And I had been working on the same campaign by myself. So I think I've felt like I'm losing you and it's, y- you don't care because they're like with other great people, then you don't have to leave your house for friendship. Yeah.

**Esther Perel:** [00:26:46] Yeah. Sometimes in the workplace, when we think about boundary issues between colleagues, I'm reminded of middle school, but I'm also reminded of my middle school. It's like the friend who is willing to play with me when we are alone. But when they are with their other friends, they don't pay attention to me. And it feels very raw and very unprofessional to bring those things up. But that doesn't mean that they're not there. This is everyday occurrence in many workplaces. So now let's start from the place where you haven't gone. And this includes profound questions about our friendship, profound questions about, should we stay working in the same place, profound questions about how much do we really support each other? Is there room for both of us here and how? And how do we step out of a, kind of a bind that we are in at this moment in which any of these independent steps are fraught?

When you tell the story of, I watch you there with all these people, with whom you're having fun and it's all, you know, you don't need me anymore. You don't want to hurt me, but I'm not sure you still like me, need me, want me, it's that. So if we go further with the goal of how do we restore the trust and can we reclaim our friendship? What needs to happen that you haven't done?

**Speaker 3:** [00:29:01] Yeah. I'm thinking two things. One, I guess I already did ask you, like, did you think of me when you were asked on the promotion. So we don't have to talk about that again. Um-

**Esther Perel:** [00:29:20] But did you think of me in what way?

**Speaker 3:** [00:29:22] Did you think of, of telling me before you got it?

**Speaker 4:** [00:29:29] Before I took it.

**Speaker 3:** [00:29:30] Yeah.

**Speaker 4:** [00:29:30] Right.

**Esther Perel:** [00:29:32] I mean, this is actually not really a question you've already said, if it had been reversed, I would first have thought of, and if it didn't sit right with you or if it would create friction between us, I would have chosen friendship over individual achievement. And you didn't, this is not a neutral question. So she may have thought about you, but not from the same place as you.

**Speaker 3:** [00:30:08] Yeah. It wasn't a neutral question. And that's like... and I guess that's the exact, like, yeah, you didn't think of talking to me about it. Like you didn't question taking it because of me, which is exactly the dynamic you're drying out, which is like autonomy, not being a bad thing, but like autonomy and togetherness. So I feel like, okay, that just feels hard. [laughs] So that feels hard.

**Esther Perel:** [00:30:33] But you translate that into, you're more important to me than I am to you.

**Speaker 3:** [00:30:42] Yeah.

**Esther Perel:** [00:30:45] I don't know that this is a useful division, you know, to pin them against each other like that. But your question repeatedly is how important am I in your life? That is not a good friendship question, by the way.

**Speaker 3:** [00:31:05] Hmm.

**Esther Perel:** [00:31:09] It makes the friendship very imbalanced. And you're asking them to demonstrate to you that they value your individuality. What of this is familiar to each of you, in light of other relationships that you've had other important relationships. What do you recognize here? I like the smile.

**Speaker 3:** [00:31:38] [laughs]

**Esther Perel:** [00:31:39] You're a complicit the smile that says, Oh, I, I know a few things about this.

**Speaker 3:** [00:31:43] A smile of recognition.

**Esther Perel:** [00:31:51] This is the moment where I want to go beyond the analysis of their own friendship, into their formative experiences in their families, to explore more the tension between attachment and authenticity. Because they says and says it with awareness, prove to me that I matter by sacrificing your authenticity in the name of our attachments. And it is a fusional choice to choose the promotion is the choice of differentiation to choose the friendship above the promotion. Which of course in the context of work does not really make sense, is a choice of fusion and enmeshment.

**Speaker 3:** [00:32:46] Yeah. I think it's definitely familiar feeling of wanting to feel or like struggling with feeling important in our relationships. And then I like play a certain role.

**Esther Perel:** [00:33:03] Say more.

**Speaker 3:** [00:33:10] Feeling, kind of unstable in the relationship at times when I don't have like demonstrations of importance. Like I'm aware that I, I have some like distortion of like, knowing I'm really valued and matter. Like my body feeling like threatened when I feel like I'm not getting signs, that that's true.

**Esther Perel:** [00:33:44] And when you trace the history of this pattern?

**Speaker 3:** [00:33:51] I don't know my family, I have... we're five and I have an older brother who is on the autistic spectrum. And then I'm second to him. Uh, yeah, my, my sister was always kind of like, my younger sister was always kind of like, I viewed her as being kind of in the popular group and always kind of felt a little bit like a weirdo and kind of out of place in my body and the places I inhabited, and feeling like I wasn't understanding some f- so- sort of social norm. And then having my brother who like, he really didn't have the social norms. Um.

**Esther Perel:** [00:34:37] Did you struggle at home to experience your significance?

**Speaker 3:** [00:34:43] I mean, I always felt very lifted up by my parents. Like I felt, you know, like, Oh, you're really smart. You know, you're good at th- you're good at math. You're like all of these things. And sometimes it's hard to get a word in edgewise with so many people. And I don't know, my, my dear mother bless her. Um, she was often focused on the group and kind of like absorption and like, how is the group doing? And when I was having like a feeling or something that would be like too big, if I was feeling really sad, it was like, get it together-

**Esther Perel:** [00:35:27] Mm-hmm [affirmative].

**Speaker 3:** [00:35:27] ... with people or like get it together.

**Esther Perel:** [00:35:31] What is the smile saying?

**Speaker 3:** [00:35:32] I'm just wondering if I should keep going. Uh, I know, I know I'm sort of just like, I don't know. I don't know. This is a lot, like, I don't know what to do with all these pieces of information.

**Esther Perel:** [00:35:45] Part of what you're both doing is seeing what is this that each of you is evoking in the other. And so it's less about the specific feelings themselves as about the intensity of them. They know where this intense need for recognition and affirmation is coming from. And that makes a big difference. Anybody in the workplace, any manager has had to work with some people who asked for too little recognition and some people who sometimes ask for too much. We bring to work these very complex needs that emerged from our childhood histories, and that become disguised in a kind of an adult form.

Do you ever explore together if you should stay working in the same place? Or do you ever think that if you were not working in the same place that would destroy the friendship?

**Speaker 3:** [00:37:07] It's something I've been thinking about.

**Esther Perel:** [00:37:09] Mm-hmm [affirmative].

**Speaker 3:** [00:37:12] Um, I, in some ways do feel like it's been so ruptured that you've got your coworkers. You've got your like housemate organizers. You're like supervising and like, you're all like set up and-

**Esther Perel:** [00:37:32] And you don't have strong connections with the other people?

**Speaker 3:** [00:37:35] I do.

**Esther Perel:** [00:37:37] But that doesn't come across when you say the way you just did.

**Speaker 3:** [00:37:45] I mean, it feels like you're saying-

**Esther Perel:** [00:37:45] You don't need me anymore.

**Speaker 3:** [00:37:48] You don't need me anymore. Yeah.

**Speaker 4:** [00:37:48] Yeah.

**Speaker 3:** [00:37:48] You don't need me anymore.

**Esther Perel:** [00:37:49] That's a frame. When you go that, to that place, you don't need me anymore. You've got everybody else. Now you've got your title, your position, your subordinates, your housemates, you know, you have a whole village. I don't belong anymore. What it induces in the other person is a feeling of obligation that supplants the feeling of love. I feel bad, do something. I don't belong here anymore, do something, include me. And she may do it, but you won't experience the juice. You'll experience her trying to be good. Not her freewheeling voluntary gushing of friendship and collegiality. Nodding.

**Speaker 4:** [00:38:54] Yeah. I mean, I think what you were saying feels true from my end of thing. And because I think what comes up for me when we have the conversations we have, is like, I am made to feel I, sorry. No, no, no. I feel, I feel shame around how I'm showing up, that I'm not like showing up for you in the way that you need, I'm not showing up for you the way that shows that I care. Then like going through the motions of showing you yes, I care. Or like, yes, you matter to me, that is very true to me. And then it becomes an exercise of how do I externalize that as clearly as possible, so that you can see that, but it's not. It's like an exercise of proof as opposed to like a flowing of our friendship.

**Esther Perel:** [00:39:54] Yep. And proving means that you have to show evidence and trust is often actually the opposite. It's a leap of faith. If you have to prove all the time, you obviously are not trusting. Do you understand?

**Speaker 4:** [00:40:17] I probably should leave. Um, I probably should leave. I like the work. I jive really well with some other coworkers and I will just be in a healing process around needing to let go of like the bright eyed, bushy tailed dream we had of like, we get to work together and we get to like transform this organization. It's not happening. That's so painful to me. Like I... there's like no world in which I want you to leave. And I, and I said this before, and I think we've talked about this. Like I just... like, it's kind of incomprehensible to me that we can't figure this out so that we can work together. Because i- you feel necessary to me for this work for this organization. Like, I, I haven't done this role without you here before, it feels necessary for you to s- stay for me. And like I, I, like, my heart is racing, like I feel panic. Like it's, it's like a panic feeling.

**Speaker 3:** [00:41:31] That's definitely helpful to hear. [laughs] Because I guess I had a story of like, it would just be better if I did leave, because then there would

be no drama and that people... like it would just be better if I... so hearing that is interesting.

**Speaker 4:** [00:41:56] Well, yeah. I'm sorry if I didn't... if I haven't expressed this enough or clearly enough. I think within the context of the work we do together, you're just integral to the organization, the vision, like moving all of us forward collectively. And also in the context of just the work you do, I feel inspired and like motivated in my own work by watching you. I can understand it being hard to keep doing the work you're doing and it continuing to not feel good. The work itself is hard. And so to also have it feel bad while you're doing it on top of it being so hard, it makes it unsustainable work environment for you. And I want that to not be the case. And on top of this, like repairing our friendship-ness.

**Speaker 3:** [00:43:09] Right. It's like, that was like, that's like layer, layer, layer.

**Speaker 4:** [00:43:14] Um, I don't, I don't want you to leave and I don't think things get easier for our friendship if you leave either. But that's... like, like I don't like, it just feels like it's all bound up.

**Esther Perel:** [00:43:29] What's it like to hear all this?

**Speaker 3:** [00:43:31] I don't know. I think, um, I'm just not feeling so hopeful every time I see you in a meeting, I feel so bad. And it's not your fault at all. It's my own reaction. For the record. I don't have anywhere else I would want to go or feel excited about anything else. So I don't know what I would do. I would figure it out.

**Speaker 4:** [00:44:10] For the record I don't want you to go. So, that's [inaudible 00:44:14]. But I'm hearing you saying that might not be enough.

**Speaker 3:** [00:44:27] I'm thinking about taking some time off.

**Speaker 4:** [00:44:30] Yeah.

**Speaker 3:** [00:44:32] Seeing how I feel to kind of get out of being so triggered all the time, which would be ultimately an e- an effort to see if I can come back. I'm thinking I might do this really soon.

**Esther Perel:** [00:44:57] We're ending the session in a very different place of where they bought originally said they want to go restoring trust and rebuilding the friendship. And we're talking about a real feminist dilemma that especially she is experiencing, which is that if she pursues her autonomy, her professional aspirations, her individual needs, she compromises her relationships and her sense of loyalty, an old dilemma for women, historically universally. However, they is also struggling with her own version of the autonomy, which is the permission to leave as a solution to certain relational dilemmas, not in order to end the relationship, but in fact, in order to allow this relationship to become a friendship, again. They may not be in the spot that they imagined, but they are certainly in a more honest spot than they have been.

**Speaker 1:** [00:46:19] 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 [how'swork.estherperel.com](http://how'swork.estherperel.com). *How's Work* is produced by

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