

Shmanners 187: Ask Shmanners

Published November 15th, 2019

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[theme music plays]

Travis: Hello, internet! I'm your husband host, Travis McElroy.

Teresa: And I'm your wife host, Teresa McElroy.

Travis: And you're listening to Shmanners!

Teresa: It's extraordinary etiquette...

Travis: ... for ordinary occasions. Hello, my dove.

Teresa: Hello, dear.

Travis: How are you?

Teresa: Y'know, it's... I'm pretty good, I think.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: There's some snow on the ground. I've got some comfy pants. Dog on my lap.

Travis: You like that snow on the ground?

Teresa: Yeah. I think I do.

Travis: Oh, I don't care for it. Oooh.

Teresa: I think I do.

Travis: [in a gruff voice, as if imitating a pirate] Oooh, I remember being a child, and appreciating the snow on the ground. Now... oooh...

Teresa: [laughs] Were you also a pirate?

Travis: [pirate voice] I was an old sea captain when I was eight, and I enjoyed the snow on the ground, but now, it just gets me boots wet.
[normally] And I don't care for it!

Teresa: I see.

Travis: But, good news – I'm about to leave Cincinnati in, mmm, an hour and 45 minutes to go... to Chicago, where I'm sure it'll be a lot better!

Teresa: [laughs] I'm sure. It's gonna be so much nicer in Chicago.

Travis: Yeah. Which is why we're doing an Ask Shmanners, and if you hadn't put it together, we're recording it way ahead of time, so we'll try not to make any topical jokes, I guess.

Now, listen, we've done Ask Shmanners before, but if you're new and this is your first time, basically, Ask Shmanners is the opportunity for people to ask very specific questions that may not fit into a big, broad topic like we normally do.

So, for example, while we have done job interviews before, Mallory asked for job interview politeness tips. And I feel like this is a pretty overarching thing, of like...

Teresa: Sure.

Travis: You want to be a good listener. And this is just a general one, but this is something that people are bad at in conversations to begin with – let the person finish asking their question before you answer, instead of like, anticipating where they're going with it. I—listen, I'm bad about that.

Teresa: Yeah, that—you could feel my eyes upon your face when you said that, couldn't you? [laughs]

Travis: Yeah. Listen, learn—do as I say, not as I do. You want to actively listen.

Teresa: [laughs] Uh, another thing is, I would suggest that you look up some open body postures. Y'know, all you have to do is type that in the internet, and you'll find it. Uh, things like not crossing your arms. Not crossing your legs at the knee. If you need to cross your legs, I would say maybe cross at the ankle.

Travis: And this is one I saw from interviewing people. Don't put your head down and look up to answer, like—raise your chin and look them like, face to face, right?

Teresa: Yeah, it exudes confidence and openness.

Travis: Yeah. And in general, that confidence, excitement... like, that's the thing is, I interviewed a lot of people when I was like, a manager at different places, who were very qualified and gave good answers, but did so with kind of a lackadaisical attitude that made it hard to get excited about them as a job candidate.

Teresa: Sure. Sure.

Travis: Right? You want to be excited about the candidate. So you don't have to be like, faking it. But like, answer, y'know, with a smile, and answer with confidence, and answer, uh, y'know, boldly.

Teresa: Oho, boldly!

Travis: Uh, this is from Dorothy. "So I am the worst when it comes to extracting myself smooth—" I doubt you're the worst. "I am the worst when it comes to extracting myself smoothly from overly long conversations. I always awkwardly end them. Any suggestions?"

Teresa: Uh, get a couple of go-to phrases. They don't necessarily have to be, "I gotta go," but how about, "Thanks for talking with me!" Or, "I hope you see you again sometime." These kind of exit sentences are social cues that, hopefully, the other person will pick up on. But I mean, if you do have to leave, then that's a perfectly acceptable answer as well. Like, "It was nice catching up with you, but I have somewhere to be."

Travis: Right. This is another one that I use a lot, which is, "Oh, I'm sorry, will you excuse me?" Uh, which is, you're apologizing for walking away from the conversation, you're asking to be excused, and then you just walk away. Right? At a certain point, I have rarely ever been involved in what I would call an overly long conversation with someone I am also excited to talk to. With someone that I like, care about and genuinely want to build a relationship with.

Teresa: Right. It doesn't feel long that way.

Travis: Right. And so, I think as long as you're polite about it, like, y'know, we only got so much time on this big blue earth, and you want to use it, y'know, wisely as far as I'm concerned.

Teresa: Yeah, so find those phrases that feel good in your mouth as you say them. And you can just use the same—oh, you okay, Bub?

Travis: That was a good cough from Buttercup.

Teresa: You can just use the same one over and over, and that'll just be your go-to one, because hopefully, you're not having to excuse yourself from the same conversation over and over again. [laughs]

Travis: And listen, chances are, if you're feeling like it's going long, the other person probably has an inkling of the same. Like...

Teresa: Yeah, maybe they're looking for an out as well.

Travis: Right. And here's the thing – man, I say that too much. And another thing!

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: There are many subjects that I find very interesting that I know are boring to other people. And I would hate to think that I thought everyone in the conversation was interested, but actually, I was boring them. Right? So if you find the conversation uninteresting—

Teresa: Or, even if you're just not in the mood for it.

Travis: Right.

Teresa: I've often asked you, let's put a pin in this. We'll come back to it later.

Travis: Yes. Right. Right? Timing, interest, maybe you don't feel good, all of these things. It's understandable. Every—I think it is perfectly normal to not want to stay engaged in a conversation that's going too long.

Uh, this is from Elise. "How do you establish boundaries in the workplace when people constantly gossip to you about people you work with?"

Teresa: Hmm. Um, well, so, here's the thing. Hopefully, you can development a reputation for not participating, really. Right? And I think that the gossip, like, fuel is your interest.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: So if you act uninterested, uh, so, things like, we talked about open body posture for an interview. Close yourself off. Busy your hands. Um, y'know, work with your computer. Do your job instead of stopping what you're doing, and if you are not interested, hopefully the gossip train will move right past ya.

Travis: And here's the thing—[groans] Stop it, Travis! Another thing.

Teresa: [laughs] You are never gonna get rid of that. You say it a million times a day. It's just part of your life!

Travis: I know. Um, gossip in the workplace usually comes down to one simple cause, and that is, usually, the only thing you have in common with your coworkers is the office, is the job. You rarely have shared friends outside, you rarely... y'know, like, you don't go hang out with them. You don't really have other things to talk to, so everyone knows that office gossip is something people can relate to.

So, if you're looking to avoid that while continuing to have conversations with your coworkers, I would suggest finding shared interests outside of that.

Teresa: Oh, that's a great idea!

Travis: Thank you! Ask them questions about what TV shows they watch, if you both follow sports, whatever you can find that gives you common ground for something to talk about that's not your coworkers.

Teresa: I mean, even if it's, "Your coffee smells great. Where do you buy your beans?"

Travis: Right. Maybe don't put it that way.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Um, y'know...

Teresa: That's not how the hip, young kids talk about their joe?

Travis: Nooo. Ask them about family, plans, y'know, all that stuff. It comes from...

Teresa: Holidays, vacations, uh... if maybe you've noticed them exercising, or seen them around outside at their favorite lunch place.

Travis: A new big movie comes out. Let's talk about the Avengers, right? Like, yes, absolutely. Do that. Because that's the thing, if—I would say you don't want to put a dead stop to—"Hey, did you hear about what happened with Joe?" And you're like, "I don't want to talk, Doug!"

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Right, like, that can be rude. But if you say, "Y'know, I'm not really comfortable with gossip, but... do you watch Game of Thrones? Because blah blah..." Or whatever.

Teresa: Sure.

Travis: Whatever show people... "Do you watch His Dark Materials?" Whatever you want to talk about. Right? That is a much better, uh, exit strategy I think than just saying like, "Don't talk to me, Doug. I'm not interested in your sinful gossip!" [laughs] I don't know why it's sinful, but I just assume.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Uh, let's see. This is from Andreas. "Here's a weird one."

Teresa: Oh!

Travis: "What's the etiquette for spitting outdoors? If I have a cold or something and need to rapidly move some saliva from my mouth, when and where is it polite?"

Teresa: Well, you're outside, and that's a good thing already. Um, I would... [sighs] Uh...

Travis: If you have a cold, I'll go ahead and say this – you should—

Teresa: You should carry a hanky.

Travis: Handkerchief, or whatever. Tissues. Whatever, and spit into those.

Teresa: Um, if that is not an option, uh, and you are around people, separate yourself from the group. Don't spit in anyone's general direction.

Travis: Don't spit into the wind.

Teresa: Don't spit into the wind.

Travis: Don't tug on Superman's cape.

Teresa: [laughs] Maybe find, uh—there are lots of outdoor trashcans.

Travis: Mm-hmm.

Teresa: Uh, find a trashcan to spit into. Um, I think just really try and be discreet. Don't draw attention to yourself.

Travis: Yeah, don't make a big show of it. Yeah, yeah, yeah. 'Cause that's not—sometimes, with like, the snorting and stuff, it can be a real thing.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: Don't do that.

Teresa: Try not to draw attention to yourself, and hopefully no one will notice.

Travis: Right.

Teresa: But if they do notice, and you feel ill, they'll forgive you.

Travis: You can just say, "I don't feel good." Right? Okay. Cool. Um, and that's the thing – if it is a problem, apologize. It's always a good way to go. Say 'excuse me' or whatever you want to say.

Um, so this is from Holly. "I'm usually the one driving on long road trips with my friends. If no one offers, is it okay to ask for gas money, or am I signing up for that expense when I volunteer to drive?"

Teresa: Um... I think that this is about expectations, right? So when you volunteer to drive is the time to address this.

Travis: "I'm happy to drive. Is it okay if we split the cost of gas?"

Teresa: Sure.

Travis: There you go.

Teresa: Exactly.

Travis: Like, do it then, instead of afterwards, or waiting for someone to offer. I saw somebody – and this isn't to put anyone on blast, which is why I'm not saying a name – but somebody said like, "Well, it's an unspoken rule." And the problem with unspoken rules is, they're unspoken.

Teresa: Right.

Travis: So, I think setting an expectation like this keeps you from feeling any kind of resentment when people don't offer, or when it doesn't happen. Right? Like, I could see where, if I said, "I'm headed down there," and they say, "Could I catch a ride with you?" That they might be thinking, "Oh, they were going that way anyway, so this isn't inconvenient to them at all."

Except now, you are saving them from having to—right? So like, I think talking about it is very important.

Teresa: Yeah. And it can be as easy as, "I'm heading down anyway. If you would like a ride, would you mind chipping in for gas?"

Travis: Right. Right. Exactly.

Teresa: Perfect.

Travis: "I'm happy to drive if you're okay splitting gas." Whatever you want to say.

Now, I like this question, 'cause this is something we kind of touch on a lot, but this will give us a chance to expound on it. Rosie asks, "What's the difference between manners/etiquette and being nice and polite?"

Teresa: Um, so, in my understanding, etiquette is a procedure, and manners are a habit.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Um, so, where etiquette is concerned, specific tasks have specific kind of social rules around them. Um, and then, manners is the way that you behave to navigate just general society.

Travis: And I think the difference between, if we put like, manners and etiquette into brackets, and nice and polite into brackets, I think the difference between the two brackets, the two groups, is that I think manners and etiquette – we've talked about this many times – is the way that one governs themselves, right? Is the process that allows you to navigate social situations, or even personal situations, and say, "Okay, well, I do this and this and this and then I don't need to worry about it."

Where I think nice and polite, whatever their original, y'know, where the words come from, have come to mean the very performative thing. Not that there's anything wrong with being nice or polite. But more that—

Teresa: As long as it's genuine.

Travis: Right. Exactly. Most of the time, when we get questions about like, "How do I politely ask someone to turn down very loud music?" Or, "How do I politely ask someone to stop, y'know, screaming in a public place?" Right? You're trying to be nice and polite for someone who is not being nice and polite, and you're—so it can get tricky.

But I think the thing is, when you are being mannerly, when you are being—when you are focusing on etiquette, it's about your own experience and the shared experience of those around you, and polite has come, to me at least, when I think about it in terms of the show now, like a tone of voice people want to use to not feel like they're bothering anyone.

Teresa: Sure.

Travis: Right? And nice feels like a thing, you can pretend to be nice while being very rude. Y'know? So I think that just for the sake of clarity, I've tried to stop thinking in terms of like, nice and polite, and more in terms of, "Am I bettering the experience of not only myself, but everyone around me?"

Teresa: I think that that's fair. I really do. Um, I think that one of the ways that um, nice and polite get used in this day and age, it is as a weakness. Whereas, if you think about manners and etiquette, it's more of a roadmap.

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: Of how we navigate, like I said, our lives within society. So um, if you, y'know, if you endeavor to be nice and act politely, you are mannerly.

Travis: Right.

Teresa: But um, if you are feigning niceties in order to not step on anybody, then I think that what you really need to do is check out the etiquette so that you can define the procedure without having the kind of façade.

Travis: Right. And here's the thing—mmm. Y'know what, I'm gonna embrace it. Here's the thing, TM.

Teresa: [laughs] TM TM TM TM.

Travis: When we talk about being nice, it's not always about being really nice or feigning nice, right? Sometimes, there's another option where... and I

can say this as like, I'm a straight, white, cis dude, right? Who has lived a lot of my life just trying not to make people upset. Just trying to be nice. Right? But there is a time where, if I see someone else being mean, being rude, uh, y'know, making someone else feel like less of a person, making them uncomfortable, or worse... the right thing to do is to say something.

Teresa: Absolutely.

Travis: The right thing to do—and that might not feel nice to confront someone, to say something.

Teresa: But it can be done politely.

Travis: Right. It can be done mannerly. Right? And I don't use the word polite, only because I think that that has become something that people say of like, "But I want to be polite." It's like, well, it's very much like the real world of like, stop being polite. Start getting real.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Sometimes, you have to say something.

Teresa: Like I said, it conveys weakness or timidity.

Travis: Right. And I think it does—it shouldn't, but I do think it often is used that way, of y'know, sometimes the mannerly thing to do is to say something. Is to stand up. Is to, what some might say, be aggressive. Right? But it's only because that's why there are structures put in place. That's why it's like, y'know what? I talked to the manager. The manager didn't do anything. This person has continued to be a problem. I'm going to say something. That's a mannerly execution of steps.

Teresa: You followed the steps, yeah. And it's never impolite to state your needs.

Travis: Or to protect someone else. That's what I think. I will use my privilege like a shield.

Um, this is from, along these same lines, this is from, uh... I'm going to say, GloomyElves on Twitter. "How do you politely tell people to be quieter? I'm autistic, so I can't handle a lot of the loud noise, but I'm always afraid I'm going to come off as rude."

Right, so this is one of those examples, where I think... I think it's perfectly okay to say, uh, "Excuse me. Would you mind keeping it down a little bit? I have some sensory issues, and I'd really appreciate it." I don't think you have to say 'I'm sorry.' I don't think you have to lead with an apology. I think you can say—state your needs.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: Now, the other person might say no, or, "I'm not going to," or disregard your experience. That happens. Right? But I don't think it is impolite or rude to state your needs, or something you're having an issue with, right? Like, if we took this a different way, if you had a compromised immune system, and someone was coughing in your face, and you said, "Hey, please don't cough in my face, I have a compromised immune system."

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: That's a perfectly reasonable request. So if yours is a sensory issue, I think that that's perfectly reasonable as well. But not everybody responds reasonably to reasonable requests.

Teresa: Right. And here are some physical things that you can do. Uh, step away from the person. So you—you make—create some more physical distance. That might give a hint. Or, if that doesn't work, you could step closer to the person. Lower your tone of voice, lower your volume, so hopefully, the other person will match that.

Travis: Yeah. I think especially, if this is someone who you are hoping to have some kind of relationship with, be it friendship, coworker, whatever... this is a thing that you need to address sooner rather than... y'know, like..

Teresa: Right. Don't ignore it.

Travis: Right. Because I think, much like if you are someone who does not like to be hugged, doesn't like to be touched, right? That's something you would want to tell a friend or a loved one, right? So I think—that's a touch thing, and this is—and y'know, this is an auditory thing, much like if you were allergic to perfumes. You would say something like, "Hey, I'm allergic to that perfume." I don't think it's unreasonable to express your needs regarding auditory issues.

Teresa: And as you develop your relationship with the other person, uh, you can include other, like, um... other clues, so that you don't have to say it every time. For example, sometimes like, in the car, Travis will get a little excited about what he's talking about.

Travis: About whatever. Sometimes it's like Daniel Tiger fan theories, y'know?

Teresa: [laughs] He—and gets loud. You can be loud. You know this. So um...

Travis: [whispers] What?

Teresa: [laughs] I often employ a gentle touch of the hand, and this is our signal without me having to tell him, "Stop yelling at me." Sometimes I do have to say, "Stop yelling at me." [laughs]

Travis: Yes. When I'm especially excited, like when we're getting into analysis of the songs from Frozen. Oh boy.

Teresa: Exactly. Oh man.

Travis: I got into a big conversation without our friend Rory the other day. I was like, "No, here's the thing – it's not about the powers, Rory. It's about the relationship between Ana and Elsa." I was getting very passionate about this.

Teresa: [laughing] And so, you can develop these social cues as you develop your relationship.

Travis: Uh, we're going to answer even more questions, but first, a thank you note for our sponsors.

[theme music plays]

Teresa: This week, Shmanners is brought to you in part by Zola. We've talked about Zola before.

Travis: Hey, I like the way you said that. That's how you should answer questions in an interview, with a smile. "Zola!" Right? You're excited about it.

Teresa: [laughs] Well, thank you.

Travis: Not just like, "Ugh, it's Zola..."

Teresa: I've been told that you can hear a smile.

Travis: I think so, too. Especially if you do this. Ararararara!

Teresa: [laughs] Zola takes the stress out of wedding planning with free wedding websites and easy wedding registry, and affordable... oh, you have really...

Travis: I'm sorry, it was that thing with the smile. I know, it threw you.

Teresa: It was. It threw me, and now I can't stop thinking about it, and I'm giggling.

Travis: Arararara!

Teresa: [sighs] Affordable invites, suites, and more. So there are tons of templates; over a hundred beautiful templates that you can pick and choose from for your specific style, for every type of wedding. And here's the thing about Zola...

Travis: Oh no, now I've made you start saying 'here's the thing.'

Teresa: I can pepper it in.

Travis: Oh, okay.

Teresa: Without over seasoning.

Travis: Okay. [laughs] Without over seasoning the stew.

Teresa: [laughs] Uh, the registry is really my favorite part, because um, you... you place the registry through Zola. You have a lot of really great options for shipping. You have a lot of really great options for um, monetary gifts. Also, for splitting gifts between guests. So it really takes a lot of the stress out of, "Oh, is this purchase too big?" From wherever. Like, those big box stores or something, or department stores, and I feel like no one is gonna be able to afford to get this for me. Is it even worth asking? Do I need to just put a million little things I don't really need?

All this kind of stuff is solved by Zola. And you can start your free wedding website, and also get \$50 off your registry on Zola. So go to Zola.com/Shmanners today.

Travis: This week, we're also sponsored by Bombas. Listen, socks are great. There, I said it. Socks are great. It's wet and cold here, and I'm very excited. No joke, today, as I was packing, I was so excited to pull out some Bombas socks to take with me, 'cause I know they're going to keep my feet toasty warm and comfortable. And Bombas socks are built with extra cushioning, so whether you're walking the dog, or y'know, just hanging out at home or whatever, you'll be comfortable.

They're comfortable and versatile. They even have a line of Merino wool socks. They're soft, warm, and naturally moisture wicking, never itchy or rough. Did you know that socks are the number one most requested item in homeless shelters? And this is personally—

Teresa: Especially this time of year, I would think.

Travis: Yes. This is my favorite thing about Bombas. Bombas socks were created to change that. For every pair you buy, Bombas donates a pair to someone in need. So, go to Bombas.com/Shmanners, and get 20% off your first purchase. That's Bombas.com/Shmanners. Bombas.com/Shmanners.

This is from Jordan. "When lending out books, how long until you should expect them returned? What do you do when they come back damaged?"

Teresa: Ooh, okay. We discussed this just a little bit in our borrowing episode. Um, but here's the thing – what I always suggest is explaining your expectations beforehand. Right? So, when you allow someone to borrow a book, you say something like, "And I'll check in with you in about a month." Or, um, "If you could get this back to me before the school year ends, that'd be perfect." Or something like that. Right?

Um, that would eliminate a lot of this. But I do think that it depends on the book. Is it reference material? Is it, um, a novel? Is it an especially long and complicated novel? So, if it's something where the time to use it would be very short... like I said, for like a reference book.

Um, if you're doing, y'know, a report, or putting together some type of survey or something that you need it for, you don't tend to hold onto those books for a long time, because you only need to look up one or two specific things. I think that you could expect that back within one to two weeks.

Travis: Everything you have said is correct. But here's my Travis McElroy hot take.

Teresa: Okay. [laughs]

Travis: If you are loaning a book, a DVD, a video game to someone, you should consider that you have given it to them. And if you get it back, that should be a surprise. I have books that people have loaned me. I have loaned books to other people. The thing is, it just doesn't always work that way. You should never, ever loan anything to somebody that you're not willing to never get back.

Especially when you talk about, what do you do if it comes back damaged? If it's precious to you... like, I have two sets of books. My favorite book series when I was a kid, that taught me—like, I feel like taught me a lot. I loved them so much, I bought a second set and kept those in a box so that I had a set to like, take with me places when I read them, or that I could loan them to somebody and not worry about not having them at home.

I think that a lot of it, I consider like, a cultural exchange of like, "I'm giving you this book because I want you to read it." Now, yes, in a perfect world, you would get things back that you loaned to somebody. And if it's something like you're loaning them, y'know, your car, or a tool, or something like that, yes, a piece of clothing, sure. But I think there's something about books and movies and video games that makes it almost impossible to get back from people.

Teresa: That's interesting.

Travis: And especially like I said, if it's something where like, this is a first edition, or this book is very precious to me, or this is my favorite movie, I would not loan those to somebody, right?

Like, if you were—for example, if you have beautiful hardbound, like, series of Harry Potter books, right? And it's a complete collection that you love, and you really want your friend to read the first Harry Potter book, and they never have. I would like, go on Amazon and find like, the cheapest paperback copy you can find and give that to them. Right? And then say, "I got this for you," instead of giving them that hardbound collection edition. Right? I think...

Teresa: That does offer the safest alternative. You are right. But I don't think it is unreasonable to, um, ask someone to give it back.

Travis: Absolutely.

Teresa: If... and the way that I would suggest you go about this is, um, asking, "Did you enjoy the book I lent you? Did you enjoy the movie? Do you want to talk about it?" The next question for this is, "Did you finish it?" [laughs]

Travis: Right. Listen, everything you're saying is completely reasonable. But I'm saying, I would not do it, at this point in my life.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: And this follow up question—well, not a follow up question, but a related question from Leslie, "If a friend borrows an item in perfect, working condition, and returns it in a nonfunctional state, am I unreasonable to expect a replacement?" Then, this twist that I think we should talk about separately, "Especially when they've borrowed and returned stuff in less than good shape before." Leslie...

Teresa: Stop letting people borrow your stuff. [laughs]

Travis: Stop. If that person has borrowed something before, and they returned it in a nonworking condition, and didn't replace it... you should not let them borrow anything again. I think that that is completely understandable and reason— "I loaned you my TV, Derek, and when you gave it back, it did not work. So no, you can't borrow my car." I think that that's perfectly understandable.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Now, if this is a one-time thing, I think that, y'know, if they bring it back and it's not working, I think it's understandable to say, "I would appreciate if you could replace it." Because if they haven't offered to... okay,

this is where we get back into like, the polite versus like, mannerly etiquette thing, right?

If this person is someone you have a relationship with, and they broke something they borrowed from you, and they do not offer to replace it, I would argue that any damage you're worried about doing to the relationship by asking for a replacement has already been done by them demonstrating that they are not thinking about your experience enough to offer a replacement. So you trying to avoid some kind of confrontation to protect the relationship is fruitless, because the damage has already been done. Right? Because you know this now.

Teresa: Sure. Let's put it a little different way.

Travis: I know, that was very serious and dour, but I stand by it.

Teresa: And say, you need to figure out what this relationship means to you. Right? So Leslie, if this relationship is very important for you, and you want to continue it, um, I think that it is okay to ask for something. "Well, it worked when I gave it to you. What happened?" Right? Um, give them a chance to explain. Maybe it was an accident. Maybe it just stopped working.

Some of the things that we buy on Amazon are better than other things, and some of them stop working. Just inexplicably. Um, inexplicably?

Travis: I don't know, I wasn't gonna correct you.

Teresa: Either way. Um, and so, if this is a relationship you're interested in continuing, you can ask for that kind of information. Um, and then, the next decision also, if you are interested in cultivating this relationship, is um, how... is the way of, "Would you mind?" Or... no, maybe not 'would you mind.'

Travis: "I would appreciate."

Teresa: "I would appreciate some compensation for the broken item." And maybe compensation is a little too formal.

Travis: “Could you help me replace it?”

Teresa: Sure.

Travis: Um, this question comes from Kai. “I’m an untransitioned, young trans man. How do I correct my teachers and classmates on my pronouns without coming off as rude or distracting?”

Teresa: It’s not rude or distracting.

Travis: Right.

Teresa: Do it as often as you need to, and as calmly as you can.

Travis: Though, I will say – if it happens enough that you're angry about it, I think that anger is completely justified.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Right? And here’s—

Teresa: But if you don’t want people to uh, to go back into their head and be like, mortified about the mistakes that they're making, I think calm is the way to activate more of a relationship.

Travis: Yeah. I mean, here’s the thing. It’s a very tricky subject, Kai. Because the thing is, both Teresa and I are cis, right? So it’s hard to understand the frustration that comes from not having your identity respected and appreciated by people whose opinion and experience you care about.

So I think it’s very understandable that you would be angry about it, and that it would be very frustrating for you. While at the same time, trying to balance the expectation, and trying to take on the burden of educating your friends, and educating your teachers... like, it’s a lot to ask. And I

understand—I don't understand. But I appreciate that it must be incredibly frustrating.

But I think when it comes to identity and being worried about feeling rude or distracting, I think about all the other forms of identity that people are comfortable correcting someone on.

Teresa: Yeah. If someone mispronounced my name, I wouldn't get mad about it, per se, unless it was continual. But I would say...

Travis: You wouldn't feel bad.

Teresa: I wouldn't feel bad. I would say, "It's Teresa." And then I would continue what I was saying. I think that the... the um, the kind of embarrassment on the other person's part comes from that space between the correction and the continuing of the conversation. So if you eliminate that space between, "It's Teresa," and, "What I was saying was..." There's no space there, right?

Travis: Right.

Teresa: So there's hardly any time for anyone to feel embarrassed, 'cause you're continuing your point.

Travis: And that's a—I think about like, I'm from West Virginia, right? And if someone says, "You're from Virginia," I would offhandedly say like, "Well, West Virginia, but yes." Like, I wouldn't feel rude saying that.

Teresa: Exactly!

Travis: The thing is, Kai, is if you're worried about feeling rude, what you're really worried about is how the other person is going to receive the information. And you can't control that. You can say it in the most, y'know, mannerly, clear, whatever kind manner, and the other person can still make a big deal out of it.

Because that's them. That's their own experience, how they feel about when it comes to gender identity in general, it has nothing to do with you. The only thing you can control in this life is your own experience. And your identity being respected is perfectly valid and important, and something that I think is worth protecting, and you should not feel rude doing it.

Uh, on a completely different note, uh, this comes from Kate. "Conflicting reports from both sides of the family. Must bread at the table be torn and buttered piece by piece before it enters your mouth, or is it cool to butter the whole roll, slice, and then bite it?" Teresa. Go.

Teresa: [laughs] This is about familial relations, right? In the way of, are you at home at your dinner table with the people that you eat with every single day for, y'know, for 15 years? Then, yeah. Do what you want to do. Like, if someone is paying attention to you ripping and buttering, or buttering a whole slice of toast at once, like... you all need some more articles of conversation to talk about. [laughs]

Travis: Yes, I agree.

Teresa: But...

Travis: If you're at dinner with the Queen...

Teresa: If you're at dinner with the Queen, it is expected.

Travis: The textbook answer, I would say. The Emily Post textbook answer.

Teresa: Yes, the Emily Post textbook answer is that one should tear off, or uh, or section off a bite-sized piece, butter it individually, and eat it immediately. Doing this before every bite of roll or bread or whatever. Also, the bread served as a... almost an appetizer in this country, um, isn't something that one should just kind of like, mainline, right? Just get it down. It's meant to stifle your hunger while you continue conversation.

Travis: It keeps everything from turning into like a post-apocalyptic, like, wild, like...

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Every person for themselves.

Teresa: But it's supposed to be during conversation, right? So—

Travis: Hence the tiny pieces instead of a big mouthful.

Teresa: Hence the tiny pieces. Exactly. But if you're at home at your dinner table, and you want to butter your whole bread at the same time, as long as you take one bite, chew, and swallow after you've put the bread down, and don't just like... I'm envisioning like, Dagwood sandwich style.

Travis: Oh, like folding the bread into a tiny—

Teresa: [imitating taking a big bite] Aaahhm.

Travis: Folding it seven times.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: But this is the thing. Like, we've talked about this many times before. We talked about it when we first talked about like, elbows on the table.

Teresa: Right.

Travis: Is that there are these things that people have been told like, 100% of the time, do—and like, that's just not how it actually is supposed to work. Because the thing about etiquette and manners is, it's a process that changes. It's the reason, if you see like, y'know, 17 pieces of flatware laid out for a big, fancy, nine-course dinner, you wouldn't also lay that out for like, a simple dinner at home with your family. They're two different circumstances.

Teresa: Right.

Travis: So elbows on the table is about like...

Teresa: Don't get your elbows in your food. Because when the food is on the table, there's probably not room for your elbows.

Travis: If it's a crowded table, keep your elbows off the table so you don't elbow somebody else, right? Like—

Teresa: If you're finished eating or between courses, or uh, there's a— there's plenty of room on the table so that you don't get your elbows in the food, and you're interested in the conversation that's happening, the relationships that are being formed... hopefully, no one is upset that you put your elbows on the table, because you're showing interest, right?

Travis: Right.

Teresa: So, with the bread, it's about still leaving room between bites for the relationships that you're having at the table. That's why the suggestion has always been, one small bite, buttered once at a time, to facilitate this continued conversation.

Travis: Agreed. Uh, one last question. This is from Mr. Book Boy. "How do you explain to people you have a mental health disorder, such as ADHD or autism?" Um, I can't speak to autism, but I can speak from my experience as someone with ADD and ADHD, is uh, I don't—okay. I have to be very careful here, 'cause once again, I'm speaking from my own experience, and not a universal answer.

But I do not apologize for having ADD. I do apologize, for example, if someone is telling me something and I zone out in the middle of it, and I miss the second thing that they have told me... it is not an excuse that I have ADD. If they say, "What did I just say?" or, "Were you not listening?" I wouldn't be like, "I've got ADD. Don't know what to tell you." I would say, "I'm sorry. I lost track of what you were saying. Could you please repeat yourself?"

But I think, as far as I'm concerned, the way I look at it is, if I'm working as hard as I can with the resources that I have, with the tools in my tool chest, to try to like, be my best, and I fall short of that sometimes, that's how it happens. Everybody has something like that. Um, not saying everybody has some kind of mental thing going on, but everybody has something that makes them not the perfect person in the world, 'cause there's no such thing as a perfect person.

Teresa: Right. I have chronic asthma. So there are certain activities that I cannot do. But I never apologize for my medical condition, and the—when it comes up, it comes up because of the medical condition. Not as a, y'know, I don't introduce myself as, "Hi, I'm Teresa and I have asthma," um, because that's not relevant to the situation.

If you find that these sorts of things are relevant to the situation, you should—I don't think that you have to apologize, but you can let people know that this is something that you deal with.

Travis: Um, also—so, you asked about explaining, and I would also say that, something I learned a long, long time ago is that, when explaining starts to turn to having to justify your own experience, that's a perfectly fine time to end that conversation.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: Y'know, there are plenty of people who will go out of their way to tell me about how ADD was made up to give kids drugs or whatever, and y'know, I don't need to explain myself to that person.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: I don't need to try to change their mind, that they are trying to deny the experience that I have had over and over and over again. Um, and so, I now, at 36, have—I will talk about that kind of thing with someone who I'm invested in that relationship. And it's like, it's important to me that this person kind of knows where I'm coming from and knows my experience, so

that we can move closer to each other in that way, so that we can share experiences, so they know who I am.

Um, but if it's somebody that I'm probably never gonna talk to again, or if they're being kind of a jerk about it, I don't need to explain myself to them, y'know? That's—like I said, there's only so much time on this earth, and to waste it explaining yourself to someone who doesn't understand your existence, you got better things to do. And I think it's okay to do that.

Teresa: And the best, like, physical action that I can give is, again, making it a statement, not an excuse or apology.

Travis: Right.

Teresa: Um, so, if you need to... if it is important that you do let the people around you know, put it in the same sentence as another declaration. Right? "My name is Teresa, and I have asthma."

Travis: Right.

Teresa: If that's something that you need to do for the company that you're in, that's—that is a physical statement you can make, so that both of those things in that sentence are a fact. They both sound the same. They both have equal weight. And they are not—you wouldn't apologize for your name. You don't have to apologize for your mental, physical, emotional conditions. Anything.

Travis: Right. Agreed. Alright, folks, that's gonna do it for us. Thank you so much for joining us for another episode. I hope you enjoyed this. If you did, maybe go tell a friend.

Teresa: Or rate, review, and subscribe on iTunes.

Travis: Well, especially for something like this, where y'know, we're just gonna title it 'Ask Shmanners.' If you're like, "Hey, they covered this topic, and I think you'd be interested in it," that would be great. If you could share that with somebody, we'd really appreciate it.

And... let's see, what else? You can follow us on Twitter, @ShmannersCast.

Teresa: Which is where we got most of these questions, correct?

Travis: Correct.

Teresa: So, this is where we solicit our fans and followers for their input and questions.

Travis: Uh, and if you have topic suggestions, you can email us. ShmannersCast@gmail.com.

Teresa: Instead of tweeting, because it's a lot easier to search... [laughs]

Travis: We won't see it.

Teresa: ... an email than it is on Twitter.

Travis: Uh, let's see. What else? You can check out all the other McElroy shows if you go to McElroy.family. While there, you can also click on the merch button, or you can go to McElroyMerch.com to order some of the amazing McElroy merch.

Teresa: New and great stuff every month, y'all.

Travis: Let's see. What else, Teresa?

Teresa: Uh, thank you to Brent "Brental Floss" Black for our rockin' theme music. That is available as a ringtone where those are found. Thank you to Kayla M. Wasil for our Twitter thumbnail art. Once again, that's @ShmannersCast. Thank you to Bruja Betty Pinup Photography for the cover picture for our fan-run Facebook group, which is a great place to find other listeners who like to give and get excellent advice.

Travis: And that's gonna do it for us, so join us again next week.

Teresa: No RSVP required.

Travis: You've been listening to Shmanners.

Teresa: Manners, Shmanners. Get it?

[theme music plays]

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