

Shmanners Ep 339: Job Interviews

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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: Doing good.

Travis: This is our first recording of the New Year.

Teresa: Indeed.

Travis: So late.

Teresa: [giggling]

Travis: Now it says here, and I'm looking at your resume—

Teresa: Uh-huh.

Travis: ... that you've been my wife for... 63 years. Is that correct?

Teresa: No, that is not correct. Please put your glasses on. [laughs lightly]

Travis: What is it? Nine?

Teresa: [laughing]

Travis: Nine. It says nine. Sorry.

Teresa: Well.

Travis: But if you add six and three together...

Teresa: You get nine.

Travis: Now, it also says special skills. You are the mom to both of my kids.

Teresa: Indeed. Yes, I am.

Travis: Okay. Yeah. You know, with those qualifications, I decided to hire you as another host as my guest.

Teresa: Perfect.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: I accept. My salary is all your salary.

Travis: Oh.

Teresa: Because when we get married, everything is— that you have is—

Travis: [incredulously] We're married?

Teresa: [through laughter] ... is mine.

Travis: What?

Teresa: [laughing loudly]

Travis: I'm willing to split it with you! But when we get married, everything's 100% yours?

Teresa: That's how it works.

Travis: Oh, my Lord. Huh, we should'a done a pre-nup.

Teresa: [giggling]

Travis: I had no idea.

Teresa: Everything that's yours is now mine.

Travis: [incredulously] Everything?

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Including my debt!

[both laugh]

Travis: Gotcha!

Teresa: I'll let you use it, though.

Travis: You can have all of my comic book toys.

Teresa: [through laughter] I don't want any of those.

Travis: Too bad! You take the good. You take the bad. That's marriage. In sickness and in health.

Teresa: And throw away the bad toys.

Travis: In money and in collectibles.

Teresa: [laughing]

Travis: You said it in your vows.

Teresa: I don't remember saying that.

Travis: You said it! You said, "And I'll take all your garbage."

Teresa: Okay. So—

Travis: We're talking about job interviews.

Teresa: We are.

Travis: That's why I brought up resumes [pronounced res-ooms].

Teresa: [through laughter] Indeed. Are you going to do that all episode?

Travis: Talk?

Teresa: Be weird. [laughs lightly]

Travis: Oh. Yeah.

Teresa: [giggling]

Travis: Now, here's the thing. I'm very excited. I've got a lot of pent-up *Shmanners* energy.

Teresa: You sure do.

Travis: But I'm very excited because sometimes we will have a topic where I'm, like, "I don't know."

Teresa: [laughing]

Travis: And then we'll have a topic like job interviews, and I'm like, "Okay!"

Teresa: You've got this.

Travis: I've done a lot of these.

Teresa: You surely have.

Travis: I've both. I've been interviewed, and I've been the interviewer.

Teresa: Indeed.

Travis: Quite a bit. So, I've got maybe even something to contribute to this episode, which is very exciting.

Teresa: We'll see.

Travis: Now, how long have they been doing job interviews?

Teresa: [giggles] Actually— actually, not that long.

Travis: [gasps]

Teresa: So, the idea of a job interview is fairly recent because once humans advanced beyond the kind of, like, hunter gatherer stage, right?

Travis: Mm-hmm.

Teresa: And started assigning people professions in their, like, villages and groups and things. It was normal for jobs simply to be passed on from generation to generation.

Travis: Yeah. I guess, then, you had apprenticeships, right?

Teresa: Well, that was the next step.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: So, first of all, if your dad was a blacksmith, you were a blacksmith.

Travis: Right.

Teresa: Right.

Travis: That's why you have a lot of last names that are just, like, Smith.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: Or Baker.

Teresa: Right.

Travis: Or whatever. 'Cause it was just the family profession.

Teresa: Exactly.

Travis: Like, my name is Travis Podcaster.

Teresa: [pause] No. No.

Travis: No, we changed it at Ellis Island.

Teresa: Oh, okay. I see. Um, but the idea of an apprenticeship happened when there was no heir, right?

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: So, um, say there was illness or death, or you just didn't produce an heir in your family unit—

Travis: Right.

Teresa: ... then you had to find someone to pass your trade skill down to, right?

Travis: Right.

Teresa: So that your village was now not bakerless, right?

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: And that practice—the apprenticeship practice dates back to the Babylonian Code of Hammurabi. That is—

Travis: Oh, that dude. He did the “eye for an eye” thing, right? Wasn't that Hammurabi?

Teresa: I think so.

Travis: I don't know.

Teresa: We're talking, like, 1792 to 1750 BCE.

Travis: Oh, okay.

Teresa: Okay. But this was more a form of indentured servitude.

Travis: Sure.

Teresa: Because you really only paid this person in knowledge and room and board.

Travis: And exposure, of course.

Teresa: [laughs lightly] I suppose.

Travis: But that went on for a while, 'cause they were still doing apprenticeships in, like, Colonial America and stuff.

Teresa: A *long* time. Yes.

Travis: I've read *Johnny Tremain*.

Teresa: [clears throat] For example, you mentioned Colonial America because Ben Franklin actually worked as an apprentice in his older brother's printing shop for a very long time, right?

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: But The Industrial Revolution is what we have to thank for the job interview.

Travis: Changed a lot of stuff, that Industrial Revolution— also, hoop skirts. I was just learning about sprung steel hoop skirts.

Teresa: Yeah. Mm-hmm.

Travis: Industrial Revolution, have that to thank. I was just listening to a *Decoder Ring* episode about butts.

Teresa: Oh, okay.

Travis: Yeah, *Butts and Bustles*.

Teresa: Actually, the hoop skirt is great because it ridded people of having to wear so many layers and layers of petticoats.

Travis: Yeah, and it allowed for that fashion to reach not just the incredibly rich because it was way cheaper to own the one hoop skirt—

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: ... than own all those petticoats and have someone dress you and all that stuff.

Teresa: Anyway— So, um— and, okay. That's where, like, apprenticeships really fell out of favor. But the job interview practice wasn't really there yet, because what happened—

Travis: Can I guess why? Can I guess why it was needed?

Teresa: Okay. Sure. It's not there yet. Because when the factories opened up, you kind of just showed up. And they needed warm bodies to pull levers and do things, right?

Travis: Right.

Teresa: Not a lot of these—

Travis: A cog in the human machine.

Teresa: Exactly. Not a lot of these things were skilled. And, pretty much, if you showed up and you were able-bodied, you would just get picked on the day, right?

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: There wasn't a lot of, like, job security even.

Travis: Yeah. That way, it was a way to keep you down. 'Cause if they were, like, "I'm going to pay you this little bit." And you were like, "Well, that's not enough." You were like, "Well, okay. I'll just take any of them. Get out of here."

Teresa: Yep. And then, job interviews emerged in the 1920s.

Travis: I'm going to guess because when you're hiring, like, management positions, you want people who, like, are— uh, that know about, like, numbers and math and reading and writing and stuff like that?

Teresa: Sure. But, also, a lot of these, like, Industrialists also just hired people that they know and their family. But, anyway, in the 20s, Thomas Edison invented the job interview. [chuckles]

Travis: Get out!

Teresa: I know, right? Totally.

Travis: I wonder if that's when he accidentally invented or stole from somebody else.

Teresa: He accidentally invented.

Travis: No, actually. Sorry. He stole a lot of ideas from people that were working for him.

Teresa: [chuckles lightly] Yes.

Travis: Not stole, but he was like, "You all work for me. Come up with ideas." Then they would come up with ideas. And he was like, "Another Edison great."

Teresa: Well, so what happened was, finally, in the 20s, there were enough college-educated individuals entering the workforce that employers realized they could be a little bit more selective, right?

Travis: Uh-huh.

Teresa: You didn't just need warm bodies. You needed people who—

Travis: You needed warm bodies and warm minds.

Teresa: Warm minds.

Travis: And cold hearts.

Teresa: [chuckles lightly] Who would advance your industry, right?

Travis: Right.

Teresa: And so, according to the story, Thomas Edison was getting *hundreds* of applicants whenever he was seeking help with, like, the sciency stuff he was doing.

Travis: Helping make lightbulbs.

Teresa: Super cool science stuff.

Travis: And trying to call ghosts.

Teresa: And so, you know, the people that he would pick, he, you know, didn't have any kind of metric, right? He would pick them and then was dissatisfied with their ingenuity or whatever it was, right?

Travis: Or their ninja-nuity, which I learned about from *3 Ninjas Kick Back*.

Teresa: [clears throat and sighs]

Travis: I'm waiting to contribute things that we haven't gotten to my part yet.

Teresa: I know! But I'm so close. So close, I promise.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: So, in order to weed out who he deemed worthy and not, he invented a test. This test was bananas, okay?

Travis: B-A-N-A-N-A-S.

Teresa: 146 questions.

Travis: Whoa!

Teresa: And only *some* of them were related to the position at hand.
[chuckles softly]

Travis: Wow!

Teresa: This test was so bananas that these *ridiculous* questions were leaked to the media, okay? Here are some of the ones that he asked people.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: "Who invented logarithms?"

Travis: Joseph Logarithm.

Teresa: "What is artificial silk made from?"

Travis: Artificial worms.

Teresa: [laughs softly] "What part of the world does it never rain?"

Travis: Ah, the desert.

Teresa: "Rhode Island is the smallest state, but what's the next smallest and the next?"

Travis: Vermont and New Hampshire.

Teresa: "What state has the largest copper mine?"

Travis: West Virginia.

Teresa: “What is coke?”

Travis: It’s a drug that you snort up your nose.

Teresa: [laughing] I don’t think that any of those questions were answered correctly.

Travis: I feel confident about one of them, but I’m not going to say which.

Teresa: [laughs] Um, and so, out of the 718 applicants that took the test, only 57 achieved a passing score of 70%. And only 32 scored Edison’s desired result of 90% or higher.

Travis: So, then, I guess a passing result is 90 or higher.

Teresa: I mean—

Travis: You can’t say a passing result is 70, but it’s not good enough to get hired.

Teresa: I mean, that’s a C-grade.

Travis: Yeah, but so? It’s a C, but you don’t get the job. Sounds like a failure to me.

Teresa: Okay. Um, and so, one of these unsuccessful applicants, again, was so annoyed, I said, that he leaked it to the New York Times.

Travis: And that was Henry Ford.

Teresa: No, his name was Charles Hansen.

Travis: Of the Hanson Brothers?

Teresa: No.

Travis: No.

Teresa: No. But they called it a “silly examination.” The Tom Edison test is a “Tomfoolery test.”

Travis: Oh, snap!

Teresa: Sick burn.

Travis: Got him. Got him!

Teresa: Um, so, one of the things that people started doing was taking these tests to figure out if *they* would actually do it. [giggles softly] Among those that failed the test, Albert Einstein—

Travis: Uh-huh.

Teresa: ... failed the test. And also Tom Edison’s youngest son, who had graduated from MIT.

Travis: Well, seemed maybe he wasn’t that smart.

Teresa: I don’t know.

Travis: I aced it.

Teresa: [laughing]

Travis: The questions you gave me.

Teresa: No, you did not ace it.

Travis: I don’t remember my answers for them, but now I’m feeling, as time goes by—

Teresa: [giggling]

Travis: ... more and more confident.

Teresa: So, these questions were ridiculous, right? But the *idea* of testing future employees caught on, right? Because Edison was revered as, like, a titan of industry and all this kind of stuff.

Travis: Sure.

Teresa: And they're, like, "If it's good enough for him, right?" And so, people started making their own test for potential candidates. And so, Thomas Edison invented the job interview.

Travis: Sure. Okay. Yeah, I'll give you that one. I'll give you that one.

Teresa: Today, there's basically two types of job interviews. There's unstructured, which is kind of, "Let's have a conversation." And then— like, for example, if you've ever, like, interviewed at a, like, coffee shop or whatever.

Travis: Yes, I have.

Teresa: And the manager just, like, comes out of the— from behind the counter—

Travis: The beaded curtain. Yeah, go on.

Teresa: And says that, "Let's have a chat."

Travis: Let me ask you this. Do you consider auditions a job interview?

Teresa: Yes, I do.

Travis: Yes, good. That was the correct answer.

Teresa: Yes. And there's structured interviews, which, of course, are a little more rigid. So, um, there usually identical in appearance. You— When I think of a structured job interview, I think of, like, several candidates in, like, a waiting room.

Travis: Uh-huh.

Teresa: And you go in one at a time in front of the interview person who has a set list of questions.

Travis: I have done this as well. When I worked at Best Buy, I was a Supervisor of a department, and I did lots of interviewing. It's not fun.

Teresa: Oh, yeah?

Travis: Yeah! The structured interview. I've also interviewed unstructured, and that's great.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: I love just having a chat.

Teresa: That's what you like.

Travis: Because— okay, this— can I do my big reveal here?

Teresa: Please do. Please do.

Travis: Okay. So, here's what I've learned. When I was a senior in college, I took a class called Preparations for Professional Work. They changed the name of the class, like, every semester trying to come up with a better one 'cause it's just not a good name.

Teresa: [laughing]

Travis: But, basically, it was, like, “Hey, someday you’re hoping to be, like, a professional actor outside of college.”

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: “Here’s how the real world works for that.”

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: So, it was about, like, taxes.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: And, like, paying for moving trucks.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: And when to order. Stuff like that. So, we had a special guest come in a lot. Actual professionals working in the industry. And one of those guests was a Casting Director. And he talked about, like, at the end of the day, he was like, “Listen, a large percentage of the people who audition will do a good job.” He’s— right? But I’ll— he was like, “Really, a lot of what it comes down to is, “Do we want to hang out with you at the party, right?”

Because his point was, like, so much of it is, like, “Do I want to work—” Like, okay, they’re going to do a great job in front of the camera or on stage, right? But that’s such a small percentage of the actual work. So much of it is just, like, all together backstage, getting ready for the thing, doing the thing, rehearsals, all that stuff.

Teresa: Right, yes.

Travis: Is *that* going to be terrible? Now, clearly, as we can tell from stories that come out of Hollywood, that’s not 100% the case all the time.

Teresa: [giggling]

Travis: But I do think that is true of most job interviews that I've ever been on or conducted, which is that feeling of, "Okay, this person is qualified. Or, you know, whatever. So, we can probably teach them how to do it, and also, they seem nice and fun."

Teresa: Right. Because, I mean, you are going to have, like, big projects; you're going to have small tasks. But you're going to have to be around this person, in like— if we're talking, like a general kind of office or even, like, um, if it's a retail job, you want people to want to be around this person.

Travis: Mm-hmm.

Teresa: Because if they don't want to be around this person, not only does the rest of everyone else in the office suffer, but also, they probably are not gonna buy the thing from them that you're selling.

Travis: Yeah. And listen, that's not, like I said, 100% of the— there are plenty— I guarantee that there are positions that are, like, highly specialized jobs, right? Where if you come in, and you're, like, *super* qualified at, like, coding, right? And I come in, and I'm like, "I kinda know coding, but aren't I a fun guy?"

Teresa: [laughing] No.

Travis: I know which one they're going to hire.

Teresa: Yeah. They're— I think that qualified, uh, is the lowest bar. And if you don't meet that one, probably not going to get the job. [giggles] No matter how funny you are. I'm sorry.

Travis: I've gotten a lot of jobs I was not qualified for.

Teresa: I know.

Travis: I'm *very* charming.

Teresa: You surely are.

Travis: I'm so charming, in fact, that we should take a break so I can just use some of that charm on you and share a word from another MaxFun show.

[theme music plays]

[new music plays]

Helen: J. Keith, do you know what I love more than the trivia, comedy, and celebrity guests on our podcast, *Go Fact Yourself*?

J. Keith: No, what, Helen?

Helen: Sharing all of those things with an actual audience!

J. Keith: Yes, well, lucky for you, *Go Fact Yourself* is back to being a live audience show.

Helen: Whoo-hoo!

J. Keith: Yeah, we've got a free recording coming up on January 15th in Los Angeles and February 11th in Pasadena.

Helen: And if you can't make it there, all of our recordings will still be available as a podcast. Twice a month, every month, on Maximumfun.org.

J. Keith: Yeah, no excuses. So, if you're not listening—

Helen: You can *Go Fact Yourself*.

[music ends]

[jazzy music plays]

Annabelle: Hey, there, it's Annabelle Gurwitch!

Laura: And I'm Laura House. We host *Tiny Victories*, the 15-minute podcast that's about the little things.

Annabelle: Getting into the tiny victory frame of mind is about recognizing minor accomplishments and fleeting joys.

[beep]

Laura: Isn't it a wonderful day when the first password you try actually works?

Speaker One: When it's freezing cold outside and toasty as all get out in my shower, my tiny victory is that I turn off the water and get on with my day.

Annabelle: We can't change this big dumb world, but we can celebrate the tiny wins.

Laura: So, join us on MaximumFun or wherever you listen to podcasts.

Annabelle and Laura: [simultaneously] Let's get tiny!

[music and ads end]

Travis: Okay. I just have a few more questions for ya. Uh, what do you think you'll be paying me to be your husband?

Teresa: Uh—

Travis: What's my salary look like?

Teresa: Everything that you make.

Travis: I get to keep it?

Teresa: No, I get to keep it.

Travis: Aw, man!

Teresa: [laughs lightly] I get to keep it. Okay. So, let's go over some general etiquette. I mean— and I— please feel free to extemporanize— extemp —extemperan— ni-ize— extemp—... to talk about it.

Travis: To speak?

Teresa: [through laughter] To talk about it.

Travis: Extemporaneously.

Teresa: If you are the interviewer, there are several things that, as a human, you should do for other humans. You should be courteous because your responsibility is to give your interviewee a good experience. So, you should be on time.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: The idea of making the interviewee wait to see how willing they are to—

Travis: Don't play mind games.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Don't do any mind games. Here's the thing, right? To speak on this.

Teresa: Okay. Please do.

Travis: The interview process is nerve-wracking. Especially when it's for, you know, money that you need to live and perhaps support a family, so, already they're coming in in a high-stress kind of mode, right? And so,

anything anyone tells you about, like, testing them, like, I guess, Edison would say, you're going to get the *worst* performance out of them.

Teresa: Exactly.

Travis: But if you are a good boss— a good manager— a good supervisor— whatever, right? It is your job to bring out the *best* in your employee and, therefore, the best in the interviewee so that you can see what they're like at their best, right? Because that is what you're going to be pulling from them.

So, trying to make them nervous or trying to make them sweat or whatever they tell you to do, don't do that, right? You want to put them at ease so that that way they're showing you their best and not their worst.

Teresa: Right. So, be on time. And things come up. Totally get that. Make sure that if you're late for reasons outside of your control, that you let them know.

Travis: Mm-hmm.

Teresa: And apologize. And reset things up, okay? Because— here's the next one. Transparency is *incredibly* important. So, if you are conducting several rounds of interviews, if it's going to be a while before you choose a candidate, how long the interview process is— maybe it's— you know, maybe there's a preliminary, and then there's a final in front of several more bosses at the company or something like that.

Travis: If you need them to bring anything, like examples of their work. Even just like stating clearly a copy of your resume or two copies or whatever, right? So that they know *exactly* what to bring.

Teresa: And you should always have all of the information about the position you're filling, right? So, what an employee could expect to make, what their work hours would be, what a typical day might look like, you know, all that kind of stuff. Anything that you have to make sure that the candidate has, you know, isn't going to waste your time or their time, right?

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Because if it's not the sort of thing that they are interested in interviewing for, and you spend half an hour trying to figure that out from each other, what's the point? Right?

Travis: Also, never take for granted— along those lines, never take for granted that it's 100% you interviewing them, right? There are plenty of scenarios where the person is so qualified, so good for the job, right? That they might be interviewing at multiple places.

Teresa: Exactly.

Travis: And so, the idea that of, like, "Well, I tested them, and I made it hard for them. And I put them, you know, through the wringer. And they're perfect." It's like, okay, well, now, maybe they don't want to work for you because you didn't set them up for success.

Teresa: Right. And another way that you can do that is be welcoming and smile and ask about their day. You know, they're probably nervous, like you said. So, maybe a little bit of chit-chat would help them. And also—

Travis: And anybody whose listening and who's like, "But I'm the interviewee, and I get nervous," we'll get to that.

Teresa: Yes. Um, also, learn their name.

Travis: Yep.

Teresa: That's a generally kind thing to do. Learn the name of the people who you are interviewing. And make sure to thank them for their time.

Travis: Mm-hmm.

Teresa: I'm not saying, like, give them false hope or anything, right? What I'm saying is they did take time out of their day to get to you, to prepare for

the interview, things like that. So, it's just nice to thank people for coming and taking the time.

Travis: I think the, like, not building up their hopes thing too is important, that you touched on there.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: And them not being like, "Wow, that went super great!" as in your head you're thinking, like, "No."

Teresa: [laughing]

Travis: Right? And saying, like, "Okay, well, thank you so much for coming in. Um, a pleasure talking. You'll be hearing from us."

Teresa: Certainly.

Travis: And then *do* make sure that they hear from you.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: That's another one. Good or bad. I've interviewed for a lot of jobs where it's like I didn't hear from them ever. And I was like, "I guess it's a no. It's been six weeks."

Teresa: I mean, I feel like for— you mentioned auditions. For auditions, it's pretty obvious.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: To know—

Travis: Those ones, especially— and, I mean, sometimes it is hundreds of people—

Teresa: Right.

Travis: ... maybe more, going for the thing.

Teresa: They're not always going to get back to you if you didn't get it.

Travis: No. But if you can. Even just an email, you know? If you got an email thread going. "Thank you so much for coming in. Don't think it's the right fit." Whatever you want to say.

Teresa: So, if you are interviewing, it always pays to be a little early. I'm not saying that you have to sit and wait and make people uncomfortable. That's happened to you, right?

Travis: Oh, my God, yes.

Teresa: Somebody came and, like, was an hour early for their interview.

Travis: Yes. Well, they— okay, they came in. I was sitting in a cubicle. They came in an hour early. Didn't announce themselves in any way. And so, then, like, 15 minutes before the interview was supposed to— I, like, stepped up front, and I was, like, "Whoa! How long have you been here?" And they're like, "About 45 minutes." I was like, "Okay. I was right there. Like, you just came in and sat down at the table and didn't say anything to anybody." It was not a good first impression.

Teresa: It was off-putting. Anyway, so, ten to fifteen minutes before the interview is customary. It gives you time to collect yourself, to go to the bathroom, to get a drink of water if you need it, to settle into the area, um, and it also shows that you are punctual.

Travis: Can we talk about, uh, dress— manner of dress?

Teresa: Sure.

Travis: I have heard a general rule that when interviewing, you should dress, like, one step nicer than, uh, what people at the job wear. Now, I

don't know how far up that goes. 'Cause if everybody wears suits, do you wear a tux?

Teresa: [through laughter] I don't think so.

Travis: If everybody wears a tux, do you wear a space suit? I don't know.

Teresa: I think it's general, right, to dress for the job you want, right?

Travis: But so, like, I know that when we were interviewing at Best Buy, if somebody came in in a t-shirt and jeans, right? That did not look as good as somebody who came in in a polo and khakis, which is what you wear at Best Buy. Which if somebody came in, like, a dress shirt and slacks, it's like, okay, that looks even nicer, right?

Teresa: Right.

Travis: So, I do think to a certain degree, dress in a manner that says, "I'm respectful of your time, for having me here, and taking this seriously." Right? And not just like in, I don't know, a t-shirt and jeans. Unless you're going to work in, like, a punk rock club. T-shirt and jeans then, go for it.

Teresa: Perfect. Perfect.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: So, you should always know the person who's interviewing you. Know what their name and spelling, pronunciation, even their position at the company is.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: It will show that you have the forethought and the courtesy to think of this person as a human, right?

Travis: Mm-hmm.

Teresa: So, then you can also have a couple of questions for them prepared in advance, and it shows that you're interested and that you've done your homework. You should, obviously, know what the company does, right? That you're interviewing for. But, you know, you can— you can bring things to take notes with. You can bring extra resumes. You can bring, um, you know, your— if you have cards. You can bring business cards. And all—

Travis: And crayons for the kids. It's great.

Teresa: [laughs breathlessly] All of this shows that you have thought about what you're doing and where you're going. Don't be afraid to also abandon your plan. Follow the interviewer's lead, right?

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Like you said, the unstructured interview is your favorite.

Travis: Correct.

Teresa: Because you love to mirror what the other person is doing.
[chuckles softly]

Travis: Well, it's also, like, the way to establish, like, "Am I comf— is this person comfortable with me? Am I comfortable with them?"

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: Will I be able to, like, talk to them about, uh, job performance? Will I be able to talk to them if they're doing great? If something needs work? How well will they take to, you know, instruction? How well will they take from, you know, criticism?

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: How will anything like that— and also, will I be comfortable working with this person? Will employees be comfortable working— Will customers be

comfortable working with this person? There's a certain— now, I do want to clarify that doesn't mean, like, you need to come in and be Joe Cool and like you're nailing everything, and it's super smooth, right?

Teresa: Right.

Travis: Because that's not a real thing that anybody can do ever. Except me. But other people, it's all a matter of, like, being yourself.

Teresa: Sure.

Travis: Putting your best foot forward.

Teresa: And I think that highlighting your attributes and your transferable skills and how teachable you are, your enthusiasm, your willingness to learn. All of that stuff goes a long, long way, especially in those unstructured interviews.

Travis: And it's highlighting your best qualities and not trying to manufacture good qualities.

Teresa: Right.

Travis: Like, if you are not somebody who makes jokes on a regular basis, this is not the time to do that. But if you do have a lot of enthusiasm or interest or dedication. Whatever your high points are—

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: ... emphasize those instead of it being, like, "And I'm going to be totally hilarious or chill or whatever." And it's like, don't start doing those now. Now is not the time to work on your type five.

Teresa: [laughing]

Travis: Like, just be yourself and do those things. Now, there are a couple techniques.

Teresa: Oh!

Travis: If you get asked a question, and you do not immediately know the answer, reframe— uh, repeat the question as a beginning of a statement. So, if someone says, you know, like, “What is your greatest strength?” You would say, “I think that my greatest strength is...”

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: And that gives you a little bit of time to think about it. Or you can say, “Oh, that’s such a good question. You know, I’ve never really thought about it. I would say that my greatest strength...” What you don’t want to do is just sit there in silence while you think about it, right?

Teresa: Right.

Travis: And another secret in a job interview, unless you’re interviewing with Thomas Edison, there’s not a right answer to most of these questions.

Teresa: Right.

Travis: These are “getting to know you” questions. So, you can sideways answer the question, right? If somebody says, like, “What is your greatest strength?” You could say, like, “Well, when I was working at this previous thing, as you can see on my resume, I found that I took really well to these kinds of tasks and that I always kind of performed great at this.” So, you’re not listing a strength or trying to come at— you’re pointing out times that you saw success in the job that you did before that relates to this.

Teresa: That’s great. There’s an interview technique of that, and it’s called STAR. So, you can explain Situation: explain where and when the thing took place, right? “I was at my last job. I had just started.” Or whatever. Task: share what your role was in the example. Action: share the steps you took to address any issues. And then, Result: describe the outcome and what you learned.

Travis: Right. And that's really way more important than having, like, the perfect answer to the question they just asked. And, you know, I think in the past there's been a lot of, um, like, advice technique given of like, "Make sure you make eye contact and stuff."

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: But not everyone's good at that, right?

Teresa: Right.

Travis: And just like, don't start trying to make jokes for the first time in your life. If you're not someone who's comfortable with eye contact and doing it, don't try to force it, then, right?

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: Because there isn't a perfect answer to that either, right? I'm someone who can make eye contact, but when I'm thinking when I'm talking, I don't really do that, right?

Teresa: Sure.

Travis: That's me. And if they're going to hire me—

Teresa: You said eye contact, and I was like, "Yes!"

Travis: I know.

Teresa: Eye contact.

Travis: When you're staring at me, I can't.

Teresa: I don't know how much I usually look at you in the booth, but you said, "eye contact," and now I can't stop looking at you.

Travis: I know. It makes me really uncomfortable.

Teresa: [laughing]

Travis: But don't be, like, well, now, I gotta get in there and make as much eye contact as I can. That's not how it works, right?

Teresa: Right.

Travis: So, just, it's— it's being comfortable showing the best sides of yourself instead of trying to create this perfect interviewee—

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: ... that's going to wow them every time.

Teresa: I wanted to touch briefly at the very end here about maybe what some of those kind of annoying questions *really* are asking, right? So, the question, "What is your biggest weakness?" Right? They're not asking you to self-deprecate. [giggles] Or, like, I love what Alex wrote in our copy, "I have no weaknesses!" and karate chop the table. [through laughter] They're not looking for that one thing.

Travis: See, I would say, "My biggest weakness is... I like big butts."

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: And also, separately, "I'm incapable of lying." Those two things, I would say, are my greatest— also, kryptonite. Those three things are my greatest weaknesses.

Teresa: This question is more of a test of how self-aware you are, right?

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: It's not— they're not looking for you to list off like, "Well, I have a hard time getting out of bed on time." Any of that kind of stuff, right? It's about self-awareness. [chuckles]

Travis: I'm chronically late. I hate talking to customers. I'm *really* bad at counting money. Sometimes, when I'm counting money, I just accidentally put it in my pocket and walk away with it.

Teresa: [giggling]

Travis: Is that enough?

Teresa: Don't do that. Don't do that.

Travis: You can also frame that, by the way, of saying, "Well, I know that some of the things that I always try to work on is..." you know, whatever, right? "Making sure to start with the most important task right off the bat." Whatever.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Instead of saying, "I'm really bad with people."

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Say, like, "The things that I make sure to focus on, 'cause I know that it doesn't come as easily to me." So, you can show that you recognize that there are areas that you need to work on, but you are working on them. All of that stuff.

Teresa: That's great. The next question would be, "What didn't you enjoy about your last job?"

Travis: Mmm. The boss was a real butt.

Teresa: I mean, the subtext of this is, they're trying to see how quick you might badmouth others, right? Or, um, be really quick to talk smack about

somebody, right? And that is not what you want to put forth on this. I think that there's no real one way to answer, but, you know, the way to talk about it is, "You know, I had a pretty good time working there, but I was ready to take the next step." Or "It wasn't a great fit for the personality's that I encountered." Or, "This wasn't really what I was looking for when I signed up for it." Or whatever it is, right?

Travis: I mean—

Teresa: So, you don't want to *badmouth* people, but you want to talk about how this wasn't a good fit for you.

Travis: And it's a lot like other communication, right? "I" statements works way better than, like, "They didn't appreciate me."

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: You can say like, "I just started to feel like my time and effort wasn't being appreciated." Right? Is much different. Or saying like, "I thought that the boss was a real jerk." You could say, "I just didn't like the working environment, um, and I find that I thrive more in an environment like this and this and this..." right?

Teresa: Sure.

Travis: That way, even if you do feel the need of, like, I have to explain why. You can make it about, "For me personally, it was not the right fit."

Teresa: Right.

Travis: And not, "They're terrible, and no one would want to work there."

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: 'Cause you also never know, especially if it's a similar industry, it might be that your interviewer is, like, best friends with your old boss, or whatever. It happens a lot.

Teresa: You never know. Here's another one, um, "What are your salary expectations?" Gosh, I hate when they talk about that, right? Because I believe that the salary should be part of the job, like, listing.

Travis: Mm-hmm.

Teresa: That's my personal opinion. But what they're asking is, "How well do you know this industry?" Right?

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: And the best thing to do is Google it. Just try and figure out for your area what are these people at this level being paid. And I would say, take the median and then add a little bit because, you know, living expenses or your experience, those definitely vary from place to place. So, this is a really good opportunity to have that prepared already.

Travis: And even if you don't have it prepared, you can always just do an answer like, "Well, you know, as long as it's competitive for, you know— comparable or whatever you want to say— competitive or comparable, whatever, to, you know, the industry here, I think it's fine. I see this as a growth opportunity." Whatever you want to say. But don't say like, "I don't know," and guess a number, right?

Teresa: No. Definitely, don't guess a number. Have a little bit of something in mind going in.

Travis: Just say— here's what you say. If they ask, say, "Well, my expectation is whatever you were going to offer plus 10%. That's my final offer."

Teresa: [laughing]

Travis: I've written a number on this table, but it just says, "Your number plus 10%."

Teresa: [laughing] Maybe— maybe not.

Travis: Maybe don't do that. Unless you're trying to make a joke. I can pull that off.

Teresa: You could.

Travis: I could pull that joke off.

Teresa: You probably could.

Travis: I probably have, frankly. [chuckles]

Teresa: Yeah. Here's one, "Tell me about a time you faced a challenge in your workplace and how you overcame it."

Travis: That's a great time to use that STAR thing.

Teresa: Exactly.

Travis: Because the challenge doesn't have to be something bad. It can be like, "Well, we were working on this new thing," or whatever, right? But what you don't want to be like is, "Ah, I was working with terrible co-workers, and my boss didn't know what they were doing, and I had to do everything."

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: You want it to be when they say "challenge," in your head, hear "opportunity."

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Like, "There was an opportunity to do this new thing, and I took it. And I did it, and I did a great job." Rather than, "Well, my boss didn't know what they were doing, and I had to do everything around the office."

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: It's like, "Okay. Great. Cool, man."

Teresa: And then one more, "Why should we hire you over all the other candidates?"

Travis: "Cause I'm two inches taller than them."

Teresa: [laughing]

Travis: "I was out there. I saw them out there in the waiting room. I can reach higher shelves than they can."

Teresa: What they're really asking is, "How passionate are you about this role?" Um, and I think that this is a really great way to reiterate all of how well your skills fit the position. You can talk about all the strengths that you've covered so far, how you're willing to, like, be a team player. Or, like, even if you have, like, a personal interest or passion for the work, this is the time to do that.

Travis: And if they ask you, "Where do you see yourself in five years?" You say, "I see myself having your job, and you have the CEO's job. Together we can make this happen."

Teresa: [giggling]

Travis: And then you hold your hand out, and you don't take that hand back 'til they shake it. Even if it takes hours, [through gritted teeth] you don't take that hand back 'til they shake it!

Teresa: Okay. One thing that is potentially illegal in several states is—

Travis: To steal the job.

Teresa: [giggles] No, if they ask you, “Do you have a family/Are you planning on having a family?”

Travis: Oh. Okay.

Teresa: And what they mean is, “How much time do you have to devote to the role or the company?” And, like I said, depending upon how they ask this, that’s actually illegal in several places.

Travis: There are quite a few questions, I would say, in a job interview that are illegal to ask, like, “Do you go to church? [mumbling unintelligibly] “I’m not working with that.” I’m just like, “What? You only hire people who go to church?” Or asking if they have a partner, how old they are, there’s *lots* of things—

Teresa: Right.

Travis: ... that if someone asks you and it makes you uncomfortable because you feel like it’s information that you don’t need to give to get a job, be aware of that. And you can totally push that by talking to, I don’t know, their boss or lawyers [chuckles softly] if you have to.

Teresa: So, what I’m saying is, before you go out for job interviews, take a look and see what is actually legal for them to ask in your state. And anything that isn’t legal for them to ask, you don’t have to answer.

Travis: Mm-hmm. Okay, that’s going to do it for us. Let’s talk about a few things; it’s the new year. It’s Twenty Sun and Sea: Surf the Vibe.

Teresa: Oh, boy!

Travis: Yeah. That’s what the— the council over at *My Brother, My Brother, and Me* decided that this year—

Teresa: The Tribune.

Travis: ... was going to be, uh, Twenty Sun and Sea: Surf the Vibe. I don't know what that has to do with you folks, but I'm happy to tell you about it. Now, I want you to know, we've got music from volume *Adventure Zone: Ethersea Volume 1*. It's available on Griffins Bandcamp. You can find it at bit.ly/Etherseavolume1. It's name your own price, and all sales through the end of the month will be donated to Earthjustice.

Speaking of *Adventure Zone*, *Adventure Zone The Eleventh Hour*, the next graphic novel in the series, comes out February 21st. You can get that, uh, at theadventurezonecomic.com. You can preorder it there. We got some new merch over at the merch store, including a set of Flamebright dice from *Adventure Zone: Amnesty*. They're absolutely beautiful. Go check those out.

Also, there's a Rudeness pin from the *McElroyale* series that we do over on YouTube. And 10% off all merch proceeds this month go to RAICES, which promotes justice by providing free and low-cost legal services to underserved immigrant children, families, and refugees.

Go check all of that out at Mcelroymerch.com. Who else do we thank? Oh, we always thank our editor Rachel, without whom we could not make this show. Our researcher, Alex, without whom we could not make this show. And you for listening. We could make the show without you, but why?

Teresa: [giggles softly] We also like to thank Brent "brentalfloss" Black for writing our theme music which is available as a ringtone where those are found. Thank you to Bruja Betty Pinup Photography for the cover picture of our fan-run Facebook Group, *Shmanners Fanners*. If you love to give and get excellent advice from other fans, go ahead and join that group today.

Also, we are always taking topic suggestions and idiom submissions. You can send those to our email, which is Shmannerscast@gmail.com. Make sure that you say "Hi" to Alex, because she reads every one.

Travis: And that's going to 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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